

the fledging of an evening grossbeak

by Ron Mackie
Oakhurst, California

Editor's Note: Here we have an article that very simply expresses the essence of man's love for nature, and nature's response.

While it is illegal to confine wild birds, saving a fledgling from almost certain death and nurturing it to maturity and then turning it loose in the wild is another matter. A fledgling fallen from the nest is rarely raised successfully. A baby bird, perhaps three weeks old and feathered, depends on a diet of wild food not easy to provide. Imprinting of such a youngster has already taken place with the parent

birds. The chick is a wild creature. On the other hand, a chick newly hatched out of the egg has not been adjusted to a diet nor has imprinting taken place. It can be fed an artificial diet and imprinting can take place with a human playing the role model of parent.

This is the story of how Mrs. Sam Clark of Country Club Acres, Oakhurst, California, successfully raised such a featherless chick, saw it grow to maturity, and, most remarkably, saw it live to have a family of its own.

One spring day, Mrs. Clark's atten-

tion was arrested by the persistent barking of one of her beagles. The dog was under a white oak nuzzling something with its nose. This turned out to be an ugly blob of flesh less than two inches long with two round bulges for eyes. It was obviously something newly hatched from an egg and fallen from a nest in the tree above. This little body, entirely featherless, looked much like a newborn mouse. Mrs. Clark cupped it in her hands to warm it and took it into the house and put it in a small box filled with cotton wool. She immediately called a veterinarian. She was advised to feed the bird pureed baby food such as liver by picking up a tiny morsel of the food with a toothpick and placing the food in the bird's throat. Likewise, water could be supplied with an eye-dropper.

In an hour Mrs. Clark had been to the store and was ready to administer to her new-found charge. She drew the toothpick, with a bit of liver on it, along the beak. Immediately it became all gaping mouth into which she placed small bits of liver. The bird not only ate voraciously right away but would have gone on eating forever if she had not noticed its crop sticking out of the naked body. So she resolved to feed it not more than once an hour which, in itself, kept her busy enough.

In a week, fuzzy pinfeathers had appeared and outlined the wings. In another week, the creature was beginning to look like a bird. And she began talking to it by saying, "pretty little birdie" and she began whistling to it in the way birds whistle "whee-oo, whee-oo."

In a few weeks this feathered friend had all its feathers and was able to flutter to tables and chairs. The beagles never tired of watching it. The one who had found the bird would sit and beam at it as if to say, "Look what I found." Mrs. Clark also never tired of the bird's antics and whistled to it over and over again. And now the baby bird was whistling back when she whistled. Further, it was eating bird seed and angle worms. Although the front door of the house was left open during the day, the bird was about two months old before it ventured outside. When it did, the railing of the porch became its favorite perch. From this railing it began to make short flights to the deck furniture and nearby oaks. The baby now looked full-grown and it was obvious that it was a grossbeak because of its bill and the coloring of feathers — a female evening grossbeak.

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Regardless of how much flying this grossbeak now did, back and forth in the trees, if Mrs. Clark whistled to her in that whee-oo call she was back right away to perch on shoulder or outstretched arm or hand. Mrs. Clark now shared breakfast and lunch with her devoted friend, offering her portions of whatever she herself ate out there on the sun-drenched deck.

The two became inseparable. If Mrs. Clark walked to the neighbors, the grossbeak went with her, riding on her shoulder or taking short spins as they went. When the bird was three months old, its flights became longer and longer and absences increased in length to half a day or more. It seems likely she was becoming acquainted with other grossbeaks for, when

Photo by Ron Mackie



Fledgling evening grossbeak shares a snack with her benefactor, Mrs. Sam Clark of Oakhurst, California.

summer was past, she was gone, evidently migrating to a winter range.

Now I will tell you how the remarkable occurred. One pleasant day the following spring, Mrs. Clark happened to look out a front window and there stood her old friend perched on the porch railing as was her habit the previous summer. Beside her old friend, also perched on the railing, was a male grossbeak and another grossbeak, apparently a youngster. Mrs. Clark went out and sat at the deck table where she had so often fed her bird friend so fondly. Mrs. Clark whistled the old call, whee-oo.

Her grossbeak flew to the table. She stood there and she whistled back. She whistled as if to say, "I am busy and can only stay a few minutes. But I am back and here is my family for you to see." Then the grossbeak flew away, taking her family with her. ●



Male Bulwer's wattled pheasant

Photo by Lincoln Allen, Salt Lake City, Utah

Bulwer's Wattled Pheasant

(Lophura bulweri)
by Ed Lawrence
Woodland Hills, California

The Bulwer's wattled pheasant is a seldom seen rarity, even in the wild. It bears considerable resemblance to the Malayan crested fireback in size and structure and dominant coloration. What really distinguishes this species from its relatives is the outrageously bizarre showing of engorged facial wattles that it employs during its ritualistic mating display. The wattles, which are bright blue in color, become engorged with

blood during the mating rite and their sky blue protuberance is carried both over the head and down the front of the neck of the bird. The dazzling tail of the cock bird is a massive corona of white and vies with the wattle display in ornamentation and attractiveness.

The comparative rarity of these spectacular birds makes them a very desirable subject for the aviculturist who has a dedication to determining



Male Bulwer's wattled pheasant in display mood.

Photo by Francis Billie, Temple City, CA