

General Delivery
Homestead, Florida

16 March 1954

Mr. Kenneth D. Morrison, Editor
The Audubon Magazine
1130 Fifth Avenue
New York 28, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Morrison:

In his column "Bird's-Eye View" in the January-February issue of the Audubon Magazine Mr. Peterson gives some very wholesome admonitions on the ethics of wildlife photography, but he makes at the same time several statements which seem to me quite uncalled for. He says that there appear in a recent publication, which I assume to be LAND BIRDS OF AMERICA, at least 15 photographs of birds in captivity or under restraint that are not properly qualified as such and he labels this failure as coming uncomfortably close to "nature faking". I have carefully examined all the illustrations in the book and can find only one which appears to have been made under artificial conditions. Other photographs may be of captive birds but there is no positive evidence of this to be found in the pictures themselves. Unless Mr. Peterson has access to information not available to me his remark is an unwarranted disparagement.

Mr. Peterson attempts to draw a line between the controls that he permits the nature photographer to use and those that he regards as unjustifiable. For reasons not made clear he excuses most controls practiced in the motion picture art, except in Audubon Screen Tour films, while condemning their use by the still photographer.

No wildlife photographer who endangers the lives of his subjects, he says, should be taking pictures, although he knows that almost all bird photography jeopardizes to some degree the lives of birds. Simply finding a bird's nest often endangers its safety. Any bird photographer who guarantees not to endanger his subjects is either ignorant or is trying to fool someone. Bird photographers should not endanger carelessly and thoughtlessly the lives of their subjects, but no rules can be prescribed. How far one may safely go to get a photograph is a matter of judgment which in turn is a matter of experience.

One of the procedures I have used with signal success under certain conditions, and which Mr. Peterson categorically rejects, is to cut off the branch on which a nest is located and to lower it from the tree tops. I have not yet failed to do this successfully. According to Mr. Peterson it is not cricket - why? I do not believe that he would have objected to my

W. J. H.

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having built towers to support my equipment at the height of the nests, although, as far as jeopardizing the birds goes, a tower, I feel, would endanger them no less than lowering the nest. Perhaps he believes that all this tree-top photography should be done from the ground with telephoto lenses. I wonder if Mr. Peterson really does not feel that the use of such modern equipment as electronic flash and photoelectric trippers is also going too far.

Very sincerely yours,

p. s. I would appreciate your publishing this letter in the next forthcoming issue of Audubon Magazine.

E. P.