

THE FOX-COLOURED FINCH.

†FRINGILLA ILIACA, *Merrem.*

PLATE CLXXXVI.—MALE AND FEMALE.

Although the Fox-coloured Sparrow visits us regularly at the approach of winter, it merely remains during the few months of the year which are too severe in the more northern parts of our continent, where it resides at all other periods. It wanders, however, as far southward as the lower parts of Louisiana, is also met with in Kentucky, and in the countries bordering on the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi, and visits the Floridas, Georgia, the Carolinas, and in short every State south of Massachusetts. In the latter State, and in that of Maine, few individuals are seen after its passage through these districts, late in October.

In the northern parts of America, where it breeds, it replaces the Towhee Bunting, so abundant in our middle States, where it delights us with its song. To that species the Fox-coloured Sparrow comes next in size, while it greatly surpasses it in its musical powers.

While in the United States, it lives retired, and separates itself from most other species. Little flocks, consisting of a family or two, take possession of some low well-covered thicket, by the side of some clear streamlet, where they spend the winter unmolested, searching for food among the fallen and withered leaves, or among the roots and dead branches of trees. Should a warm morning dawn on their retreat, the male birds directly ascend to the middle branches of the brambles, and in a soft under tone cheer the females with their melodies. At all other times they remain comparatively silent, merely emitting a note to call each other, or to assure their little family that all is safe around them. Towards spring a kind of bustle takes place in their camp: the males, already warmed with affection and love, renew their attentions to their mates; new connections are formed by the young; their song becomes much improved; and the passer by may here and there see a pair moving slowly and cautiously towards the land whence they had emigrated some months before.

Follow these birds wherever you will, you invariably find them not in deep woods, but along the fences, and amid patches of briars and tangled underwood, which at all times seem so pleasing to them. They traverse the

whole of the Union by day, resting here and there awhile, to watch the gradual improvement of the season.

They enter the British Provinces full of joy, and lavish of song. Many are well pleased to remain there, but the greater number pursue their course to revisit the Magdeleine Islands, Newfoundland, and the country of Labrador. There you find them in every pleasant dell, where no sooner have they arrived than each searches for a safe retreat in which to place its nest. This is in due time replenished with eggs; and, while the female sits on them with care and anxiety, her devoted lover chants the blessings they both enjoy.

The flight of this bird is low, rapid, and undulating. While passing over the Gulf of St. Lawrence, it flies swiftly, at a moderate height, without uttering any note. They appear to be able to travel to a considerable distance, without the necessity of alighting, and I have thought that they may accomplish the passage of the Gulf without resting on any of its islands. As soon as they alight, they betake themselves to the deepest thickets.

During the breeding season, their plumage has a richness which it does not exhibit in the winter months, while with us. Indeed some of the males at that time are so highly coloured as to be of a bright red rather than of a brown tint; and their appearance, as they pass from one bush to another, or skip from stone to stone, is extremely pleasing. I have attempted to represent this colouring in the Plate.

Would that I could describe the sweet song of this Finch; that I could convey to your mind the effect it produced on my feelings, when wandering on the desolate shores of Labrador!—that I could intelligibly tell you of the clear, full notes of its unaffected warble, as it sat perched on the branch of some stunted fir. There for hours together was continued the delightful serenade, which kept me lingering about the spot. The brilliancy and clearness of each note, as it flowed through the air, were so enchanting, the expression and emphasis of the song so powerful, that I never tired of listening. But, reader, I can furnish no description of the melody.

While in South Carolina, in January 1834, after I had returned from the country where this species breeds, I happened, one fair day, to meet with a groupe of these birds. They were singing in concert. Never shall I forget the impression which their notes made on me: I suddenly stopped and looked around; for a moment I imagined that I had been by magic transported to the wilds of Labrador; but how short was the duration of these feelings!—a Hawk sailed over the spot of their concealment, and in an instant all was silent as the tomb.

The nest of the Fox-coloured Sparrow, which is large for the size of the bird, is usually placed on the ground, among moss or tall grass, near the stem



Fox-coloured Finch

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.R.S., F.L.S.

1. Male. 2. Female.

Lith^d Printed & Col^d by J. T. Bowen, Philad^a

of a creeping fir, the branches of which completely conceal it from view. Its exterior is loosely formed of dry grass and moss, with a carefully disposed inner layer of finer grasses, circularly arranged; and the lining consists of very delicate fibrous roots, together with some feathers from different species of water-fowl. In one instance I found it composed of the down of the Eider-duck. The period at which the eggs are laid, is from the middle of June to the 5th of July. They are proportionally large, four or five in number, rather sharp at the smaller end, of a dull greenish tint, sprinkled with irregular small blotches of brown. I think that the description given in the splendid work of my friends SWAINSON and RICHARDSON, of the eggs of this species, must have been taken from those of the White-crowned Bunting, as it agrees precisely with eggs which I have found in many nests of that bird.

When one approaches the nest, the female affects lameness, and employs all the usual arts to decoy him from it. They raise only one brood in the season. The young, before they depart for the United States, already resemble their parents, which have by this time lost much of the brilliancy of their colouring. They leave Labrador about the 1st of September, in small groups, formed each of a single family. When in that country, and in Newfoundland, I frequently observed them searching along the shores for minute shell-fish, on which they feed abundantly.

Many of these birds are frequently offered for sale in the markets of Charleston, they being easily caught in "figure-of-four traps!" Their price is usually ten or twelve cents each. I saw many in the aviaries of my friends Dr. SAMUEL WILSON and the Reverend JOHN BACHMAN, of that city. To the former I am indebted for the following particulars relative to this species, part of which I was myself witness to.

Dr. WILSON, who was almost in the daily habit of visiting my friend BACHMAN, with whom it was my good fortune to reside while at Charleston, was fond of talking about birds, many of which he knew more accurately than ordinary ornithologists are wont to do. "My dear Mr. AUDUBON," he said, "I have several beautiful Fox-coloured Sparrows in my aviary, but of late some of them have been killed, and I wish you would tell me by what other birds the murders can have been committed." I laid the charge first on the Blue Jays; but he replied that even they appeared as if greatly molested by some other species. A day elapsed, the Doctor returned, and astonished me not a little by informing me that the culprit was a Mocking-bird. I went to his house on the 8th of December; and, while standing on the piazza, we both saw the Mocking-bird alight on one of the Fox-coloured Sparrows, in the manner of a small Hawk, and peck at the poor bird with such force as to convince us that its death must soon ensue. The muscular

powers of the Finch, however, appeared almost too much for the master songster of our woods; it desisted for a moment, out of breath, and we could observe its pantings; but it did not fail to resume its hitherto unknown character of tyrant. A servant was despatched to the rescue, and peace was restored; but the Finch was almost reduced to its last gasp, and shortly after expired. This very Mocking-bird we strongly suspected of being the individual that had killed a Blue Jay of exceedingly meek disposition, a few weeks before. It was ultimately removed into a lonely cage, where it is yet passing its days, perhaps in unavailing penitence.

The Fox-coloured Finch is found abundantly on the Columbia river. It breeds in the woody districts of the Fur Countries, up to the 68th parallel. About Boston it is abundant during summer, generally skulking in the bushes and avoiding observation. It passes through Massachusetts on its way south in the first week in November, and returns about the 10th of April. It is very easily approached, and its note is extremely beautiful.

In this species the palate is moderately ascending, deeply concave, with two prominent lines, at the meeting of which anteriorly is a small soft projection. The upper mandible is moderately concave, with a prominent middle line and two lateral ridges. The width of the mouth is $5\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. The tongue is 4 twelfths long, compressed, channelled above, horny, rather obtuse, somewhat spoon-shaped at the point, as in the Pine Finch. Œsophagus $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, its greatest width $4\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths, being slightly dilated towards the lower part of the neck. The stomach is roundish, 7 twelfths long, 6 twelfths broad; its lateral muscles rather strong, the epithelium tough, longitudinally rugous. Intestine $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, from 3 twelfths to 2 twelfths in width: cæca $3\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths long, $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth in width, 1 inch distant from the extremity. Trachea 1 inch 8 twelfths long, 1 twelfth in breadth; the rings 72, and 2 dimidiate, firm; bronchial rings about 15; the muscles as usual.

Male, $7\frac{1}{2}$, $10\frac{1}{2}$. Female, $7\frac{1}{2}$.

Dispersed in winter throughout the Southern and Western Districts. Breeds from Nova Scotia to Labrador and the Fur Countries. Rather common.

FOX-COLOURED SPARROW, *Fringilla rufa*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iii. p. 53.

FRINGILLA ILIACA, Bonap. Syn., p. 112.

FRINGILLA (ZONOTRICHIA) ILIACA, Swains. & Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 257.

FERRUGINOUS FINCH, *Fringilla iliaca*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 514.

FOX-COLOURED SPARROW, *Fringilla iliaca*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 58; vol. v. p. 512.

Adult Male in summer.

Bill short, robust, conical, acute; upper mandible broader than the lower, almost straight in its dorsal outline, as is the lower, both being rounded on

the sides, and the lower with inflected acute edges; the gap-line nearly straight, a little deflected at the base, and not extending to beneath the eye. Nostrils basal, roundish, open, partially concealed by the feathers. Head rather large, neck shortish; body robust. Legs of moderate length, rather strong; tarsus shorter than the middle toe; covered anteriorly with a few longish scutella; toes scutellate above, free, the lateral ones nearly equal; claws slender, arched, compressed, acute, that of the hind toe rather large.

Plumage compact above, soft and blended beneath; wings short, curved, rounded, the second, third and fourth quills longest, and nearly equal; the first and fifth equal; tail longish, even, or slightly rounded.

TOWNSEND'S FINCH.

★FRINGILLA TOWNSENDI.

PLATE CLXXXVII.—FEMALE.

This species was discovered on the shores of the Columbia river, by Mr. TOWNSEND, who sent me a perfect specimen, ticketed "Female, February 15th, 1836," together with the following notice. "I found this species numerous on the plains of the Colorado of the west, in the Rocky Mountains. It is a very active and rather shy bird, keeping constantly in the low bushes of wormwood, and on the ground, in the vicinity. It appears to be partially gregarious, six or eight being mostly seen together. Its voice is a sharp quick chirp, and occasionally a low weak warble." It bears a considerable resemblance to *Fringilla iliaca* of our Eastern Districts, but is darker, and wants the light-coloured bands with which the wings of that species are marked. Other differences will be found on comparing the description with that of the bird above mentioned, to which, however, it is so nearly allied that it evidently belongs to the same subordinate group.

Female, 7, 10½.

Colorado of the West. Rocky Mountains.

TOWNSEND'S FINCH, *Fringilla Townsendi*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. v. p. 236.

Female.

Bill short, rather robust, conical, acute; upper mandible rather broader



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