

A PERSISTENT PARENT

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On his way home from lunch on Monday, March 13th, my son, Neil, discovered a bird's nest on the ground with three partly grown young birds in it; their wing and tail feathers were just sprouting. The nest had fallen a minimum of 20 feet but the birds were apparently unharmed. Neil replaced the nest in a lower branch nearby but later that day found it on the ground again. He decided to bring the nest home, which was about 40 yards away, and put it for safety into a small cage, carefully lining it with casuarina needles. The birds, which appeared to be the young of the Bananaquit or Sucrier (Sugarbird), were fed on bread and milk, which they accepted eagerly. When night came, the cage was put into the store room.

On Tuesday and Wednesday the young birds were fed morning, noon and night on the same diet of bread and milk, together with small pieces of banana. We used a golf tee to drop the milk into their mouths.

On Thursday morning we noticed that when we fed the young birds an adult Bananaquit was flying around under our house, where we kept the cage during the day. The adult went to the cage several times, and when the cage door was opened at lunch time the adult, obviously the parent, eventually found its way into the cage and out again. On this first occasion it did nothing particular, but was soon back feeding all three young birds in the nest (inside the cage). It did not seem at all bothered by the cage, once it found its way in. But that night we again put the cage into the store room.

On Friday morning the children noticed that the parent was back again, but feeding only two of the young. In spite of our efforts to feed the unfortunate third young bird ourselves it died at lunch time. In the afternoon the parent bird, still steadily visiting the remaining young, was caught by our cat. Fortunately we forced the cat to abandon the bird before any harm was done, but we supposed the bird would now abandon the young. Not a bit. She soon returned to feed the youngsters!

On Saturday and Sunday mornings I suppose we were up later than usual, for on both mornings the parent bird was evidently impatient, flying around the area, waiting for us to open the store room and take out the cage. Within minutes of our doing so, she was feeding the young.

On Monday we found that one young bird disappeared from the nest during the morning. At first we suspected that

the cat had been responsible for this, but we didn't really see how. Later we had other ideas.

On Tuesday the parent bird was seen to lure the remaining young bird from the nest. It was found about 15 yards away, when it was replaced in the nest by someone anxious to protect it from the cat. But again the parent enticed it from the nest, and though unable to fly properly it fluttered off into the bush.