

ON RUBYTHROATS.

BY CHRESWELL J. HUNT.

How often does one get even half a look at a Hummingbird? We see them hover for a moment about some clump of flowers and then like a flash they have vanished—we know not where. Of so diminutive a size and with such marvelous swiftness of wing, is it not a veritable will-o'-the-wisp?

If we are so fortunate as to find one of the tiny nests we may watch the female caring for the family, for from what has been written it would seem that the female is left to shoulder all the domestic cares alone. But after the young are awing and when away from the nest how and where does the Hummer spend the time?

In my field experience how seldom has it been my good fortune to have one of these birds under observation for even ten minutes at a time! Well I remember, when a youthful egg collector, how I was informed by the wise ones that the only way to discover a Hummingbird's nest was to hear the hum made by the wings of the incubating bird. Of course this story should have been relegated to the rubbish heap along with that of straddling Flamingoes, etc., but being of a credulous age with much faith in what the elders told me, I was led to believe that a hummer's wings were always in motion and it was not until some years afterward when I visited a museum and saw a hummer mounted upon a nest with the wings at rest that I realized the error, for otherwise would not the taxidermist have spread them? But of the Hummer at large, what of him? How much of his time does he spend in feeding? For how long does he rest, perched upon some twig? Where does he spend the night? Also do not some flowers attract him more than others or more properly does he not find some flowers more profitable feeding-grounds than others? The trumpet vine is said to be a favorite, but what of the others? These are a few of the questions that I have frequently asked myself and upon which I have tried to throw some light, but my efforts in this direction have been well-nigh fruitless. Whenever we do

chance to meet it is nearly always a case of "now you see me; now you don't"—and Hummers leave no trail.

In going over my note-books I can find but four instances where I have had this bird under anything like satisfactory observation and then what they taught me was indeed next to nothing.

I offer these scanty notes, not that they contain any real value but in hopes that they may call forth the experiences of some other student who has been more fortunate in the study of Rubythroat ways.

It was a hot August day and I was trudging along the dusty road when a Rubythroat darted across in front of me and hovered above a clump of blossoming Jewel weed (*Impatiens fulva*). I am inclined to believe that among the wild varieties this plant is a favorite with the hummer, for I have frequently noted them about it. I watched this bird for fifteen minutes or more and then it left for parts unknown. It was a female or young of the year. It would go from flower to flower for several minutes and then would perch upon a branch of the Jewel weed where it would stretch out a wing and run its bill down over and under it, seemingly smoothing out the feathers.

Again I was following a wood path one June day when I was surprised to see two Hummers hovering above the path directly in front of me. I halted and they darted all about me, sometimes almost into my face. It may be that they had a nest close by, but if so I was unable to locate its whereabouts. But why would both birds be guarding the nest? Is it not left entirely to the female?

One disagreeable October day—the fifth of the month—with a cold driving rain I had taken up my station in the woods beside a dogwood tree to watch the birds that came to feed upon the crimson berries. These all proved to be Robins and I had about decided to move on when a Crested Flycatcher alighted in the tree and began to feast upon the plentiful fruit. Whether the berries were not to his liking or his appetite easily satisfied I know not, but after eating a few he darted up into a chestnut tree that stood near by. My

eyes followed him but not far, however, for they rested upon a little knob at the end of a twig away up in that chestnut tree. I shall never be able to say why this tiny knob should have attracted my attention, for it was not until I had brought my field glasses to bear upon it that I realized I was looking at a Rubythroat. He certainly did look like a drowned rat. Every feather seemed saturated with the cold rain and there he sat and preened away at them with his bill. While I watched him he flew to another perch and finally left me, but I wondered where he sought his food at this season. Among the goldenrods and asters, or did he catch insects from some perch in true flycatcher fashion?

We were boating on the Delaware River in late July. I had pushed the boat's bow in among the marsh grasses and sat waiting for my friend who had gone ashore. Down darted a Rubythroat and hovered before a Cardinal flower sat less than four feet away he was not the least bit alarmed. He visited every flower, one after another, then made a circle in the air only to return and revisit each flower. My friend appearing about this time, Mr. Rubythroat made a rapid departure.

Still another picture stands out vividly on by memory. It was the third of July, 1904. Tom and I were climbing the Welsh Mountains in N. W. Chester County. We came to a little clearing. We scrambled over the low stone wall into a small meadow, where we waded knee deep among timothy and clover. There going from one red clover head to another was a Rubythroat. His red throat seemed fairly aflame in the sunlight. We saw him for only a brief moment, but somehow the picture clings. We had a good trip that day, with lots of novelties. There had been Scarlet Tanagers, Chestnut- (*Lobelia Cardinalis*) standing by the boat's bow. Although I sided Warblers and Rough-winged Swallows; Bartramian Sandpipers had shown us how gracefully they could fold their wings, and a Nighthawk, resting in the road, had almost let us trample him under foot, but whenever I recall the Welsh Mountain trip I see again that hillside meadow, the crumbling stone wall, the nodding clovers and the Rubythroat.



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