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Love Stories

*A woman rescues a hummingbird.
A wren nourishes a bluebird.*

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

Two stories about birds came to me recently. One is about a hummingbird, the other about bluebirds and wrens. Both show cooperation between species, and a thread of altruism that runs through all creation.

Country Magazine features the delightful tale of a baby hummingbird raised by a woman who rescued the infant after it had fallen from the nest during a storm. It was the

woman's dog who crossed the species barrier to alert her mistress that something was wrong. The woman nurtured the infant hummer with sweetened water from an eyedropper. After eight days of intensive care the tiny bird, who had been exercising its wings in a roomy cage, was released. It flew to a nearby tree and began to peck at leaves and bark, and devouring small insects.

Later that summer, a young hummingbird hovered over the woman, looking directly into her eyes, and another time,

alighted on her hand. She believes this to be the one she had reared.

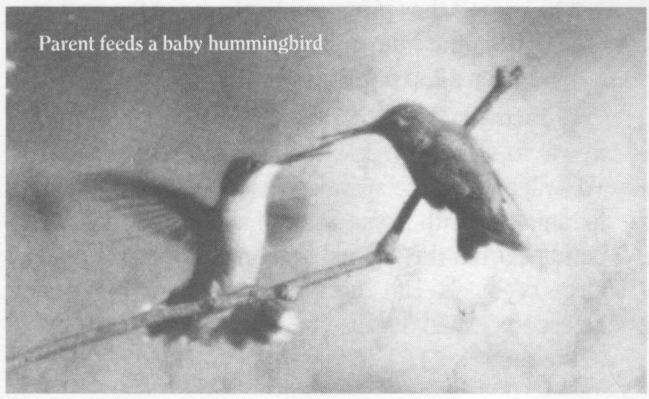
Wildbird Magazine recounts efforts of wrens and other birds who have fed the young of a different species. Bluebird young of a first brood often feed siblings of a second brood, but feeding of young bluebirds by their wren neighbors is a different matter. A photographer tells of seeing a wren approach the bluebird nesting cavity with insect food, then hearing the excited chirps of young being fed.

Alexander Skutch, in his book, *Parent Birds and Their Young*, concludes that "... every species of altricial birds has occasionally helped another altricial species of somewhat similar size with which it has been associated over a wide area for many years." Among examples given are: a house wren feeding northern flickers; a common grackle who fed and protected chipping sparrow nestlings; and a black-and-white warbler feeding nestling worm-eating warblers.

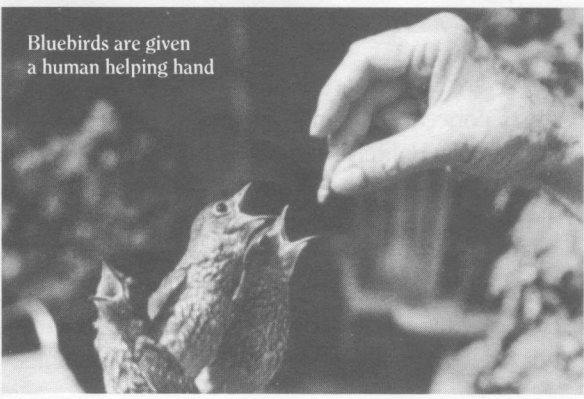
A. C. Bent, another student of bird behavior, reports that a screech owl whose eggs had been destroyed entered a nearby hole in which flickers were nesting and helped brood the young, as well as bring some food to them. Evidence suggests that birds turn to help their neighbors while waiting for their own eggs to hatch, if their own young have been lost, or when their own young are no longer dependent upon them.

Interspecies cooperation is not always between species of birds, of course. A cardinal has been observed offering food to the open mouths of fish who came to the surface. Cats and dogs have nursed infant rabbits and/or squirrels. The late Carl Marty of Wisconsin wrote many accounts of orphan deer and other animals being cared for by his St. Bernard dog.

Is it any wonder that our human hearts go out to the young of other species in need? The impulse to care is inborn, and can flourish if we allow it to take action. □ □



Parent feeds a baby hummingbird



Bluebirds are given a human helping hand