

Man a small part in nature's chain

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE
The many fringe benefits derived from watching creatures such as birds include a growing appreciation of the various other subjects that form a part and parcel of the outdoor world.

Such an interest soon spawns the realization that the beautiful feathered creatures are actually only one small link in a great and intricate chain.

A finely bonded natural mechanism has its beginnings in such things as minute pond life and encompasses in its vast sphere of influence the whole environment and even the destiny of mankind itself.

As autumn approaches with its quickening pulse of bird migration, the opportunities for observations along these lines increases.

One need not dwell in some remote wooded area for example, to witness nature's way of reforestation.

The backyard birdwatcher or the rural observer have equal opportunities to study the bluejay or the squirrel as they practice an age-old planting method with seeds and acorns.

We also see at this season

waves of small birds, gleaners aphids, and insect egg clusters from almost every tree in which they peck. Such depredations are a defence that helps keep the insect hordes in check without ever eliminating them entirely.

Sometimes during the operation of a bird feeding station, we may be saddened to see a hawk swoop in and take one of our favorite songbirds.

Other wasps sting their victims into submission before taking them back to the colony to feed their young. The numbers of those big green tomato worms that raised havoc in many gardens this year also are controlled by a parasitic wasp.

The clusters of yellow bumps you often see on the backs and sides of these large caterpillars are actually wasp eggs. These will eventually produce tiny larva of their own that will feed on and kill the large grub.

To the interested observer, the world of nature is a never ending source of amazement.

So wide is its scope and varied in its character that people who have devoted their lifetime to its study find they have in reality

often only scratched the surface. For whether it be the tragedy of a hummingbird impaled on a spiny thistle, the unmatched beauty of a woodland orchid, or the infinite construction of an oriole's nest, each new discovery is a wonder in itself.

TIPS & CLIPS: While duck numbers are generally lower than normal, the goose population continues to increase. To help local wildfowlers harvest some of these surplus honkers, my neighbor Ron Brusseau and myself have volunteered to go to James Bay and see if we can't scare some of these big white cheeked birds down this way...

Again this action, though seemingly harsh, is a measure designed to limit the numbers of that particular species for its own good.

The fact that the hawk may also have removed a diseased bird from the otherwise healthy ranks must be considered before any bad judgment is passed.

The brightly colored butterflies still gracing our landscape on the warmer days also draw our attention to some of the happenings in the insect world.

It's interesting to note that the strikingly marked orange and black Monarch butterfly migrates to Mexico.

On the other hand, another fragile member of the butterfly family, the shaggy-winged Mourning Cloak, may travel only as far as a crevice under your back veranda to pass the winter.

Apart from providing food for birds during the caterpillar stage, such graceful insects perform a useful service by pollinating a wide variety of blossoms.

One insect group that fascinates most people are the predator species. Odd looking but

highly specialized creatures such as the Preying Mantis feed on harmful beetles and grasshoppers.

Included in this family too are many of the wasps and hornets that, for the most part, were out there welcome this summer.

However, some species of parasitic wasps search out the pupae of the screw worm fly and lay a single egg on it. When the egg hatches, the tiny wasp larva tunnels through the pupae walls and devours the insect inside.

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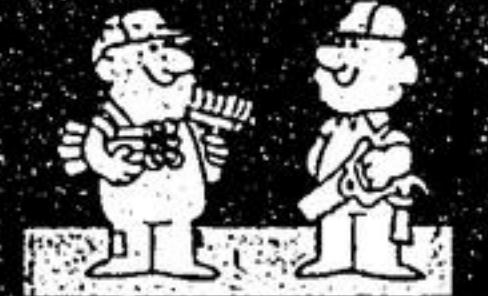
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