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Birds

BIRDS

With pictures
From John James Audobon's
"Birds of America"

JOHN BURROUGHS

Edited with introduction, by
Robert J. Cole

SMITHSONIAN

JUL 22 1987

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INTRODUCTION . . .

THEODORE ROOSEVELT saw his name in type as often as any man. Yet he knew that Time has a way of reducing the largest headlines to fine print. And he knew that a bird-song can drown a brass band. So he begged—yes pleaded with—John Burroughs to write him down a bird-lover, lest it should be thought in after days that he was only a President!

“I do hope,” he wrote, “that you will include in your coming volume of sketches a little account of the time you visited us at Pine Knot, our little Virginia camp, while I was President. I am very proud of you, Oom John, and I want the fact that you were my guest when I was President, and that you and I looked at birds together, recorded there—and don’t forget that I showed you the blue grosbeak and the Bewick wren, and almost all the other birds I said I would.”

When those words were printed in the

book "Under the Maples," John and Theodore were gone beyond the farthest flight of their beloved birds. But the music of wren and warbler and the fragrance of that friendship breathes from those pages whenever a sympathetic reader opens the volume. "He taught me Bewick's wren and the prairie warbler," wrote Burroughs, "and I taught him the swamp sparrow and one of the rare warblers; I think it was the pine warbler. If he had found the Lincoln sparrow again, he would have been one ahead of me." A happy rivalry, free from the bitterness of political campaigns.

Burroughs meditated more deeply on what he saw out of doors than did Roosevelt or the superb Audubon whose pictures form the illustrations of this book. They were men of action and it is hard to imagine a war going on in their time without their trying to get into it. Burroughs began the essay reprinted in this volume while the guns of Gettysburg were singing a sterner music. He always regretted that he had not been in the Civil War. It was not from indifference

to the fortunes of his country. But he was a philosopher rather than a fighter. When he was seventy-nine I met him in the studio of an artist where he had gone to see his portrait.

"I've been working very steadily, these years," he said, "at the kind of writing that requires close thinking. Now I'm going to play a little and be happy if I can."

"Why 'if'?"

"This war—I can't help thinking about it."

Read "John Burroughs: Boy and Man" by Clara Barrus, M. D. (Doubleday Page) to see how all his life entered into the making of his books. He began gathering material for them before he knew what he was doing. There was a rock in a hillside pasture near an iron-wood tree. "Here I climbed at sundown," he says, "to rest from work and play, and to listen to the vesper sparrow sing."

When little John was only seven, he had heard a strange bird sing in the woods. He asked his brothers what it was and they could not tell him. In

those days bird study was not thought of and there were few books in which one could look for such knowledge, even if he were curious in that direction—as few were. But John Burroughs was curious and he never gave up till he found out, though it was twenty years before he was able to identify that particular bird. His curiosity and persistence are among the chief sources of the great mass of information that is now at the service of everybody.

In 1863, while Burroughs was teaching school near West Point, he saw a copy of Audubon's "Birds of America." Years afterward he wrote, "How eagerly and joyously I took up the study! It fitted in so well with my country tastes and breeding; it turned my enthusiasm as a sportsman into a new channel; it gave to my walks a new delight; it made me look upon every grove and wood as a new storehouse of possible treasures."

Soon after that he went to Washington and while he was waiting for employment by the government, he wrote his first bird essay substantially as it is here

printed. He wrote it partly on a little table in Willard's hotel, partly in the rubber store of his friend Allen. It was sent to the *Atlantic*, whose editor, Lowell, had already printed an essay of his. Articles were unsigned in those days, and many readers had taken Burroughs' work for Emerson's. When he heard that, it quickened the young author's determination to write in his own way, much as he admired Emerson.

It was about this time that his lifelong friendship with Walt Whitman began. The poet and the bird student were introduced by Allen, to whom Walt afterward said of John: "His face is like a field of wheat."

In his works, this essay is a good deal changed. It forms the first chapter of his first volume "Wake Robin." A comparison of the two forms indicates the direction of the author's development. For example, he omits, in the book, the remark that the birds sang his praises because he killed their enemy the snake. He was increasingly severe with any tendency to attribute human thoughts or

feelings to the birds. But even he could not succeed in dehumanizing them altogether—and I'm glad of it.

In the last of his volumes, "Under the Maples," Burroughs tells one of the secrets of his rich harvest of nature wisdom. It may be found in the reversal of an old proverb. Not distance but familiarity lends enchantment. These are his words:

"When, as sometimes happens, I feel an inclination to seek out new lands in my own country, or in other countries, to see what Nature is doing there, and what guise she wears, something prompts me to pause, and after awhile to say to myself: "Look a little closer into the nature right at your own door; do a little intensive observation at home and see what that yields you. The enticement of the far-away is mostly in your imagination; let your eyes and your imagination play once more on the old familiar birds and objects." And a paragraph from another chapter completes the statement of that profound truth:

"The mere studying of the birds, seek-

ing mere knowledge of them, is not enough. You must live with the birds, so to speak; have daily and seasonal associations with them before they come to mean much to you. Then, as they linger about your house or your camp, or as you see them in your walks, they are a part of your life, and help give tone and color to your day."

Dr. Clara Barrus, his secretary and friend, gives his answer to a letter from students who asked him for hints on writing. They had read and liked—as who would not—his essay on the strawberry. And this is what he wrote:

"Ah! but I loved the strawberry; I loved the fields where it grew; I loved the birds that sang there, and the flowers that bloomed there; and I loved my mother who sent me forth to gather the berries. I loved all the rural sights and sounds. I felt near them, so that, when in after years I came to write my essay, I had only to obey the old adage, which sums all the advice which can be given in these matters, 'Look in thy heart and write'

“The same when I wrote about the apple. I had apples in my blood and bones. I had not ripened them in the haymow and bitten them under the desk and behind my slate so many times in school for nothing. Every apple tree I ever shinned up and dreamed under of a long summer day, while a boy, helped me to write that paper. The whole life of the farm, and love of home, and of father and mother, and of my brothers and sisters, helped me to write it.”

I hope the readers of these pages will go on to gain for themselves the fuller acquaintance with this great American that can be won only by reading many volumes. There is the Complete Works, published by Houghton Mifflin Company—though the author protests against a solemn title like that.

“I cannot bring myself to think of my books as ‘works’” he writes in the general introduction, “because so little work has gone to the making of them. It has all been play. . . . The writing of the book was only a second and finer enjoyment of my holiday in the fields or woods.

Not till the writing did it really seem to strike in and become part of me. . . . I am not always aware myself how much pleasure I have had in a walk till I try to share it with my reader. The heat of composition brings out the color and flavor. Literature does not grow wild in the woods."

As for Audubon, it would take a volume to do justice to his life and work. From the point of view of bird study, however, his value is largely limited to the pictures. As Burroughs wrote, "his ear is less skilled than his eye." In observation he was admirable. "He not only paints the form and colors of the bird," declares Burroughs, "but its manners also. Its most characteristic and instantaneous attitude is seized with a grace and a completeness all but marvelous."

Audubon was born in Louisiana of a Spanish mother. Among his first memories was the sight and sound of the mocking bird. But he was sent to France, his father's country, to be educated. There he learned drawing of the famous David. He was sent back to America to manage

his father's property near Philadelphia. Among his own recollections of this period we find this curious sentence,

"It was one of my fancies to be ridiculously fond of dress; to hunt in black satin breeches, wear pumps when shooting, and dress in the finest ruffled shirts I could obtain from France."

On the other hand, he showed the bravest spirit in all the hardships of pioneer life. He was cheated out of his share in his father's fortune and taught drawing and dancing for a living—playing the fiddle for the dancers. His wife was a great help to him, both in earning money and in stimulating his faith and courage. He took his drawings to England, where he was fortunate in finding the Havells, father and son. These admirable engravers, especially Robert, junior, made possible the presentation of his great work. It was a magnificent success, but during its progress, Audubon was more than once on the verge of bankruptcy.

In his later years he returned to America. One who saw him then gives this report: "To make him happy you

had only to give him a new fact in natural history, or introduce him to a rare bird."

The happiness of such as Audubon and Burroughs in the study of nature has increased the happiness of the human race.

WITH THE BIRDS

From the Atlantic Monthly, May, 1865.

NOT in the spirit of exact science, but old acquaintance, would I celebrate rather with the freedom of love and some of the minstrels of the field and forest,—these accredited and authenticated poets of Nature.

All day, while the rain has pattered and murmured, have I heard the notes of the Robin and the Wood-Thrush; the Red-Eyed Flycatcher has pursued his game within a few feet of my window, darting with a low, complacent warble amid the dripping leaves, looking as dry and unruffled as if a drop of rain had never touched him; the Cat-Bird has flirted and attitudinized on my garden-fence; the House-Wren stopped a moment between the showers, and indulged in a short, but spirited, rehearsal under a large leaf in the grape-arbor; the King-Bird

advised me of his proximity, as he went by on his mincing flight; and the Chimney-Swallows have been crying the child's riddle of "*Chippy, chippy, cherryo,*" about the house-top.

With these angels and ministers of grace thus to attend me, even in the seclusion of my closet, I am led more than ever to expressions of love and admiration. I understand the enthusiasm of Wilson and Audubon, and see how one might forsake house and home and go and live with them the free life of the woods.

To the dissecting, classifying scientist a bird may be no more perfect or lovable than a squirrel or a fish; yet to me it seems that all the excellences of the animal creation converge and centre in this nymph of the air; a warbler seems to be the finishing stroke.

First, there is its light, delicate, aerial organization,—consequently, its vivacity, its high temperature, the depth and rapidity of its inspirations, and likewise the intense, gushing, lyrical character of its life. How hot he is! how fast he lives!

—as if his air had more oxygen than ours, or his body less clay. How slight a wound kills him! how exquisite his sensations! how perfect his nervous system! and hence how large his brain! Why, look at the cerebral development of this tiny songster,—almost a third larger, in proportion to the size of its body, than that of Shakespeare even! Does it mean nothing? You may observe that a warbler has a much larger brain and a much finer cerebral organization throughout than a bird of prey, or any of the *Picus* family even. Does it signify nothing?

And then there is its freedom, its superior powers of locomotion, its triumph over time and space. The reptile measures its length upon the ground; the quadruped enjoys a more complete liberation, and is related to the earth less closely; man more still; and the bird most of all. Over our heads, where our eyes travel, but our bodies follow not,—in the free native air,—is his home. The trees are his temples and his dwellings, and the breezes sing his lullaby. He needs no sheltering; for the rain does not

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

wet him. He need fear no cold; for the tropics wait upon his wings. He is the nearest visible representation of a spirit I know of. He *flies*,—the superlative of locomotion; the poet in his most audacious dreams dare confer no superior power on flesh and blood. Sound and odor are no more native to the air than is the Swallow. Look at this marvellous creature! He can reverse the order of the seasons, and almost keep the morning or the sunset constantly in his eye, or outstrip the west-wind cloud. Does he subsist upon air or odor, that he is forever upon the wing, and never deigns to pick a seed or crumb from the earth? Is he an embodied thought projected from the brain of some mad poet in the dim past, and sent to teach us a higher geometry of curves and spirals? See him with that feather high in air, dropping it and snapping it up again in the very glee of superabundant vitality, and in his sudden evolutions and spiral gambollings seeming more a creature of the imagination than of actual sight!

And, again, their coming and going,

how curious and suggestive! We go out in the morning, and no Thrush or Vireo is to be heard; we go out again, and every tree and grove is musical; yet again, and all is silent. Who saw them come? who saw them depart? This pert little Winter-Wren, for instance, darting in and out the fence, diving under the rubbish here and coming up yards away,—how does he manage with those little circular wings to compass degrees and zones, and arrive always in the nick of time? Last August I saw him in the remotest wilds of the Adirondack, impatient and inquisitive as usual; a few weeks later, on the Potomac, I was greeted by the same hardy little busybody. Does he travel by easy stages from bush to bush and from wood to wood? or has that compact little body force and courage to brave the night and the upper air, and so achieve leagues at one pull? And yonder Bluebird, with the hue of the Bermuda sky upon his back, as Thoreau would say, and the flush of its dawn upon his breast,—did he come down out of heaven on that bright March morning when he told us so softly

and plaintively, that, if we pleased spring had come?

About the middle of September I go out in the woods, and am attracted by a faint piping and lispings in the tops of the Oaks and Chestnuts. Tiny figures dart to and fro so rapidly that it pains the eye to follow them, and I discover that the Black-Poll Warbler is paying me a return visit. Presently I likewise perceive a troop of Redstarts, or Green-Backed Warblers, or Golden and Ruby-Crowned Wrens, flashing through the Chestnut-branches, or hanging like jewels on the Cedar-sprays. A week or two later, and my darlings are gone, another love is in my heart, and other voices fill my ears. But so unapparent and mysterious are the coming and going, that I look upon each as a special Providence, and value them as visitants from another sphere.

The migration of the Pigeons, Ducks, and Geese is obvious enough; we see them stream across the heavens, or hear their *clang* in the night; but these minstrels of the field and forest add to their other charms a shade of mystery, and pique

COOPER'S HAWK

the imagination by their invisible and unknown journeyings. To be sure, we know they follow the opening season north and the retreating summer south; but who will point to the parallels that mark the limits of their wandering, or take us to their most secret haunts?

What greater marvel than this simple gift of music? What beside birds and the human species sing? It is the crowning gift; through it the field and forest are justified. Nature said, "These rude forms and forces must have a spokesman of their own nursing; here are flowers and odor, let there be music also." I suspect the subtle spirit of the meadow took form in the Bobolink, that the high pasture-lands begot the Vesper-Sparrow, and that from the imprisoned sense and harmony of the forests sprang the Wood-Thrush.

From the life of birds being on a more intense and vehement scale than that of other animals result their musical gifts and their holiday expression of joy. How restless and curious they are! Their poise and attitudes, how various, rapid, and

graceful! They are a study for an artist, especially as exhibited in the Warblers and Flycatchers: their looks of alarm, of curiosity, of repose, of watchfulness, of joy, so obvious and expressive, yet as impossible of reproduction as their music. Even if the naturalist were to succeed in imparting all their wild extravagances of poise and motion to their inanimate forms, his birds, to say the least, would have a very theatrical or melodramatic aspect, and seem unreal in proportion to their fidelity to Nature. I have seen a Blue Jay alone, saluting and admiring himself in the mirror of a little pool of water from a low overhanging branch, assume so many graceful, novel, as well as ridiculous and fantastic attitudes, as would make a taxidermist run mad to attempt to reproduce; and the rich medley of notes he poured forth at the same time—chirping, warbling, cooing, whistling, chattering, revealing rare musical and imitative powers—would have been an equally severe test to the composer who should have aspired to report them; and the indignant air of outraged privacy

he assumed, on finding himself discovered, together with his loud, angry protest, as, with crown depressed and plumage furred, he rapidly ascended to the topmost branch of a tall Birch, the better to proclaim my perfidy to the whole world, would have excited the interest and applause of the coolest observer.

So much in a general sense; but let me discriminate; "for my purpose holds" to call my favorites by name, and point them out to you, as the tuneful procession passes.

Every stage of the advancing season gives prominence to certain birds as to certain flowers. The Dandelion tells me when to look for the Swallow, and I know the Thrushes will not linger when the Orchis is in bloom. In my latitude, April is emphatically the month of the Robin. In large numbers they scour the fields and groves. You hear their piping in the meadow, in the pasture, on the hillside. Walk in the woods, and the dry leaves rustle with the whir of their wings, the air is vocal with their cheery call. In excess of joy and vivacity, they

ANNA HUMMINGBIRDS

run, leap, scream, chase each other through the air, diving and sweeping among the trees with perilous rapidity.

In that free, fascinating, half-work and half-play pursuit, — sugar-making, — a pursuit which still lingers in many parts of New York, as in New England, the Robin is one's boon companion. When the day is sunny and the ground bare, you meet him at all points and hear him at all hours. At sunset, on the tops of the tall Maples, with look heavenward, and in a spirit of utter abandonment, he carols his simple strain. And sitting thus amid the stark, silent trees, above the wet, cold earth, with the chill of winter still in the air, there is no fitter or sweeter songster in the whole round year. It is in keeping with the scene and the occasion. How round and genuine the notes are, and how eagerly our ears drink them in! The first utterance, and the spell of winter is thoroughly broken and the remembrance of it afar off.

Robin is one of the most native and democratic of our birds; he is one of the family, and seems much nearer to us than

those rare, exotic visitants, as the Orchard-Starling or Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, with their distant, high-bred ways. Hardy, noisy, frolicsome, neighborly and domestic in his ways, strong of wing and bold in spirit, he is the pioneer of the Thrush family, and well worthy of the finer artists whose coming he heralds and in a measure prepares us for.

I could wish Robin less native and plebeian in one respect,—the building of his nest. Its coarse material and rough masonry are creditable neither to his skill as a workman nor to his taste as an artist. I am the more forcibly reminded of his deficiency in this respect from observing yonder Humming-Bird's nest, which is a marvel of fitness and adaptation, a proper setting for this winged gem,—the body of it composed of a white, felt-like substance, probably the down of some plant or the wool of some worm, and toned down in keeping with the branch on which it sits by minute tree-lichens, woven together by threads as fine and frail as gossamer. From Robin's good looks and musical turn we might rea-

sonably predict a domicile of equal fitness and elegance. At least I demand of him as clean and handsome a nest as the King-Bird's, whose harsh jingle, compared with Robin's evening melody, is as the clatter of pots and kettles beside the tone of a flute. I love his note and ways better even than those of the Orchard-Starling or the Baltimore Oriole; yet his nest, compared with theirs, is a half-subterranean hut contrasted with a Roman villa. There is something courtly and poetical in a pensile nest. Next to a castle in the air is a dwelling suspended to the slender branch of a tall tree, swayed and rocked forever by the wind. Why need wings be afraid of falling? Why build only where boys can climb? After all, we must set it down to the account of Robin's democratic turn; he is count of Robin's democratic turn; he is no aristocrat but one of the people; and therefore we should expect stability in his workmanship, rather than elegance.

Another April bird, which makes her appearance sometimes earlier and sometimes later than Robin, and whose mem-

RAVEN

ory I fondly cherish, is the Phœbe-Bird, (*Muscicapa nunciola*,) the pioneer of the Flycatchers. In the inland farming districts, I used to notice her, on some bright morning about Easter-day, proclaiming her arrival with much variety of motion and attitude, from the peak of the barn or hay-shed. As yet, you may have heard only the plaintive, homesick note of the Bluebird, or the faint trill of the Song-Sparrow; and Phœbe's clear, vivacious assurance of her veritable bodily presence among us again is welcomed by all ears. At agreeable intervals in her lay she describes a circle or an ellipse in the air, ostensibly prospecting for insects, but really, I suspect, as an artistic flourish, thrown in to make up in some way for the deficiency of her musical performance. If plainness of dress indicates powers of song, as it usually does, then Phœbe ought to be unrivalled in musical ability, for surely that ashen-gray suit is the superlative of plainness; and that form, likewise, though it might pass for the "perfect figure" of a bird, measured by Joe Gargery's standard, to a fastidious

taste would present exceptionable points. The seasonableness of her coming, however, and her civil, neighborly ways, shall make up for all deficiencies in song and plumage, and remove any suspicions we may have had, that, perhaps, from some cause or other, she was in some slight disfavor with Nature. After a few weeks Phœbe is seldom seen, except as she darts from her moss-covered nest beneath some bridge or shelving cliff.

Another April comer, who arrives shortly after Robin-Redbreast, with whom he associates both at this season and in the autumn, is the Golden-Winged Woodpecker, *alias*, "High-Hole," *alias*, "Flicker," *alias*, "Yarup." He is an old favorite of my boyhood, and his note to me means very much. He announces his arrival by a long, loud call, repeated from the dry branch of some tree, or a stake in the fence,—a thoroughly melodious April sound. I think how Solomon finished that beautiful climax on Spring, "And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land," and see that a description of Spring in this farming country, to be

equally characteristic, should culminate in like manner,—“And the call of the High-Hole comes up from the wood.”

It is a loud, strong, sonorous call, and does not seem to imply an answer, but rather to subserve some purpose of love or music. It is “Yarup’s” proclamation of peace and good-will to all. On looking at the matter closely, I perceive that most birds, not denominated songsters, have, in the spring, some note or sound or call that hints of a song, and answers imperfectly the end of beauty and art. As a “lievlier iris changes on the burnished dove,” and the fancy of the young man turns lightly to thoughts of his pretty cousin, so the same renewing spirit touches the “silent singers,” and they are no longer dumb; faintly they lisp the first syllables of the marvellous tale. Witness the clear, sweet whistle of the Gray-Crested Titmouse,—the soft, nasal piping of the Nuthatch,—the amorous, vivacious warble of the Bluebird,—the long, rich note of the Meadow-Lark,—the whistle of the Quail,—the drumming of the Partridge,—the animation

COMMON BLUEBIRD

and loquacity of the Swallows, and the like. Even the Hen has a homely, contented carol; and I credit the Owls with a desire to fill the night with music. All birds are incipient or would-be songsters in the spring. I find corroborative evidence of this even in the crowing of the Cock. The flowering of the Maple is not so obvious as that of the Magnolia; nevertheless, there is actual inflorescence. Neither Wilson nor Audubon, I believe, awards any song to that familiar little Sparrow, the *Socialis*; yet who that has observed him sitting by the wayside, and repeating, with devout attitude, that fine sliding chant, does not recognize the neglect? Who has heard the Snow-Bird sing? Not the ornithologist, it seems; yet he has a lisping warble very savory to the ear. I have heard him indulge in it even in February.

Even the Cow-Bunting feels the musical tendency, and aspires to its expression, with the rest. Perched upon the topmost branch beside his mate or mates,—for he is quite a polygamist, and usually has two or three demure little ladies

in faded black beside him,—generally in the early part of the day, he seems literally to vomit up his notes. Apparently with much labor and effort, they gurgle and blubber up out of him, falling on the ear with a peculiar subtile ring, as of turning water from a glass jug, and not without a certain pleasing cadence.

Neither is the common Woodpecker entirely insensible to the wooing of the spring, and, like the Partridge, testifies his appreciation of melody after quite a primitive fashion. Passing through the woods, on some clear, still morning in March, while the metallic ring and tension of winter are still in the earth and air, the silence is suddenly broken by long, resonant hammering upon a dry limb or stub. It is Downy beating a reveille to Spring. In the utter stillness and amid the rigid forms we listen with pleasure, and as it comes to my ear oftener at this season than at any other, I freely exonerate the author of it from the imputation of any gastronomic motives, and credit him with a genuine musical performance.

It is to be expected, therefore, that "Yellow-Hammer" will respond to the general tendency, and contribute his part to the spring chorus. His April call is his finest touch, his most musical expression.

I recall an ancient Maple standing sentry to a large Sugar-Bush, that, year after year, afforded protection to a brood of Yellow-Hammers in its decayed heart. A week or two before the nesting seemed actually to have begun, three or four of these birds might be seen, on almost any bright morning, gambolling and courting amid its decayed branches. Sometimes you would hear only a gentle, persuasive cooing, or a quiet, confidential chattering,—then that long, loud call, taken up by first one, then another, as they sat about upon the naked limbs,—anon, a sort of wild, rollicking laughter, intermingled with various cries, yelps, and squeals, as if some incident had excited their mirth and ridicule. Whether this social hilarity and boisterousness is in celebration of the pairing or mating ceremony, or whether it is only a sort of

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES

annual "house-warming" common among High-Holes on resuming their summer quarters, is a question upon which I reserve my judgment.

Unlike most of his kinsmen, the Golden-Wing prefers the fields and the borders of the forest to the deeper seclusion of the woods,—and hence, contrary to the habit of his tribe, obtains most of his subsistence from the ground, boring for ants and crickets. He is not quite satisfied with being a Woodpecker. He courts the society of the Robin and the Finches, abandons the trees for the meadow, and feeds eagerly upon berries and grain. What may be the final upshot of this course of living is a question worthy the attention of Darwin. Will his taking to the ground and his pedestrian feats result in lengthening his legs, his feeding upon berries and grains subdue his tints and soften his voice, and his associating with Robin put a song into his heart?

Indeed, what would be more interesting than the history of our birds for the last two or three centuries? There can be no

doubt that the presence of man has exerted a very marked and friendly influence upon them, since they so multiply in his society. The birds of California, it is said, were mostly silent till after its settlement, and I doubt if the Indians heard the Wood-Thrush as we hear him. Where did the Bobolink disport himself before there were meadows in the North and rice-fields in the South? Was he the same blithe, merry-hearted beau then as now? And the Sparrow, the Lark, and the Goldfinch, birds that seem so indigenous to the open fields and so averse to the woods, we cannot conceive of their existence in a vast wilderness and without man. Did they grow, like the flowers, when the conditions favorable to their existence were established?

But to return. The Bluebird and Song-Sparrow, these universal favorites and firstlings of the spring, come before April, and their names are household words.

May is the month of the Swallows and the Orioles. There are many other distinguished arrivals, indeed nine-tenths of the birds are here by the last week in

May, yet the Swallows and Orioles are the most conspicuous. The bright plumage of the latter seems really like an arrival from the tropics. I see them flash through the blossoming trees, and all the forenoon hear their incessant warbling and wooing. The Swallows dive and chatter about the barn, or squeak and build beneath the eaves; the Partridge drums in the fresh unfolding woods; the long, tender note of the Meadow-Lark comes up from the meadow; and at sunset, from every marsh and pond come the ten thousand voices of the Hylas. May is the transition month, and exists to connect April and June, the root with the flower.

With June the cup is full, our hearts are satisfied, there is no more to be desired. The perfection of the season, among other things, has brought the perfection of the song and plumage of the birds. The master artists are all here; and the expectations excited by the Robin and the Song-Sparrow are fully justified. The Thrushes have all come; and I sit down upon the first rock, with

NIGHTHAWKS

hands full of the pink Azalea, to listen. With me, the Cuckoo does not arrive till June; and often the Goldfinch, the King-Bird, the Scarlet Tanager delay their coming till then. In the meadows the bobolink is in all his glory; in the high pastures the Field-Sparrow sings his breezy vesper-hymn; and the woods are unfolding to the music of the Thrushes.

The Cuckoo is one of the most solitary birds of our forests, and is strangely tame and quiet, appearing equally untouched by joy or grief, fear or anger. Is he an exile from some other sphere, and are his loneliness and indifference the result of a hopeless, yet resigned soul? Or has he passed through some terrible calamity or bereavement, that has overpowered his sensibilities, rendering him dreamy and semi-conscious? Something remote seems ever weighing upon his mind. He deposits his eggs in the nests of other birds, having no heart for work or domestic care. His note or call is as of one lost or wandering, and the farmer says is prophetic of rain. Amid the general joy and the sweet assurance of

things, I love to listen to this strange clairvoyant call. Heard a quarter of a mile away, coming up from the dark bosom of the forest or out from the sombre recesses of the mountain, like the voice of a muezzin calling to prayer in the Oriental twilight, it has a peculiar fascination. He wanders from place to place,

“An invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery.”

You will probably hear him a score of times to seeing him once. I rarely discover him in the woods, except when on a protracted stay; but when in June he makes his gastronomic tour of the garden and orchard, regaling himself upon canker-worms, he is quite noticeable. Since food of some kind is a necessity, he seems resolved to burden himself as little as possible with the care of obtaining it, and so devours these creeping horrors with the utmost matter-of-course air. At this time he is one of the tamest birds in the orchard, and will allow you to approach within a few yards of him.

I have even come within a few feet of one without seeming to excite his fear or suspicion. He is quite unsophisticated, or else royally indifferent.

Without any exception, his plumage is the richest brown I am acquainted with in Nature, and is unsurpassed in the qualities both of firmness and fineness. Notwithstanding the disparity in size and color, he has certain peculiarities that remind one of the Passenger-Pigeon. His eye, with its red circle, the shape of his head, and his motions on alighting and taking flight, quickly suggest the resemblance; though in grace and speed, when on the wing, he is far inferior. His tail seems disproportionately long, like that of the Red Thrush, and his flight among the trees is very still, contrasting strongly with the honest clatter of the Robin or Pigeon.

Have you heard the song of the Field-Sparrow? If you have lived in a pastoral country with broad upland pastures, you could hardly have missed him. Wilson, I believe, calls him the Grass-Finch, and was evidently unacquainted with his

SNOWY OWL

powers of song. The two white lateral quills in his tail, and his habit of running and skulking a few yards in advance of you as you walk through the fields, are sufficient to identify him. Not in meadows or orchards, but in high, breezy pasture-grounds, will you look for him. His song is most noticeable after sundown, when other birds are silent; for which reason he has been aptly called the Vesper-Sparrow. The farmer following his team from the field at dusk catches his sweetest strain. His song is not so brisk and varied as that of the Song-Sparrow, being softer and wilder, sweeter and more plaintive. Add the best parts of the lay of the latter to the sweet, vibrating chant of the Wood-Sparrow, and you have the evening hymn of the Vesper-Bird,—the poet of the plain, unadorned pastures. Go to those broad, smooth, up-lying fields where the cattle and sheep are grazing, and sit down in the twilight on one of those warm, clean stones, and listen to this song. On every side, near and remote, from out the short grass which the herds are cropping, the

strain rises. Two or three long, silver notes of peace and rest, ending in some subdued trills and quavers, constitute each separate song. Often you will catch only one or two of the bars, the breeze having blown the minor part away. Such unambitious, quiet, unconscious melody! It is one of the most characteristic sounds in Nature. The grass, the stones, the stubble, the furrow, the quiet herds, and the warm twilight among the hills are all subtly expressed in this song; this is what they are at last capable of.

The female builds a plain nest in the open field, without so much as a bush or thistle or tuft of grass to protect it or mark its site; you may step upon it, or the cattle may tread it into the ground. But the danger from this source, I presume, the bird considers less than that from another. Skunks and foxes have a very impertinent curiosity, as Finchie well knows,—and a bank or hedge, or a rank growth of grass or thistles, that might promise protection and cover to mouse or bird, these cunning rogues would be apt to explore most thoroughly.

The Partridge is undoubtedly acquainted with the same process of reasoning; for, like the Vesper-Bird, she, too, nests in open, unprotected places, avoiding all show of concealment,—coming from the tangled and almost impenetrable parts of the forest, to the clean, open woods, where she can command all the approaches and fly with equal ease in any direction.

One of the most marvellous little songsters whose acquaintance I claim is the White-Eyed Flycatcher. He seems to have been listened to by unappreciative ears, for I know no one who has made especial mention of him. His song is not particularly sweet and soft; on the contrary, it is a little hard and shrill, like that of the Indigo-Bird or Oriole; but for fluency, volubility, execution, and power of imitation, he is unsurpassed (and in the last-named particular unequalled) by any of our Northern birds. His ordinary note is forcible and emphatic, but, as stated, not especially musical: *Chick-a-re'r-chick*, he seems to say, hiding himself in the low, dense undergrowth, and eluding your most vigilant

MOUNTAIN ORIOLE

search, as if playing some part in a game. But in July or August, if you are on good terms with the sylvan deities, you may listen to a far more rare and artistic performance. Your first impression will be that that cluster of Azalea or that clump of Swamp-Huckleberry conceals three or four different songsters, each vying with the others to lead the chorus. Such a medley of notes, snatched from half the songsters of the field and forest, and uttered with the utmost clearness and rapidity, I am sure you cannot hear short of the haunts of the genuine Mocking-Bird. If not fully and accurately repeated, there are at least suggested the notes of the Robin, Wren, Cat-Bird, High-Hole, Goldfinch, and Song-Sparrow: The *pip*, *pip*, of the last is produced so accurately that I verily believe it would deceive the bird herself,—and the whole uttered in such rapid succession that it seems as if the movement that gives the concluding note of one strain must form the first note of the next. The effect is very rich, and, to my ear, entirely unique. The performer is very careful not to reveal him-

self in the mean time; yet there is a conscious air about the strain that impresses one with the idea that his presence is understood and his attention courted. A tone of pride and glee, and, occasionally, of bantering jocoseness, is discernible. I believe it is only rarely, and when he is sure of his audience, that he displays his parts in this manner. You are to look for him, not in tall trees or deep forests, but in low, dense shrubbery about wet places, where there are plenty of gnats and mosquitoes.

The Winter-Wren is another marvelous songster, in speaking of whom it is difficult to avoid superlatives. He is not so conscious of his powers and so ambitious of effect as the White-Eyed Flycatcher, yet you will not be less astonished and delighted on hearing him. He possesses the fluency, volubility, and copiousness for which the Wrens are noted, and besides these qualities, and what is rarely found conjoined with them, a wild, sweet, rhythmical cadence that holds you entranced. I shall not soon forget that perfect June day, when, loitering in a

low, ancient Hemlock, in whose cathedral aisles the coolness and freshness seemed perennial, the silence was suddenly broken by a strain so rapid and gushing, and touched with such a wild sylvan plaintiveness, that I listened in amazement. And so shy and coy was the little minstrel that I came twice to the woods before I was sure to whom I was listening. In summer, he is one of those birds of the deep Northern forests, that, like the Speckled Canada Warbler and the Hermit-Thrush, only the privileged ones hear.

The distribution of plants in a given locality is not more marked and defined than that of the birds. Show a botanist a landscape, and he will tell you where to look for the Lady's-Slipper, the Columbine, or the Harebell. On the same principles the ornithologist will direct you where to look for the Hooded Warbler, the Wood-Sparrow, or the Chewink. In adjoining counties, in the same latitude, and equally inland, but possessing a different geological formation and different forest-timber, you will observe

BELTED KINGFISHER

quite a different class of birds. In a country of the Beech and Maple I do not find the same songsters that I know where thrive the Oak, Chestnut, and Laurel. In going from a district of the Old Red Sandstone to where I walk upon the old Plutonic Rock, not fifty miles distant I miss in the woods the Veery, the Hermit - Thrush, the Chestnut - Sided Warbler, the Blue-Backed Warbler, the Green-Backed Warbler, the Black and Yellow Warbler, and many others,—and find in their stead the Wood-Thrush, the Chewink, the Redstart, the Yellow-Throat, the Yellow-Breasted Flycatcher, the White-Eyed Flycatcher, the Quail, and the Turtle-Dove.

In my neighborhood here in the Highlands, the distribution is very marked. South of the village I invariably find one species of birds,—north of it, another. In only one locality, full of Azalea and Swamp-Huckleberry, I am always sure of finding the Hooded Warbler. In a dense undergrowth of Spice-Bush, Witch-Hazel, and Alder, I meet the Worm-Eating Warbler. In a remote clearing, covered

with Heath and Fern, with here and there a Chestnut and an Oak, I go to hear in July the Wood-Sparrow, and returning by a stumpy shallow pond, I am sure to find the Water-Thrush.

Only one locality within my range seems to possess attractions for all comers. Here one may study almost the entire ornithology of the State. It is a rocky piece of ground, long ago cleared, but now fast relapsing into the wildness and freedom of Nature, and marked by those half-cultivated, half-wild features which birds and boys love. It is bounded on two sides by the village and highway, crossed at various points by carriage-roads, and threaded in all directions by paths and by-ways, along which soldiers, laborers, and truant schoolboys are passing at all hours of the day. It is so far escaping from the axe and the bushwhack as to have opened communication with the forest and mountain beyond by straggling lines of Cedar, Laurel, and Blackberry. The ground is mainly occupied with Cedar and Chestnut, with an undergrowth, in many places, of Heath and

Bramble. The chief feature, however, is a dense growth in the centre, consisting of Dogwood, Water-Beech, Swamp-Ash, Alder, Spice-Bush, Hazel, etc., with a network of Smilax and Frost-Grape. A little zigzag stream, the draining of a swamp beyond, which passes through this tangle-wood, accounts for many of its features and productions, if not for its entire existence. Birds that are not attracted by the Heath or the Cedar and Chestnut are sure to find some excuse for visiting this miscellaneous growth in the centre. Most of the common birds literally throng this inclosure; and I have met here many of the rarer species, such as the Great-Crested Flycatcher, the Solitary Warbler, the Blue-Winged Swamp-Warbler, the Worm-Eating Warbler, the Fox-Sparrow, etc. The absence of all birds of prey, and the great number of flies and insects, both the result of proximity to the village, are considerations which no Hawk-fearing, peace-loving minstrel passes over lightly: hence the popularity of the resort.

But the crowning glory of all these Robins, Flycatchers, and Warblers is the

ICELAND OR GYR FALCON

Wood-Thrush. More abundant than all other birds, except the Robin and Cat-Bird, he greets you from every rock and shrub. Shy and reserved when he first makes his appearance in May, before the end of June he is tame and familiar, and sings on the tree over your head, or on the rock a few paces in advance. A pair even built their nest and reared their brood within ten or twelve feet of the piazza of a large summer-house in the vicinity. But when the guests commenced to arrive and the piazza to be thronged with gay crowds, I noticed something like dread and foreboding in the manner of the motherbird; and from her still, quiet ways, and habit of sitting long and silently within a few feet of the precious charge, it seemed as if the dear creature had resolved, if possible, to avoid all observation.

The Hermit-Thrush, the Wood-Thrush, and the Veery (*Turdus Wilsonii*) are our peers of song. The Mocking-Bird undoubtedly possesses the greatest range of mere talent, the most varied executive ability, and never fails to surprise and de-

light one anew at each hearing; but being mostly an imitator, he never approaches the serene beauty and sublimity of the Hermit-Thrush. The word that best expresses my feelings, on hearing the Mocking-Bird, is admiration, though the first emotion is one of surprise and incredulity. That so many and such various notes should proceed from one throat is a marvel, and we regard the performance with feelings akin to those we experience on witnessing the astounding feats of the athlete or gymnast,—and this, notwithstanding many of the notes imitated have all the freshness and sweetness of the original. The emotions excited by the songs of these Thrushes belong to a higher order, springing as they do from our deepest sense of the beauty and harmony of the world.

The Wood-Thrush is worthy of all, and more than all, the praises he has received; and considering the number of his appreciative listeners, it is not a little surprising that his relative and superior, the Hermit-Thrush, should have received so little notice. Both the great ornitho-

logists, Wilson and Audubon, are lavish in their praises of the former, but have little or nothing to say of the song of the latter. Audubon says it is sometimes agreeable, but evidently has never heard it. Nuttall, I am glad to find, is more discriminating, and does the bird fuller justice. Professor Baird, of the Smithsonian Institution, a more recent authority, and an excellent observer, tells me he regards it as pre-eminently our finest songster.

It is quite a rare bird, of very shy and secluded habits, being found in the Middle and Eastern States, during the period of song, only in the deepest and most remote forests, usually in damp and swampy localities. On this account the people in the Adirondack region call it the "Swamp Angel." Its being so much of a recluse accounts for the comparative ignorance that prevails in regard to it.

The cast of its song is so much like that of the Wood-Thrush, that an enthusiastic admirer of the latter bird, as all admirers are, would be quite apt to mistake it for the strain of his favorite, observing

GREAT BLUE HERON

only how unusually well he sings. I myself erred in this manner, and not till I had seen the bird in the midst of his solemn hymn—a hard thing to do, I assure you—was I aware that my Wood-Thrush had a superior. I believe so good an observer as Thoreau has confounded the songs of the two birds, as he speaks of having heard the Wood-Thrush in the forests of Northern Maine, where the law of geographical distribution would lead one to look for only the Hermit.

The song of this Thrush is of unparalleled sweetness and sublimity. There is a calmness and solemnity about it that suggests in Nature perpetual Sabbath and perennial joy. How vain seem our hurry and ambition! Clear and serene, strong and melodious, falling softly, yet flowing far, these notes inspire me with a calm, sacred enthusiasm. I hear him most in the afternoon, but occasionally at nightfall he “pours his pure soprano,”

“Deepening the silence with diviner
calm.”

I have known one to sit for hours in the upper branches of a tall Maple in an opening in a remote wood, and sing till all other birds seemed as if pausing to listen. Attempting to approach him at such times, I have called to my aid numerous devices,—such as keeping the range of a tree, skulking close to the ground, carrying a large bush in front of me,—but all to no purpose. Suddenly the strain would cease, and while waiting for him to commence again, I would see him dart off to a lower tree, or into a thick undergrowth of Witch-Hazel. When I had withdrawn, he would resume his perch and again take up his song. At other times I have come abruptly upon him while singing on a low stump, without his seeming to notice me at all.

I think his song, in form and manner, is precisely that of the Wood-Thrush,—differing from it in being more wild and ethereal, as well as stronger and clearer. It is not the execution of the piece so much as the tone of the instrument that is superior. In the subdued trills and

quavers that occur between the main bars, you think his tongue must be more resonant and of finer metal. In uttering the tinkling, bead-like *de, de, de*, he is more facile and exquisite; in the longer notes he possesses greater compass and power, and is more prodigal of his finer tones. How delicately he syllables the minor parts, weaving, as it were, the finest of silver embroideries to the main texture of his song!

Those who have heard only the Wood-Thrush commit a very pardonable error in placing him first on the list of our songsters. He is truly a royal minstrel, and, considering his liberal distribution throughout our Atlantic seaboard, perhaps contributes more than any other bird to our sylvan melody. One may object, that he spends a little too much time in tuning his instrument, yet his careless and uncertain touches reveal its rare compass and power.

He is the only songster of my acquaintance, excepting the Canary, that displays different degrees of proficiency in the exercise of his musical gifts. Not long

SCREECH OWL

since, while walking one Sunday in the edge of an orchard adjoining a wood, I heard one that so obviously and unmistakably surpassed all his rivals, that my companion, though slow to notice such things, remarked it wonderingly; and with one accord we threw ourselves upon the grass and drank in the bounteous melody. It was not different in quality so much as in quantity. Such a flood of it! Such magnificent copiousness! Such long, trilling, deferring, accelerating preludes! Such sudden, ecstatic overtures would have intoxicated the dullest ear. He was really without a compeer, a master artist. Twice afterward I was conscious of having heard the same bird. The Wood-Thrush is the handsomest species of this family. In grace and elegance of manner he has no equal. Such a gentle, high-bred air, and such inimitable ease and composure in his flight and movement! He is a poet in very word and deed. His carriage is music to the eye. His performance of the commonest act, as catching a beetle or picking a worm from the mud, pleases like a stroke

of wit or eloquence. Was he a prince in the olden time, and do the regal grace and mien still adhere to him in his transformation? What a finely proportioned form! How plain, yet rich his color,—the bright russet of his back, the clear white of his breast, with the distinct heart-shaped spots! It may be objected to Robin that he is noisy and demonstrative; he hurries away or rises to a branch with an angry note, and flirts his wings in ill-bred suspicion. The Mavis, or Red Thrush, sneaks and skulks like a culprit, hiding in the densest Alders; the Cat-Bird is a coquette and a flirt, as well as a sort of female Paul Pry; and the Chewink shows his inhospitality by spying upon every one of your movements. The Wood-Thrush has none of these underbred traits. He regards me unsuspiciously, or avoids me with a noble reserve,—or, if I am quiet and incurious, graciously hops toward me, as if to pay his respects, or to make my acquaintance. Pass near his nest, under the very branch, within a few feet of his mate and brood, and he opens not his beak; he concedes

you the right to pass there, if it lies in your course; but pause an instant, raise your hand toward the defenceless household, and his anger and indignation are beautiful to behold.

What a noble pride he has! Late one October, after his mates and companions had long since gone South, I noticed one for several successive days in the dense part of this next-door wood, flitting noiselessly about, very grave and silent, as if doing penance for some violation of the code of honor. By many gentle, indirect approaches, I perceived that part of his tail-feathers were undeveloped. The sylvan prince could not think of returning to court in this plight,—and so, amid the falling leaves and cold rains of autumn, was patiently biding his time.

The soft, mellow flute of the Veery fills a place in the chorus of the woods that the song of the Vesper-Sparrow fills in the chorus of the fields. It has the Nightingale's habit of singing in the twilight, and possesses, I believe, all of the Nightingale's mellowness and serenity. Walk out toward the forest in the warm twi-

WHOOPING CRANE

light of a June day, and when fifty rods distant you will hear their soft, reverberating notes, repeated and prolonged with exquisite melodiousness, rising from a dozen different throats.

It is one of the simplest strains to be heard,—as simple as the curve in form, and mellower than the tenderest tones of the flute,—delighting from the pure element of harmony and beauty it contains, and not from any novel or fantastic modulation of it,—thus contrasting strongly with such rollicking, hilarious songsters as the Bobolink, in whom we are chiefly pleased with the tintinnabulation, the verbal and labial excellence, and the evident conceit and delight of the performer.

I hardly know whether I am more pleased or annoyed with the Cat-Bird. Perhaps she is a little too common, and her part in the general chorus a little too conspicuous. If you are listening for the note of another bird, she is sure to be prompted to the most loud and protracted singing, drowning all other sounds; if you sit quietly down to ob-

serve a favorite or study a new comer, her curiosity knows no bounds, and you are scanned and ridiculed from every point of observation. Yet I would not miss her; I would only subordinate her a little, make her less conspicuous.

She is the parodist of the woods, and there is ever a mischievous, bantering, half-ironical undertone in her lay, as if she were conscious of mimicking and disconcerting some envied songster. Ambitious of song, practising and rehearsing in private, she yet seems the least sincere and genuine of the sylvan minstrels, as if she had taken up music only to be in the fashion, or not to be outdone by the Robins and Thrushes. In other words, she seems to sing from some outward motive, and not from inward joyousness. She is a good versifier, but not a great poet. Vigorous, rapid, copious, not without fine touches, but destitute of any high serene melody, her performance, like that of Thoreau's squirrel, always implies a spectator.

There is a certain air and polish about her strain, however, like that in the vi-

vacuous conversation of a well-bred lady of the world, that commands respect. Her maternal instinct, also, is very strong, and that simple structure of dead twigs and dry grass is the centre of much anxious solicitude. Not long since, while strolling through the woods, my attention was attracted to a small, densely grown swamp, hedged in with Eglantine, Brambles, and the everlasting Smilax, from which proceeded loud cries of distress and alarm, indicating that some terrible calamity was threatening my sombre-colored minstrel. On effecting an entrance, which, however, was not accomplished till I had doffed coat and hat, so as to diminish the surface exposed to the thorns and brambles, and looking around me from a square yard of terra firma, I found myself the spectator of a loathsome, yet fascinating scene. Three or four yards from me was the nest, beneath which, in long festoons, rested a huge black snake; a bird, two thirds grown, was slowly disappearing between his expanded jaws. As they seemed unconscious of my presence, I quietly observed

ORCHARD ORIOLES

the proceedings. By slow degrees he compassed the bird about with his elastic mouth; his head flattened, his neck writhed and swelled, and two or three undulatory movements of his glistening body finished the work. Then, with marvellous ease, he cautiously raised himself up, his tongue flaming from his mouth the while, curved over the nest, and, with wavy, subtle motions, explored the interior. I can conceive of nothing more overpoweringly terrible to an unsuspecting family of birds than the sudden appearance above their domicile of the head and neck of this archenemy. It is enough to petrify the blood in their veins. Not finding the object of his search, he came streaming down from the nest to a lower limb, and commenced extending his researches in other directions, sliding stealthily through the branches, bent on capturing one of the parent birds. That a legless, wingless creature should move with such ease and rapidity where only birds and squirrels are considered at home, lifting himself up, letting himself down, running out

on the yielding boughs, and traversing with marvellous celerity the whole length and breadth of the thicket, was truly surprising. One thinks of the great myth, of the Tempter and the "cause of all our woe," and wonders if the Arch One is not now playing off some of his pranks before him. Whether we call it snake or devil matters little. I could but admire his terrible beauty, however, his black, shining folds, his easy, gliding movement, head erect, eyes glistening, tongue playing like subtile flame, and the invisible means of his almost winged locomotion.

The parent birds, in the mean while, kept up the most agonizing cry,—at times fluttering furiously about their pursuer, and actually laying hold of his tail with their beaks and claws. On being thus attacked, the snake would suddenly double upon himself and follow his own body back, thus executing a strategic movement that at first seemed almost to paralyze his victim and place her within his grasp. Not quite, however. Before his jaws could close upon the coveted prize

the bird would tear herself away, and, apparently faint and sobbing, retire to a higher branch. His reputed powers of fascination availed him little, though it is possible that a more timid and less combative bird might have been held by the fatal spell. Presently, as he came gliding down the slender body of a leaning Alder, his attention was attracted by a slight movement of my arm; eying me an instant, with that crouching, utter, motionless gaze which I believe only snakes and devils can assume, he turned quickly,—a feat which necessitated something like crawling over his own body,—and glided off through the branches, evidently recognizing in me a representative of the ancient parties he once so cunningly ruined. A few moments after, as he lay, carelessly disposed in the top of a rank Alder, trying to look as much like a crooked branch as his supple, shining form would admit, the old vengeance overtook him. I exercised my prerogative, and a well-directed missile in the shape of a stone, brought him looping and writhing to the ground. After I

CATBIRD

had completed his downfall, and quiet had been partially restored, a half-fledged member of the bereaved household came out from his hiding-place, and, jumping upon a decayed branch, chirped vigorously, no doubt in celebration of the victory. What the emotions of the parent birds were, on seeing their destroyer's head so thoroughly bruised, and a part of their little ones at least spared to them, I can only conjecture; but I imagined the news spread immediately, and that my praises as the deliverer were sung in that neighborhood ever after.

Till the middle of July there is a general equilibrium; the tide stands poised; the holiday-spirit is unabated. But as the harvest ripens beneath the long, hot days, the melody gradually ceases. The young are out of the nest and must be cared for, and the moulting season is at hand. After the Cricket has commenced to drone his monotonous refrain beneath your window, you will not, till another season, hear the Wood-Thrush in all his matchless eloquence. The Bobolink has become careworn and fretful, and blurts

out snatches of his song between his scolding and upbraiding, as you approach the vicinity of his nest, oscillating between anxiety for his brood and solicitude for his musical reputation. Some of the Sparrows still sing, and occasionally across the hot fields, from a tall tree in the edge of the forest, comes the rich note of the Scarlet Tanager. This tropical-colored bird loves the hottest weather, and I hear him more in dog-days than at any other time.

The remainder of the summer is the carnival of the Swallows and Flycatchers. Flies and insects, to any amount, are to be had for the catching; and the opportunity is well improved. See that sombre ashen-colored Pewee on yonder branch. A true sportsman he, who never takes his game at rest, but always on the wing. You vagrant Fly, you purblind Moth, beware how you come within his range! Observe his attitude. You might think him studying the atmosphere or the light, for he has an air of contemplation and not of watchfulness. But step closer; observe the curious move-

ment of his head, his "eye in a fine frenzy rolling, glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." His sight is microscopic and his aim sure. Quick as thought he has seized his victim and is back to his perch. There is no strife, no pursuit,—one fell swoop and the matter is ended. That little Sparrow, as you will observe, is less skilled. It is the *Socialis*, and he finds his subsistence properly in various seeds and the larvæ of insects, though he occasionally has higher aspirations, and seeks to emulate the Pewee, commencing and ending his career as a Flycatcher by an awkward chase after a Beetle or "Miller." He is hunting around in the grass now, I suspect, with the desire to indulge this favorite whim. There!—the opportunity is afforded him. Away goes a little cream-colored Meadow-Moth in the most tortuous course he is capable of, and away goes *Socialis* in pursuit. The contest is quite comical, though I dare say it is serious enough to the Moth. The chase continues for a few yards, when there is a sudden rushing to cover in the

grass,—then a taking to wing again, when the search has become too close, and the Moth has recovered his wind. *Socialis* chirps angrily, and is determined not to be beaten. Keeping, with the slightest effort, upon the heels of the fugitive, he is ever on the point of halting to snap him up, but never quite does it,—and so, between disappointment and expectation, is soon disgusted, and returns to pursue his more legitimate means of subsistence.

In striking contrast to this serio-comic strife of the Sparrow and the Moth, is the Pigeon-Hawk's pursuit of the Sparrow or the Goldfinch. It is a race of surprising speed and agility. It is a test of wing and wind. Every muscle is taxed, and every nerve strained. Such cries of terror and consternation on the part of the bird, tacking to the right and left, and making the most desperate efforts to escape, and such silent determination on the part of the Hawk, pressing the bird so closely, flashing and turning and timing his movements with those of the pursued as accurately and as inexor-

RICE BIRDS

ably as if the two constituted one body, excite feeling of a deep interest. You mount the fence or rush out of your way to see the issue. The only salvation for the bird is to adopt the tactics of the Moth, seeking instantly the cover of some tree, bush, or hedge, where its smaller size enables it to move about more rapidly. These pirates are aware of this, and therefore prefer to take their prey by one fell swoop. You may see one of them prowling through an orchard, with the Yellow-birds hovering about him, crying, *Pi-ty, pi-ty*, in the most desponding tone; yet he seems not to regard them, knowing, as do they, that in the close branches they are as safe as if in a wall of adamant.

August is the month of the high-sailing Hawks. The Hen-Hawk is the most noticeable. He likes the haze and the calm of these long, warm days. He is a bird of leisure, and seems always at his ease. How beautiful and majestic are his movements! So self-poised and easy, such an entire absence of haste, such a magnificent amplitude of circles and spirals, such

a haughty, imperial grace, and, occasionally, such daring aerial evolutions!

With slow, leisurely movement, rarely vibrating his pinions, he mounts and mounts in an ascending spiral till he appears a mere speck against the summer sky; then, if the mood seizes him, with wings half-closed, like a bent bow, he will cleave the air almost perpendicularly, as if intent on dashing himself to pieces against the earth; but on nearing the ground, he suddenly mounts again on broad, expanded wing, as if rebounding upon the air, and sails leisurely away. It is the sublimest feat of the season. One holds his breath till he sees him rise again. Sometimes a squirrel or bird or an unsuspecting barn-fowl is scathed and withered beneath this terrible visitation.

If inclined to a more gradual and less precipitous descent, he fixes his eye on some distant point in the earth beneath him, and thither bends his course. He is still almost meteoric in his speed and boldness. You see his path down the heavens, straight as a line; if near, you hear the rush of his wings; his shadow

HERMIT THRUSH

hurtles across the fields, and in an instant you see him quietly perched upon some low tree or decayed stub in a swamp or meadow, with reminiscences of frogs and mice stirring in his maw.

• When the south-wind blows, it is a study to see three or four of these air-kings at the head of the valley far up toward the mountain, balancing and oscillating upon the strong current; now quite stationary, except a slight tremulous motion like the poise of a rope-dancer, then rising and falling in long undulations, and seeming to resign themselves passively to the wind; or, again, sailing high and level far above the mountain's peak,—no bluster and haste, but, as stated, occasionally a terrible earnestness and speed. Fire at him as he sails overhead, and, unless wounded badly, he will not change his course or gait.

His flight is a perfect picture of repose in motion. He might sleep or dream in that level, effortless, aimless sail. It strikes the eye as more surprising than the flight of the Pigeon and Swallow

KILDEE PLOVER

even, in that the effort put forth is so uniform and delicate as to escape observation, giving to the movement an air of buoyancy and perpetuity, the effluence of power rather than the conscious application of it.

The calmness and dignity of this Hawk, when attacked by Crows or the King-Bird, are well worthy of him. He seldom deigns to notice his noisy and furious antagonists, but deliberately wheels about in that aerial spiral, and mounts and mounts till his pursuers grow dizzy and return to earth again. It is quite original, this mode of getting rid of an unworthy opponent, rising to heights where the braggart is dazed and bewildered and loses his reckoning! I am not sure but it is worthy of imitation.

But summer wanes, and autumn approaches. The songsters of the seed-time are silent at the reaping of the harvest. Other minstrels take up the strain. It is the heyday of insect life. The day is canopied with musical sound. All the songs of the spring and summer appear

PASSENGER PIGEON, NOW EXTINCT, VICTIM
OF POT-HUNTERS

to be floating, softened and refined, in the upper air. The birds, in a new, but less holiday suit, turn their faces southward. The Swallows flock and go; the Bobolinks flock and go; silently and unobserved, the Thrushes go. Autumn arrives, bringing Finches, Warblers, Sparrows, and Kinglets from the North. Silently the procession passes. Yonder Hawk, sailing peacefully away till he is lost in the horizon, is a symbol of the closing season and the departing birds.

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