COMMON MOCKING-BIRD.

†ORPHEUS POLYGLOTTUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CXXXVIII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

It is where the great magnolia shoots up its majestic trunk, crowned with evergreen leaves, and decorated with a thousand beautiful flowers, that perfume the air around; where the forests and fields are adorned with blossoms of every hue; where the golden orange ornaments the gardens and groves; where bignonias of various kinds interlace their climbing stems around the white-flowered stuartia, and mounting still higher, cover the summits of the lofty trees around, accompanied with innumerable vines, that here and there festoon the dense foliage of the magnificent woods, lending to the vernal breeze a slight portion of the perfume of their clustered flowers; where a genial warmth seldom forsakes the atmosphere; where berries and fruits of all descriptions are met with at every step;—in a word, kind reader, it is where Nature seems to have paused, as she passed over the earth, and opening her stores, to have strewed with unsparing hand the diversified seeds from which have sprung all the beautiful and splendid forms which I should in vain attempt to describe, that the Mocking-bird should have fixed its abode, there only that its wondrous song should be heard.

But where is that favoured land?—It is in this great continent.—It is, reader, in Louisiana that these bounties of nature are in the greatest perfection. It is there that you should listen to the love-song of the Mocking-bird, as I at this moment do. See how he flies round his mate, with motions as light as those of the butterfly! His tail is widely expanded, he mounts in the air to a small distance, describes a circle, and, again alighting, approaches his beloved one, his eyes gleaming with delight, for she has already promised to be his and his only. His beautiful wings are gently raised, he bows to his love, and again bouncing upwards, opens his bill, and pours forth his melody, full of exultation at the conquest which he has made.

They are not the soft sounds of the flute or of the hautboy that I hear, but the sweeter notes of Nature's own music. The mellowness of the song, the varied modulations and gradations, the extent of its compass, the great brilliancy of execution, are unrivalled. There is probably no bird in the

world that possesses all the musical qualifications of this king of song, who has derived all from Nature's self. Yes, reader, all!

No sooner has he again alighted, and the conjugal contract has been sealed, than, as if his breast was about to be rent with delight, he again pours forth his notes with more softness and richness than before. He now soars higher, glancing around with a vigilant eye, to assure himself that none has witnessed his bliss. When these love-scenes, visible only to the ardent lover of nature, are over, he dances through the air, full of animation and delight, and, as if to convince his lovely mate that to enrich her hopes he has much more love in store, he that moment begins anew, and imitates all the notes which nature has imparted to the other songsters of the grove.

For awhile, each long day and pleasant night are thus spent; but at a peculiar note of the female he ceases his song, and attends to her wishes. A nest is to be prepared, and the choice of a place in which to lay it is to become a matter of mutual consideration. The orange, the fig, the pear-tree of the gardens are inspected; the thick briar patches are also visited. They appear all so well suited for the purpose in view, and so well does the bird know that man is not his most dangerous enemy, that instead of retiring from him, they at length fix their abode in his vicinity, perhaps in the nearest tree to his window. Dried twigs, leaves, grasses, cotton, flax, and other substances, are picked up, carried to a forked branch, and there arranged. Five eggs are deposited in due time, when the male having little more to do than to sing his mate to repose, attunes his pipe anew. Every now and then he spies an insect on the ground, the taste of which he is sure will please his beloved one. He drops upon it, takes it in his bill, beats it against the earth, and flies to the nest to feed and receive the warm thanks of his devoted female.

When a fortnight has elapsed, the young brood demand all their care and attention. No cat, no vile snake, no dreaded Hawk, is likely to visit their habitation. Indeed the inmates of the next house have by this time become quite attached to the lovely pair of Mocking-birds, and take pleasure in contributing to their safety. The dew-berries from the fields, and many kinds of fruit from the gardens, mixed with insects, supply the young as well as the parents with food. The brood is soon seen emerging from the nest, and in another fortnight, being now able to fly with vigour, and to provide for themselves, they leave the parent birds, as many other species do.

The above account does not contain all that I wish you to know of the habits of this remarkable songster; so, I shall shift the scene to the woods and wilds, where we shall examine it more particularly.

The Mocking-bird remains in Louisiana the whole year. I have observed with astonishment, that towards the end of October, when those which had

gone to the Eastern States, some as far as Boston, have returned, they are instantly known by the "southrons," who attack them on all occasions. I have ascertained this by observing the greater shyness exhibited by the strangers for weeks after their arrival. This shyness, however, is shortly over, as well as the animosity displayed by the resident birds, and during the winter there exists a great appearance of sociality among the united tribes.

In the beginning of April, sometimes a fortnight earlier, the Mocking-birds pair, and construct their nests. In some instances they are so careless as to place the nest between the rails of a fence directly by the road. I have frequently found it in such places, or in the fields, as well as in briars, but always so easily discoverable that any person desirous of procuring one, might do so in a very short time. It is coarsely constructed on the outside, being there composed of dried sticks of briars, withered leaves of trees, and grasses, mixed with wool. Internally it is finished with fibrous roots disposed in a circular form, but carelessly arranged. The female lays from four to six eggs the first time, four or five the next, and when there is a third brood, which is sometimes the case, seldom more than three, of which I have rarely found more than two hatched. The eggs are of a short oval form, light green, blotched and spotted with umber. The young of the last brood not being able to support themselves until late in the season, when many of the berries and insects have become scarce, are stunted in growth;—a circumstance which has induced some persons to imagine the existence in the United States of two species of Common Mocking-bird, a larger and a smaller. This, however, in as far as my observation goes, is not correct. The first brood is frequently brought to the bird-market in New Orleans as early as the middle of April. A little farther up the country, they are out by the fifteenth of May. The second brood is hatched in July, and the third in the latter part of September.

The nearer you approach to the sea-shores, the more plentiful do you find these birds. They are naturally fond of loose sands, and of districts scantily furnished with small trees, or patches of briars, and low bushes.

During incubation, the female pays such precise attention to the position in which she leaves her eggs, when she goes to a short distance for exercise and refreshment, to pick up gravel, or roll herself in the dust, that, on her return, should she find that any of them has been displaced, or touched by the hand of man, she utters a low mournful note, at the sound of which the male immediately joins her, and they are both seen to condole together. Some people imagine that, on such occasions, the female abandons the nest; but this idea is incorrect. On the contrary, she redoubles her assiduity and care, and scarcely leaves the nest for a moment; nor is it until she has been

repeatedly forced from the dear spot, and has been much alarmed by frequent intrusions, that she finally and reluctantly leaves it. Nay, if the eggs are on the eve of being hatched, she will almost suffer a person to lay hold of her.

Different species of snakes ascend to their nests, and generally suck the eggs or swallow the young; but on all such occasions, not only the pair to which the nest belongs, but many other Mocking-birds from the vicinity, fly to the spot, attack the reptiles, and, in some cases, are so fortunate as either to force them to retreat, or deprive them of life. Cats that have abandoned the houses to prowl about the fields, in a half wild state, are also dangerous enemies, as they frequently approach the nest unnoticed, and at a pounce secure the mother, or at least destroy the eggs or young, and overturn the nest. Children seldom destroy the nests of these birds, and the planters generally protect them. So much does this feeling prevail throughout Louisiana, that they will not willingly permit a Mocking-bird to be shot at any time.

In winter, nearly all the Mocking-birds approach the farm-houses and plantations, living about the gardens or outhouses. They are then frequently seen on the roofs, and perched on the chimney-tops; yet they always appear full of animation. Whilst searching for food on the ground, their motions are light and elegant, and they frequently open their wings as butterflies do when basking in the sun, moving a step or two, and again throwing out their wings. When the weather is mild, the old males are heard singing with as much spirit as during the spring or summer, while the younger birds are busily engaged in practising, preparatory to the love season. They seldom resort to the interior of the forest either during the day or by night, but usually roost among the foliage of evergreens, in the immediate vicinity of houses in Louisiana, although in the Eastern States they prefer low fir trees.

The flight of the Mocking-bird is performed by short jerks of the body and wings, at every one of which a strong twitching motion of the tail is perceived. This motion is still more apparent while the bird is walking, when it opens its tail like a fan and instantly closes it again. The common *cry* or *call* of this bird is a very mournful note, resembling that uttered on similar occasions by its first cousin the *Orpheus rufus*, or, as it is commonly called, the "*French Mocking-bird*." When travelling, this flight is only a little prolonged, as the bird goes from tree to tree, or at most across a field, scarcely, if ever, rising higher than the top of the forest. During this migration, it generally resorts to the highest parts of the woods near water-courses, utters its usual mournful note, and roosts in these places. It travels mostly by day.

Few Hawks attack the Mocking-birds, as on their approach, however sudden it may be, they are always ready not only to defend themselves

vigorously and with undaunted courage, but to meet the aggressor half way, and force him to abandon his intention. The only Hawk that occasionally surprises it is the *Astur Cooperii*, which flies low with great swiftness, and carries the bird off without any apparent stoppage. Should it happen that the ruffian misses his prey, the Mocking-bird in turn becomes the assailant, and pursues the Hawk with great courage, calling in the mean time all the birds of its species to its assistance; and although it cannot overtake the marauder, the alarm created by their cries, which are propagated in succession among all the birds in the vicinity, like the watchwords of sentinels on duty, prevents him from succeeding in his attempts.

The musical powers of this bird have often been taken notice of by European naturalists, and persons who find pleasure in listening to the song of different birds whilst in confinement or at large. Some of these persons have described the notes of the Nightingale as occasionally fully equal to those of our bird, but to compare her essays to the finished talent of the Mocking-bird, is, in my opinion, quite absurd.

The Mocking-bird is easily reared by hand from the nest, from which it ought to be removed when eight or ten days old. It becomes so very familiar and affectionate, that it will often follow its owner about the house. I have known one raised from the nest kept by a gentleman at Natchez, that frequently flew out of the house, poured forth its melodies, and returned at sight of its keeper. But notwithstanding all the care and management bestowed upon the improvement of the vocal powers of this bird in confinement, I never heard one in that state produce any thing at all approaching in melody to its own natural song.

The male bird is easily distinguished in the nest, as soon as the brood is a little fledged, it being larger than the female, and shewing more pure white. It does not shrink so deep in the nest as the female does, at the sight of the hand which is about to lift it. Good singing birds of this species often bring a high price. They are long-lived and very agreeable companions. Their imitative powers are amazing, and they mimic with ease all their brethren of the forests or of the waters, as well as many quadrupeds. I have heard it asserted that they possess the power of imitating the human voice, but have never met with an instance of the display of this alleged faculty.

MOCKING-BIRD, *Turdus polyglottus*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. ii. p. 14.

TURDUS POLYGLOTTUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 74.

MOCKING-BIRD, *Turdus polyglottus*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 320.

MOCKING-BIRD, *Turdus polyglottus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 108; vol. v. p. 438.

Male.

Upper parts greyish-brown; feathers of the wings and tail greyish-black;

tips of secondary coverts, edges of primary quills, and a large spot at the end of the three lateral tail-feathers, white; lower parts whitish, marked with triangular dusky spots, of which there is a distinct line from the base of the bill; throat, middle of the breast, abdomen, and lower tail-coverts unspotted.

In an adult male of this celebrated bird, the roof of the mouth is flat, with two narrow longitudinal palatal ridges, and an anterior median prominent line; the posterior aperture of the nares is oblongo-linear, margined with acute papillæ, with which also the whole membrane of the palate is covered. The tongue is slender, 7 twelfths long, emarginate and papillate at the base, channelled above, horny and thin toward the end, which is slit and lacerated. The width of the mouth is 6 twelfths. The œsophagus, *a b c*, is 3 inches long, and of the nearly uniform width of $4\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths, unless at the commencement where it is a little wider. The proventricular glands form a belt 5 twelfths of an inch in breadth. The stomach, *c d e*, is rather small, broadly elliptical, 9 twelfths long, $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths broad, considerably compressed; its muscular coat moderately developed, the right muscle being $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths thick, the left 1 twelfth; the epithelium dense, tough, reddish-brown, with seven longitudinal rugæ on one side and three on the other. The intestine, *e f g h i j k*, is of moderate length and width; the duodenum, *e f g*, curves at the distance of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and is 3 twelfths wide, as is the rest of the intestine, of which the entire length is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches; the cloaca, *k*, very little enlarged; the cœca, *i*, 2 twelfths long, and $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth broad, their distance from the extremity 8 twelfths.

The right lobe of the liver is very large, being 1 inch $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in length, and extending under the anterior part of the stomach, in the form of a thin-edged rounded lobe; the left lobe is 10 twelfths long, and lies under the proventriculus and left side of the stomach. The heart is of moderate size, $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, 5 twelfths in breadth, of a conical obtuse form.

The aperture of the glottis is $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, and furnished with the

same muscles as the other singing birds, viz. the *thyro-arytenoideus*, which passes from the edge of the thyroid cartilage at its lower part to be inserted into the tip and sides of the arytenoid cartilage; the *thyro-cricoideus*, which passes from the anterior edge of the thyroid backward to the cricoid; a small muscle, the *crico-arytenoideus*, which assists in closing the glottis; and several small slips similar to those observed in other Thrushes, and especially in the Crows, in which the parts, being larger, are more easily seen. The trachea is 1 inch 10 twelfths in length, considerably flattened, gradually tapering from $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths to 1 twelfth; the rings, which are firm, are about 60, and 2 dimidiate rings. The lateral muscles are slender, as are the sterno-tracheal. There are four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles; an anterior, going to the tip of the first half-ring, another to the tip of the second, a third broader and inserted into a portion of the last half-ring, the fourth or posterior or upper, long, narrow, and inserted into the point of the same half-ring. Besides these, as in all the land-birds, there is a pair of very slender muscles, the *cleido-tracheal*, arising from the sides of the thyroid cartilage and inserted into the furcula. The bronchi are rather wide and short, of 12 cartilaginous half rings.

As in all the birds of this family, there is a very slender salivary gland on each side, lying between the branch of the lower jaw and the mucous membrane of the mouth, upon which latter it opens anteriorly to the frenum of the tongue.

This species is abundant in the Texas, where it breeds. The eggs are generally one inch in length, and nine-twelfths and a quarter in breadth.

THE FLORIDA JESSAMINE.

GELSEMINUM NITIDUM, *Mich. Flor. Amer.*, vol. i. p. 120. *Pursch, Flor. Amer.*, vol. i. p. 184.—PENTANDRIA DIGYNIA, *Linn.* APOCINEÆ, *Juss.*

A climbing shrub, with smooth lanceolate leaves, axillary clusters of yellow flowers, which are funnel-shaped, with the limb spreading and nearly equal, the calyx five-toothed, the capsule two-celled and two-valved. It grows along the sea-coast, especially near rivers, from Virginia to Florida, flowering through the summer. The flowers are fragrant. It is also named *Carolina jessamine* and *yellow jessamine*.

Common Mocking Bird
 Males 1 & 2 Female 3,
Florida Jessamine, Celserium nudatum
 Rattlesnake

Audubon, John James. 1841. "Common Mocking-Bird, Orpheus polyglottus, Linn. [Pl. 138]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 2, 187–193. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319251>.

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