

A Cooperative Venture in Raising Young Robins: During the evening of June 9, 1966, there was a hard wind and rain storm in Endicott. The next morning we found that a Robin's nest about 10 feet up in a blue spruce had disintegrated during the storm, spilling out the approximately week-old nestlings (we had first noted them on 6/2/66); two were on the ground and the third hanging head down in one of the branches. The female was hammering away at an earthworm on the front sidewalk when we went out to remove the supposedly dead birds. To our surprise, all three were still alive, although covered with ants as well as being cold and wet. We brought them into the house and quickly improvised a nest from a small box and some Kleenex. As we were preparing to feed them a little "Instant" oatmeal mixed with milk one of the two that had been on the ground died. The other two gulped down the food with considerable enthusiasm, although we had to pry open their beaks to shove it in. We lit the oven at its lowest setting and left them in it, with the door open, for about an hour.

In the meantime Newell put a small wooden platform in the tree at the site of the original nest and replaced the nest, which was now only a wet handful of muddy grass. By now the two young were warm, dry and relatively lively. Since the female was still fussing rather aimlessly around the yard, we put the nest box back under the spruce tree where we had found the young ones. After a few minutes she walked past within a foot of the nest, turned back, hopped up on the edge and proceeded to brood one of the birds (our hasty and clumsy attempts at nest building had produced a structure somewhat larger than the normal Robin's nest). When she left the nest, we replaced it with a chicken wire and feather arrangement that was rather unsatisfactory because the feathers kept getting in the birds' mouths. We further modified the nest by sewing an old washcloth around the circumference. The female alternated brooding and feeding her family, apparently accepting the new arrangement.

Half an hour or so later, we saw the female light on the edge of the old nest, so we quickly transferred the young ones, still in their chicken wire nest, to the old site and awaited developments. The female showed no interest in the nest in the tree, but continued to hop about on the ground, so we returned the nest to the ground and waited. After about half an hour she returned, and continued feeding and brooding. We left them alone the rest of the day.

By dusk the female showed no interest in brooding the young for the night. About 9 p.m., since it was still quite cold (50-55°) and windy we brought nest and all in the house and put it in a box on the stove, where the pilot lights provided some warmth. The next morning, about 5:30 a.m., I fed both birds 2-3 pea-sized pellets of raw hamburger and put them out under the spruce tree. Before I was back in the house the female arrived with a beakful of insects. Later that day we replaced our makeshift nest with a "second-hand" Robin's nest we had found. This seemed to be a most satisfactory arrangement.

We continued to bring them in about 9 p.m. and put them back out about 5 a.m. After a day or two the male showed up and began to help out with the feeding. The young were feathering out and becoming quite active, one a little more so than the other. Finally, on June 16, nearly a week later, the larger bird took off from the nest about 11:30 a.m., and the other followed about an hour and a half later. We have seen them occasionally since then, following their parents around begging for food; they have apparently overcome any set-back they may have had due to their night out in the cold and rain. The persistence of life continues to amaze us.

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Editor's Note: This suggests a possible course of action in the numerous cases we all encounter of well meaning but overly enthusiastic (at first) individuals who set out to raise young birds single handed. In most cases, however, it is recommended that the entire job be left to the parents.