

WESTERN BLUE-BIRD.

†*SIALIA OCCIDENTALIS*, Towns.

PLATE CXXXV.—MALE AND FEMALE.

Of this handsome bird, which was discovered by Mr. TOWNSEND, Mr. NUTTALL has favoured me with the following notice:—"The Western Blue-bird possesses many of the habits of our common kind. The male is equally tuneful throughout the breeding season. Mounting some projecting branch of an oak or low pine, he delivers his delightful ditty with great energy, extending his wings, and exerting all his powers as it were to amuse his sitting mate, or to allure attention to his short, often-repeated, but thrilling lay. In the midst of all this charming employment economy is rarely forgotten, and a crawling beetle or busy insect is no sooner seen than snatched up by our still watchful songster, who resumes his wonted perch, to be again interrupted by the cares of providing a subsistence; or, reiterating his melody, strives to drown the song of some neighbouring rival by tender strains and more earnest endeavours. He appears also equally solicitous with our common species to shew his affection for his mate, whom he constantly accompanies, feeds, and caresses with an ardour of affection seldom rivalled. His song is more varied, sweet and tender than that of the common *Sialia*, and very different in many of its expressions. In the small rocky prairies of the Columbia, near its bank, where I first heard and saw this species, they were exceedingly shy, probably in consequence of the presence of birds of prey, which prowled around, and it was with difficulty that we got sight of them, but afterwards, in the vicinity of Santa Barbara, in Upper California, I saw them in considerable numbers, and very familiar, making at this time (April) their nests in the knot-holes of the oaks which abound in the neighbouring plains. We first met a flock of young birds alone, in the winter, near to Fort Vancouver, flitting through the tall fir trees, like so many timorous and silent winter passengers. These had so much the appearance of young of the common species, that for some time we paid little attention to them; but their silence, the absence of the usual complaints of *t shaye vit*, &c., and at length their different notes, convinced me of their being distinct, previous to any examination of their plumage. This species, unlike *Sialia arctica*, does not extend to the mountains, but



Western Blue Bird.

1. Male. 2. Female.

seems constantly to affect similar situations with our common kind, along the coast of the Pacific, as ours does along that of the Atlantic."

I have given figures of both the male and the female in their spring dress.

SIALIA OCCIDENTALIS, *Western Blue-bird*, Towns., Journ. Acad. Nat. Sc. Philadelphia, vol. vii. p. 188.

WESTERN BLUE-BIRD, *Sylvia occidentalis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. v. p. 41.

Adult Male in summer.

This species in size and form, as well as in colour, is very similar to the Common Blue-bird. Its bill is of ordinary length, nearly straight, broader than high at the base, compressed toward the end; upper mandible with the dorsal line straight and a little declinate at the base, convex toward the end, the ridge narrow, the sides convex toward the end, the edges direct and overlapping, with a slight notch close to the narrow deflected tip; lower mandible with the angle of moderate length and narrow, the dorsal line straight, the sides convex, the edges direct, the tip narrow. Nostrils basal, elliptical, operculate, partially concealed by the feathers.

Head rather large; neck short; body moderately full. Feet of ordinary length, slender; tarsus compressed, covered anteriorly with seven scutella, behind with two long plates meeting so as to form a thin edge; toes of moderate length; the first stouter, the second and fourth nearly equal, the third much longer; claws moderate, well curved, compressed, laterally grooved, tapering to a fine point.

Plumage soft and blended, with considerable gloss. Short bristles at the base of the upper mandible. Wings very long; the first quill very small, being only seven-twelfths of an inch long, the second half a twelfth shorter than the third, which is longest, but only exceeds the fourth by three-fourths of a twelfth; the other primaries rapidly graduated; outer secondaries emarginate, inner not elongated. Tail rather long, deeply emarginate, the middle feathers being four-twelfths of an inch shorter than the longest.

Bill and feet black; iris brown. The general colour of the upper parts is bright blue, of a tint approaching to ultramarine; a broad band across the fore part of the back, and the scapulars, chestnut-red; the quills and larger coverts dark greyish-brown, the outer webs blue, the primaries light brown at the end, the secondaries faintly margined with whitish. The tail-feathers are also brown toward the end, but blue toward the base; the lateral with the margin of the outer web whitish. The sides and fore part of the neck are light blue, tinged with grey; the fore part of the breast and the sides of the body light chestnut-red; the rest of the lower parts greyish-white, tinged with blue.

Length to end of tail 7 inches; bill along the ridge $\frac{5\frac{3}{4}}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $\frac{7\frac{1}{2}}{12}$; wing from flexure $4\frac{5}{12}$; tail $2\frac{10}{12}$; tarsus $\frac{10}{12}$, hind toe $\frac{4}{12}$, its claw $\frac{4}{12}$; middle toe $\frac{8}{12}$, its claw $\frac{3}{12}$.

Adult Female in summer.

The female differs from the male in the same degree as that of the Arctic Blue-bird from its male; the upper parts being light greyish-brown, tinged with blue, which is brighter on the rump; the wings and tail are as in the male, but with less blue; the lower parts are bluish-grey, the breast and sides light brownish-red, tinged with grey.

ARCTIC BLUE-BIRD.

+*SIALIA ARCTICA*, Swains.

PLATE CXXXVI.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This beautiful species, first introduced to the notice of ornithologists by Dr. RICHARDSON, who procured a single specimen at Fort Franklin, in July 1825, is merely a summer visitor to the Fur Countries. Both the male and the female are represented in my plate. The latter I believe has not hitherto been figured. Mr. NUTTALL's notice respecting this interesting bird, so closely allied to *Sialia Wilsoni*, is as follows:

“*Sialia arctica*. Ultramarine Blue-bird. About fifty or sixty miles north-west of the usual crossing place of that branch of the Platte called Larimie's Fork, in the early part of June, this species of *Sialia* is not uncommon. The female utters a low plaint when her nest is approached, the place for which is indifferently chosen in a hole in a clay cliff, or in that of the trunk of a decayed cedar. At this time the young were hatched. The nest is made of the usual material of dry grass in very insignificant quantity. They are more shy than the common species, and have the same mode of feeding by watching on some low bush or plant, and descending for an insect. We afterwards saw a nest of this species on a cliff of the Sandy river, a branch of the Colorado of the West. The female and male were both feeding their brood. The former chirped and appeared uneasy at my approach, and at intervals uttered a plaintive *yéow*. The male sings more



Western Blue Bird.

1. Male. 2. Female.



Audubon, John James. 1841. "Western Blue-Bird, *Sialia occidentalis*, Towns. [Pl. 135]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 2, 176–178. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319248>.

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