

PHOTOGRAPHING BIRDS' NESTS

By L. W. BROWNELL

AT this season of the year birds' nests are, naturally, the first objects in outdoor photography to claim our attention, and they are by far the easiest of all nature subjects upon which to work; therefore, I always advise the beginner along these paths to commence with them.

It must be remembered, primarily, that a picture of a bird's nest, to be of any value scientifically or otherwise, must be photographed as it stands with as much of the surroundings intact and showing as possible. The image of the nest itself should not be so large as to occupy the greater part of the picture, but should show clearly for what it is and the manner of its construction; and the nature of the locality in which it is built should be clearly indicated.

Another important thing is, never to point the camera directly downward at the nest, for this shows nothing but the interior of the nest and invariably gives a false impression of it. The camera should be so set up as to point at the nest at an angle of about thirty degrees. This allows a view of both the outer and inner construction, as well as the manner in which the nest is attached to its support, and will show also some, if not all, the eggs. It is not always necessary to show all the eggs, provided those that do show are clearly defined.

The nest photographer's outfit should consist of a four-by-five long-focus camera, any ordinary lens (the longer the focus the better); an ordinary tripod and one with legs about a foot long; a ball and socket clamp; a mirror about a foot square; a pair of climbing-irons and a pair of pruning-shears.

I advocate the use of a small size camera, as the less weight which one has to carry with him on a day's tramp after subjects the more work he is likely to do. A four-by-five negative is also a convenient size to keep and may always be enlarged if so desired.

Of course, it will be found necessary in many instances to trim away some of the foliage that intervenes between the nest and the camera so that an unobstructed view may be obtained. This should be done as little and as carefully as possible, and by pressing it aside instead of cutting it better results can be obtained.

The focusing should be done upon the edge of the nest nearest the camera and then the lens stopped down until all the surroundings are brought out in clear detail, for clearness of detail is what counts most in these pictures. Of course, one should learn the use of his swing back, for

it is of great assistance in this work. I should advise the use of the fast orthochromatic plates, as they invariably give the best results.

The nest should always be shaded from the direct rays of the sun, otherwise the contrasts of light and shadow are too great and spoil the picture, also, the eggs are apt to come out a glaring white, with no signs of the markings. To show distinctly the shape and markings of the eggs is important, for they must be capable of proving for themselves that they belong in the nest and are not merely any eggs photographed in any nest.

Nests should always be photographed in *situ*, and never removed from the situation in which they were originally built. This is often hard to accomplish when the nest happens to be in the topmost branches of the tall trees, but with persistence and the application of a little ingenuity it can be done. In such cases the ball and socket clamp can be used to advantage in fastening the camera to a branch of the tree.

In cases of nests swung at the ends of branches, such as vireo's, oriole's, etc., if they are not more than ten or twelve feet above the ground, the branch can be bent down and fastened in the desired position with twine, but in doing this be sure to prop up the end of the branch so that the nest will be in its original horizontal position. If they are higher than this they are almost hopeless, and a lower hung specimen of the same nest must be looked for.

In photographing the nests of woodpeckers, bluebirds, wrens and all those birds that build in holes excavated in the trunks or branches of trees, the mirror may be advantageously used. The exact depth of the excavation should first be ascertained and then, at the bottom, a small, square hole should be cut out with a keyhole saw. Thus both the entrance hole and the nest and eggs may be shown. Light can be reflected into the hole and the eggs properly illuminated by the aid of the mirror.

In every instance in making the exposures it is better to err on the side of over-, than under-exposure, for an under-exposed negative shows the eggs as mere blotches of white in a black detailless nest.

I sincerely trust that all who enter this field of work will do so with a thorough regard for, and an appreciation of, the rights of the birds. Never disturb the nests so much as to cause the birds to desert them, for this is not necessary to the obtaining of a good picture, and in all things give the owners as little cause for complaint as possible.