

With the Birds

By E. L. M.

R. Owen Merriman is a familiar name to many friends of wild life both in Canada and the United States who will feel most keenly the recent loss of one who had so deep a sense of comradeship with the feathered and furred.

A native of Hamilton, it was largely through his influence that the Hamilton Society for the Protection of Birds was formed, and in a very short time became a prominent association for bird protective work. In connection with that society he worked for the setting aside, as a provincial sanctuary, of the Dundas Marsh, now one of the most important sanctuaries in Ontario.

As a bird lover R. Owen Merriman was always practical, considering what the viewpoint of the birds would be before he supported any suggestion. We first knew him when as president of this society he invited us to attend one of the meetings and tell the members something of the bird life here. We happened to mention an instance where a sparrow had entered a bluebird nestbox and killed the mother bluebird, and made the suggestion that bluebird nest boxes should have two

holes to make escape possible.

Later when chatting over a cup of tea at his home on the "Mountain" he told us that he had been wondering what the bluebirds would think of two doors when a friend who also had heard the suggestion called to tell him of having found a pair nesting in a tree stub that had two holes, and the bluebirds were using both.

"Good proof" he said, "that they would like a front door and a back door."

The grounds about this charming family home were spacious, and formed a small sanctuary much appreciated by the feathered folk. All available places seemed to be taken, from the thick hedge where a Maryland Yellowthroat was nesting to the tiny wren box beside the verandah table where he wrote.

With the help of members of the family keenly interested, some of the feathered tenants were banded and watched for the following year. One hard Winter when there was unusual activity at his birds' food table, the Department of National Parks had some moving pictures taken of his chickadees, downy and nuthatch guests.

An irreparable loss to the Hamilton Bird Protective Association was his acceptance of a position at Queen's University and removal to Kingston.

But he was by no means lost to the interests of the society or to his feathered friends. Recently he was made a charter member of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and elected to office in the federation.

To his friends his letters from his new residence were filled with bits of striking interest, from the banding of thousands of chimney swift at the tower chimney in an attempt to discover where these dusky mites spend their winters, to the doings of a mother tree swallow outside his window.

A very recent vacation which gave him (and his friends to whom he described it) great pleasure was a trip to England with his sister. The birds there delighted him, especially the Robin. His Christmas greeting the following Yuletide was a photograph of the doorway of Ely Cathedral. Inside the folder were the words in his fine printing:

"A Robin sang as my sister and I took this photograph."

How deeply will he be missed by all who had the joy of his friendship. His love of the things of nature, those things not made by man, we know he has taken on to some finer realm. But we have the memory of it and the privilege of passing it on in a world that needs it greatly.