COMMON SNOW-BIRD.

NEPHÆA HYEMALIS, *Linn.*

PLATE CLXVII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This is one of our winter visitants from the north, which, along with many others, makes its appearance in Louisiana about the beginning of November, to remain a few months, and again, when spring returns, fly off, to seek in higher latitudes a place in which to nestle and rear its young. So gentle and tame does it become on the least approach of hard weather, that it forms, as it were, a companion to every child. Indeed, there is not an individual in the Union who does not know the little Snow-bird, which, in America, is cherished as the Robin is in Europe. I have seen it fed by persons from the "Old Country," and have always been pleased by such a sight. During fine weather, however, it becomes more timorous, and keeps aloof, resorting to the briar patches and the edges of the fences; but even then it is easily approached, and will suffer a person on horseback to pass within a few feet of the place where it may be searching for food on the road, or the rails of the fences on which it is perched.

Although the Snow-birds live in little families, consisting of twenty, thirty, or more individuals, they seem always inclined to keep up a certain degree of etiquette among themselves, and will not suffer one of their kind, or indeed any other bird, to come into immediate contact with them. To prevent intrusions of this kind, when a stranger comes too near, their little bills are instantly opened, their wings are extended, their eyes are seen to sparkle, and they emit a repelling sound peculiar to themselves on such occasions.

They are aware of the advantages to be derived by them from larger birds scratching the earth, and in some degree keep company with Partridges, Wild Turkeys, and even Squirrels, for the purpose of picking up such food as these animals may deem beneath their notice. This habit is more easily observed in those which frequent the farm-yards, where the domestic fowls prove regular purveyors to them. The report of a gun, or the unexpected barking of a dog, cause the little flock to rise and perch either on the fences or an adjoining tree, where, however, they remain only for a few minutes, after which they return to their avocations. They are particularly fond of

Common Snow-Bird.

1. Male. 2. Female.

grass-seeds, to procure which they often leap up from the ground, and dexterously seize the bending panicles.

It is a true hopping bird, and performs its little leaps without the least appearance of moving either feet or legs, in which circumstance it resembles the Sparrows. Another of its habits, also indicative of affinity to these birds, is its resorting at night, during cold weather, to stacks of corn or hay, in which it forms a hole that affords a snug retreat during the continuance of such weather, or its recurrence through the winter. In fine weather, however, it prefers the evergreen foliage of the holly, the cedar or low pines, among which to roost. Its flight is easy, and as spring approaches, and its passions become excited by the increased temperature, the males chase each other on wing, when their tails being fully expanded, the white and black colours displayed in them present a quite remarkable contrast.

The migration of these birds is performed by night, as they are seen in a district one day, and have disappeared the next. Early in March, the Snow-bird is scarcely to be seen in Louisiana, but may be followed, as the season advances, retreating towards the mountains of the middle districts, where many remain during the summer and breed. Although I never had the good fortune to find any of their nests, yet I have seen them rear their young in such places, and particularly in the neighbourhood of the Great Pine Forest, where many persons told me they had often seen their nests.

During the period when the huckleberries are ripe, they feed partially upon them, being found chiefly on the poorest mountain lands, in which that shrub grows most abundantly. I have seen the Snow-birds far up the Arkansas, and in the province of Maine, as well as on our Upper Lakes. I have been told of their congregating so as to form large flocks of a thousand individuals, but have never seen so many together. Their flesh is extremely delicate and juicy, and on this account small strings of them are frequently seen in the New Orleans market, during the short period of their sojourn in that district. Towards the spring, the males have a tolerably agreeable song.

The twig on which you see them is one of the *tupelo*, a tree of great magnitude, growing in the low grounds of the State of Louisiana, and on one of which I happened to shoot the pair represented in the plate.

The principal breeding places of this species are in the range of the Alleghany Mountains, and their spurs, commencing in the State of Virginia, and continuing eastward. It is merely a summer resident in the Fur Countries, where it is not common, and where it was not met with by Dr. RICHARDSON beyond the 57th parallel. I did not find it in Labrador, nor does it occur on the Rocky Mountains, where it seems to be represented by *Fringilla oregona*. My friend Dr. BACHMAN has seen it in the breeding season (June) in the mountainous districts of Virginia, in considerable

numbers. At this season it has a sweet note. In July the young were full grown, and kept among the huckleberry bushes. It arrives in South Carolina in November, and departs in March. When kept in aviaries in that State, it appears to suffer much from heat, bathing frequently to cool itself, but it never breeds, and is always silent.

My friend Dr. T. M. BREWER of Boston, has sent me the following account of the nest and eggs, as found among the mountains in Oswego county, in the State of New York, by Mr. EDWARD APPLETON:—"The nests were all situated on the ground, some of them having concealed entrances in the same manner as is frequently practised by the Song Sparrow, and their complement of eggs was four. The external diameter of the nest given me was four and a half inches, its internal two and a half, the internal depth an inch and a half, the external about two. It is composed of stripes of bark, straw roots, and horse-hair, lined with fine moss and the soft hair of small quadrupeds. In size and appearance it is not unlike the nest of the common *Fringilla melodia*. The eggs measure six-eighths of an inch in length, five-eighths in breadth, and are more nearly spherical than any of the eggs of this genus with which I am acquainted. Their ground-colour is yellowish-white, thickly covered with small dots of a reddish-brown colour; in the broadest part of the egg the spots are more numerous and confluent, forming a crown or belt, but at the end they are more sparse.

Distributed, in winter, over the Southern, Western, and Middle Districts, as far as the base of the Rocky Mountains, and in the Fur Countries. Breeds from Maryland eastward, on the mountains. Very abundant.

SNOW-BIRD, *Fringilla nivalis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. ii. p. 129.

FRINGILLA HYEMALIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 109.

FRINGILLA HYEMALIS, *Black Finch*, Swains. & Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 259.

COMMON SNOW-BIRD, *Fringilla Hudsonia*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 491.

SNOW-BIRD, *Fringilla hyemalis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 72; vol. v. p. 505.

Adult Male.

Bill short, rather small, conical, very acute; upper mandible a little broader than the lower, very slightly declinate at the tip, rounded on the sides, as is the lower, which has the edges inflected and acute; the gap-line straight, not extending to beneath the eye. Nostrils basal, roundish, concealed by the feathers. Head rather large. Neck short. Body full. Legs of moderate length, slender; tarsus longer than the middle toe, covered anteriorly with a few longish scutella; toes scutellate above, free, the lateral ones nearly equal; claws very slender, greatly compressed, acute and slightly arched, that of the hind toe little larger.

Plumage soft and blended. Wings shortish, curved, rounded, the third

and fourth quills longest, the second nearly as long, the first little shorter. Tail long, forked, the lateral feathers curved outwards a little towards the tip.

Bill white, tinged with red, dark coloured at the tip. Iris blackish-brown. Feet and claws flesh-coloured. Head, neck, fore part of the breast, back, wings and upper part of the sides blackish-grey, deeper on the head. Quills margined with whitish; tail of the same dark colour as the wings, excepting the two outer feathers on each side, which are white, as are the lower breast and abdomen.

Length $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches, extent of wings 9; beak $\frac{1}{3}$ along the ridge, $\frac{1}{2}$ along the gap; tarsus $\frac{3}{4}$, middle toe $\frac{1}{2}$.

Adult Female.

The female differs from the male in being of a lighter grey, tinged on the back with brown. Length $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

OREGON SNOW-BIRD.

†*NIPHÆA OREGONA*, *Towns.*

PLATE CLXVIII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This species, which is so nearly allied to our Common Snow-bird, is another of those recently added to our Fauna by Mr. TOWNSEND, from whom I purchased several specimens. All that I know of its habits is derived from the following notice given me by Mr. NUTTALL. "It was first seen by us in the woods of the Columbia, in the autumn and winter, flitting about in small flocks, always in the forest, never in the open fields, or on the way-sides. At this time they rarely utter an occasional chirp, or remain wholly silent. We afterwards saw them inhabiting the same woods throughout the summer, in diminished numbers, or in pairs, but I do not recollect hearing them utter any song, though they are probably not silent in the season of breeding. With the nest, eggs, and young I am not acquainted."

I have represented the male and female from specimens procured by Mr. TOWNSEND on the Columbia river, on the 5th of October, 1834.

Columbia river. Common. Migratory.

Common Snow-Bird.

Audubon, John James. 1841. "Common Snow-Bird, *Nephaea hyemalis*, Linn. [Pl. 167]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 3, 88–91. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319280>.

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