

# WILL THEY RETURN?

Handwritten notes and signatures in the top right corner, including "A-1" and "A956".

by Hope Sawyer



Buyukmihci

*Barn swallow and young at rest*

Recently I received a letter from a woman in Wisconsin. She told of a barn swallow family who had nested in her garage. Here's her story:

*Each summer barn swallows nest in our garage, so I have to leave the doors open. This past summer they built on the bottom of the open door (overhead) where I could look into their nest. The first part of the summer I was dimly aware whenever I went outside that some swallows were rushing around my head.*

*She must have raised three batches, and in July and August I began to take notice that I was being dive-bombed. She would rush down and snap her bill in front of my nose while saying "seepsee." The "p" was made when the bill snapped as close as possible to my nose. She came from first one direction and then the other, her wing grazing my cheek. I stood still and let her dive-bomb me while laughing at such a tiny thing defending her nest.*

*It was hot, and the babies were panting; they had perfectly formed tails about one quarter-inch wide. When she got some of them flying they would say "kip-kip," while catching mosquitoes, as the younger ones said, "sweet? sweet?"*

*Every day I was dive-bombed*

*until she got them all into the air. Then she finally got them all on a wire, heading into the woods. No more "seepsee?"*

*I went out in the yard and called "sweet?" And they came back! They circled above my head, then left. I was lonesome. About a week later they all came back into the garage to say good-bye. They looked at their former nest site and then they were gone.*

This woman's story reminds me of orphan birds I have released, always wondering if they would return. One was a sparrow hawk named Brownie. For about two weeks I had fed him lean ground beef mixed with bits of feather. He was just beginning to fly about in an outdoor cage with wire roof, from which I planned to release him soon. Before I thought he was ready, however, he escaped. Was he capable of catching his own food? If not, would he starve rather than come back home?

Two evenings after his escape I was standing in the yard when a sparrow hawk flew to the low branch of a maple and looked down at me. He was only ten feet away. I hurried into the house and brought out some ground beef. When I held it out to him, he ate ravenously. It was almost roosting time, so he flew to find a place for the night. But I was filled with

relief, for I knew that he would come again if he needed food. As it happened, he never returned, so I assume he had found enough grasshoppers, mice or other prey to sustain him.

Another experience came with birds of a different kind. These were orphan chipping sparrows who had been entrusted to my care. They were less than two inches long, with mouths almost too small to feed, but I was able to raise them successfully on a diet of ground beef and moistened dogfood in tiny portions on the end of tweezers.

When these birds began to fly from perch to perch in their cage I put the cage on a table outdoors and opened the door. On the roof of the cage I put a dish of food. For two days they came and helped themselves. Then I removed the food.

Toward evening on the third day I stood outside with food and they came with twitters of recognition and hunger and fed from my hand before flying up into a big maple for the night. For a few days they were with me each evening; then they did not come anymore. I missed their bedtime visits, but hoped their absence meant that they were on their own.

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