

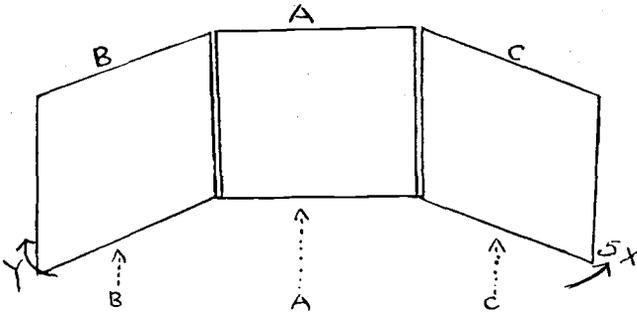
(137)

AGGRESSIVE DISPLAY OF BIRDS BEFORE A LOOKING-GLASS.

BY
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EARLY in April of this year I placed a triple looking-glass on the lawn in front of my study window in Berkshire to find out, which birds, among the common birds of a garden, would be likely to display, or to attack their own reflection in the glass.

The mirror was a three-sided one, so that a bird approaching the centre glass A would also see itself reflected at B and C.



The glass had hardly been down half an hour or so, before a male Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla a. yarrellii*) proceeded to display in front of the mirror, and to fight its own reflection for two or three hours on end, and it monopolized the whole field of reflection, attacking first one side, and then the other side whilst the female, most of the time, walked around looking on and generally seemed to be feeding quite unconcernedly. Whilst especially displaying its black chin and throat, the Pied Wagtail pecked and struck continuously at its own reflection, and whilst doing so at B or C, it often ran round the corner of either X or Y expecting to find its rival there, and its apparent attitude of blank astonishment at finding no rival there, was very interesting to watch. The bird almost at once returned to B or C again, and started displaying afresh. Often whilst attacking itself full on at A, it would fly on to the top of A, and look over the other side, only to find no rival, and so back it would go, and at itself again. At the end of about 3 hours or so, I folded up the glass as I thought the bird had had about enough of it, and

it might hurt itself—whereupon not seeing its rival any more, it at once joined its mate, which was then sitting and waiting patiently on the roof of the house.

The next time I put the glass out it was immediately attacked by a male Blackbird (*Turdus m. merula*). This bird fought itself with beak and claw, but it used its beak more so than did the Wagtail, and frequently crouched something like a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) crouches in display, before making a determined strike at its shadow. Like the Wagtail, it was very interesting to see this bird run round the other side of B and C, to attack its enemy at X and Y, only to find nothing there to attack. This male Blackbird attacked itself for hours continuously, till it became so tired I could almost pick it up, so I folded up the glass, to stop it doing itself harm; yet I never saw the female even bother to look at the glass though she was quite close by most of the time. Again I expected a Robin (*Erithacus r. melophilus*) which was nesting quite close at hand, to go to the glass and display, but it never did. This Robin appeared to take quite an interest in the Blackbird's efforts, and would hop around watching, for some minutes at a stretch, and although it hopped quite close to the glass, I never saw it at all put out or to show the least sign of display. This was to me unexpected, for I had banked on a Robin displaying before any other species. When I moved the glass to another part of the garden, the same display took place by another male Blackbird almost at once, though the female only hopped about near at hand and never once approached the glass.

The only other bird I saw attack the glass and attack it again and again continuously was a male Great Titmouse (*Parus m. newtoni*). In many ways the Great Tit was the most persistent in its attack of all three kinds of birds, continually displaying its black chest, and fighting itself especially with its beak for hours on end, so that eventually, to save the bird from itself, I had to remove the glass.

This experiment was carried out for a day or two at the beginning of April this year. By the end of April the urge to the Blackbird to attack itself had waned considerably, and during May, when I had the looking-glass out in the garden continuously, I never saw any bird take any notice of it at all. The interesting point to my mind is that all the three types of bird that attacked themselves were birds with a good deal of black about them. The Wagtail and Great Tit continuously displayed their black chests, whilst the Blackbird crouched and displayed both its body and bill.