

GENUS IV.—SPIZA, *Bonap.* PAINTED-BUNTING.

Bill short, moderately stout, conical, acute; upper mandible rather narrower, with the dorsal line somewhat convex, the ridge narrow, the sides sloping and a little convex, the edges inclining upwards for a third of their length, then direct, with a slight notch close to the narrow declinate tip; lower mandible with the angle short and rounded, the dorsal line very slightly convex, the sides rounded, the edges involute, the tip acute. Nostrils basal, roundish, partly concealed by the feathers. Head broadly ovate; neck short; body rather full. Feet of moderate length; tarsus much compressed, with seven scutella; toes of moderate size, hind toe large, lateral equal. Claws slender, compressed, well arched, acute. Plumage full, soft, and blended. Wings of moderate length, the second and third quills longest, the first about equal to the fourth. Tail of moderate length, emarginate. Palate anteriorly with their narrow ridges, forming a large oblong hard knob at their base; tongue higher than broad, deeply grooved above, pointed; œsophagus dilated into a crop; stomach elliptical, muscular; intestine of moderate length; cœca very small.

 PAINTED BUNTING.
SPIZA CIRIS, *Wils.*

PLATE CLXIX.—MALE in different states of Plumage, AND FEMALE.

About the middle of April, the orange groves of the lower parts of Louisiana, and more especially those in the immediate vicinity of the City of New Orleans, are abundantly supplied with this beautiful little Finch. But no sooner does it make its appearance than trap-cages are set, and a regular business is commenced in the market of that city. The method

employed in securing the male Painted Finch is so connected with its pugnacious habits, that I feel inclined to describe it, especially as it is so different from the common way of alluring birds, that it may afford you, kind reader, some amusement.

A male bird in full plumage is shot and stuffed in a defensive attitude, and perched among some grass-seed, rice, or other food, on the same platform as the trap-cage. This is taken to the fields or near the orangeries, and placed in so open a situation, that it would be difficult for a living bird of any species to fly over it, without observing it. The trap is set. A male Painted Finch passes, perceives it, and dives towards the stuffed bird, with all the anger which its little breast can contain. It alights on the edge of the trap for a moment, and throwing its body against the stuffed bird, brings down the trap, and is made prisoner. In this manner, thousands of these birds are caught every spring. So pertinacious are they in their attacks, that even when the trap has closed upon them, they continue pecking at the feathers of the supposed rival. The approach of man seems to allay its anger in a moment. The live bird is removed to the lower apartment of the cage, and is thereby made to assist in decoying others.

They feed almost immediately after being caught; and if able to support the loss of liberty for a few days, may be kept for several years. I have known some instances of their being kept in confinement for upwards of ten years. Few vessels leave the port of New Orleans during the summer months, without taking some Painted Finches, and through this means they are transported probably to all parts of Europe. I have seen them offered for sale in London and Paris, with the trifling difference of value on each individual, which converted the sixpence paid for it at New Orleans to three guineas in London.

The pugnacious habits of this species are common in a great degree to the whole family of Sparrows. Like the most daring, the Common House Sparrow of Europe, they may be observed in spring time, in little groups of four, five or six, fighting together, moving round each other to secure an advantageous position, pecking and pulling at each other's feathers with all the violence and animosity to which their small degree of strength can give effect.

A group thus occupied I have attempted to represent in the plate. I have at the same time endeavoured to save you the trouble of reading a long description of the changes which take place in their plumage, from the time at which the young leave the nest, until the second year following, when the males attain the full beauty of their brilliant livery.

The flight of the *Pape*, by which name the Creoles of Louisiana know this bird best, is short, although regular, and performed by a nearly constant



Painted Bunting

1. 2. 3. Males in different States of Plumage 4 Female.

Chicasaw Wild Plum.

motion of the wings, which is rendered necessary by their concave form. It hops on the ground, moving forward with ease, now and then jetting out the tail a little, and, like a true Sparrow, picking up and carrying off on wing a grain of rice or a crum of bread to some distance, where it may eat in more security. It has a sprightly song, often repeated, which it continues even when closely confined. When the bird is at liberty, this song is uttered from the top branches of an orange-tree, or those of a common briar, and although not so sonorous as that of the Canary, or of its nearer relative, the Indigo Bunting, is not far from equalling either. Its song is continued during the greatest heats of the day, which is also the case with that of the Indigo-bird.

The nest of this pretty bird is generally placed in a low situation, in an orange-tree, frequently within a few paces of the house, or far from it on the edge of the fences, where briars are convenient. It raises two broods each season. The eggs are four or five, of a beautiful pearly, rather bluish colour, speckled with blackish, and are deposited in a simply constructed nest, lined with fine fibrous roots or horse-hair, and externally formed of fine grass. They readily breed in confinement, if their prison is rendered tolerably comfortable. The young are fed at first in the manner of Canaries, but at the end of ten or twelve days are taught to swallow grains of rice, insects or berries. No sooner are figs or grapes ripe than these birds attack them, feeding for some time almost entirely upon them. Towards evening they also pursue insects on wing.

Some persons give the name of *Nonpareil* to this species, but it is more commonly known by the name of *Pape*, which, in fact, is a general appellation given by the inhabitants of Louisiana to all the smaller species of thick-billed birds.

The Painted Finches do not proceed far eastward, nor, indeed, up the Mississippi, being seldom seen above the city of Natchez, on that river, or farther to the east than the Carolinas. It retires southward in the beginning of October.

My friend Dr. BACHMAN has favoured me with the following very interesting notice regarding its change of plumage, which is greatly at variance with WILSON and other writers. "I have kept these birds for many years in aviaries. The males and females of a year old were of a uniform colour, but I have invariably found them to assume their perfect plumage in the second year. This bird could be easily domesticated and multiplied in Europe, in the manner of the Canary. I have had them to raise three broods of young in the year in confinement. The plumage, however, in this state, was never so brilliant as when wild."

The *Chickasaw wild plum*, on a twig of which I have represented a

group of these birds, is found growing abundantly in the country where the birds occur. It is a small shrub, the fruit of which is yellow when ripe, and excellent eating.

From Texas to North Carolina, and up the Mississippi to Natchez. Abundant. Migratory.

PAINTED BUNTING, *Emberiza Ciris*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iii. p. 68.

FRINGILLA CIRIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 107.

PAINTED BUNTING, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 477.

PAINTED FINCH, *Fringilla Ciris*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 279; vol. v. p. 517.

Adult Male, in full plumage.

Bill short, robust, conical, somewhat bulging, straight, acute; upper mandible broader, slightly declinate at the tip; gap-line a little declinate at the base. Nostrils basal, roundish, partly concealed by the frontal feathers. Head and neck rather large. Body full. Feet of moderate length; tarsus a little longer than the middle toe; toes free, the lateral ones nearly equal; claws compressed, arched, acute.

Plumage blended, tufty, somewhat compact on the head and back. Wings of ordinary length, the third quill longest. Tail shortish, even, of twelve rounded feathers.

INDIGO BUNTING.

+ *SPIZA CYANEA*, Wils.

PLATE CLXX.—MALE, FEMALE, AND YOUNG.

The species here presented for inspection is best known to the Creoles of Louisiana by the name of *Petit Papebleu*. This is in accordance with the general practice of the first settlers of that State, who named all the Finches, Buntings, and Orioles, *Papes*; and all the Warblers and Fly-catchers, *Grassets*. They made an exception, however, in favour of the Rice-bird, which they honoured with the name of *Ortolan*, an appellation given in the Island of St. Domingo to the Ground Dove, which, however, is seldom seen near New Orleans.



Painted Bunting

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Audubon, John James. 1841. "Painted Bunting, Spiza ciris, Wils. [Pl. 169]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 3, 93–96. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319282>.

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