THE WHITE-CROWNED FINCH.

†FRINGILLA LEUCOPHRYS, *Gmel.*

PLATE CXCII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

It is to the wild regions of Labrador that you must go, kind reader, if you wish to form a personal acquaintance with the White-crowned Sparrow. There in every secluded glen opening upon the boisterous Gulf of St. Lawrence, while amazed you glance over the wilderness that extends around you, so dreary and desolate that the blood almost congeals in your veins, you meet with this interesting bird. Your body is sinking under the fatigue occasioned by your wading through beds of moss, as extraordinary for their depth, as for the brilliancy of their tints, and by the difficulties which you have encountered in forcing your way through the tangled creeping pines, so dwarfish and so stubborn, that you often find it easier to trample down their branches than to separate them so as to allow you a passage. In such a place, when you are far away from all that is dear to you, how cheering is it to hear the mellow notes of a bird, that seems as if it had been sent expressly for the purpose of relieving your mind from the heavy melancholy that bears it down! The sounds are so sweet, so refreshing, so soothing, so hope inspiring, that as they come upon the soul in all their gentleness and joy, the tears begin to flow from your eyes, the burden on your mind becomes lighter, your heart expands, and you experience a pure delight, produced by the invitation thus made to offer your humblest and most sincere thanks to that all-wondrous Being, who has caused you to be there no doubt for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with the operations of his mighty power.

Thus it was with me, when, some time after I had been landed on the dreary coast of Labrador, I for the first time heard the song of the White-crowned Sparrow. I could not refrain from indulging in the thought that, notwithstanding the many difficulties attending my attempts—my mission I must call it—to study God's works in this wild region, I was highly favoured. At every step, new objects presented themselves, and whenever I rested, I enjoyed a delight never before experienced. Humbly and fervently did I pray for a continuation of those blessings, through which I now hoped to see my undertaking completed, and again to join my ever-dear family.

I first became acquainted with the White-crowned Sparrow at Henderson,

in the autumn of 1817. I then thought it the handsomest bird of its kind, and my opinion still is that none other known to me as a visiter or inhabitant of the United States, exceeds it in beauty. I procured five individuals, three of which were in full plumage and proved to be males. The sex of the other two could not be ascertained; but I have since become convinced that these birds lose the white stripes on the head in the winter season, when they might be supposed to be of a different species. During spring and summer the male and the female are of equal beauty, the former being only a little larger than the latter. The young which I procured in Labrador, shewed the white stripes on the head as they were fully fledged, and I think they retain those marks in autumn longer than the old birds, of which the feathers have become much worn at that season. In the winter of 1833, I procured at Charleston in South Carolina, one in its brown livery.

One day, while near American Harbour, in Labrador, I observed a pair of these birds frequently resorting to a small hammock of firs, where I concluded they must have had a nest. After searching in vain, I intimated my suspicion to my young friends, when we all crept through the tangled branches, and examined the place, but without success. Determined, however, to obtain our object, we returned with hatchets, cut down every tree to its roots, removed each from the spot, pulled up all the mosses between them, and completely cleared the place; yet no nest did we find. Our disappointment was the greater that we saw the male bird frequently flying about with food in its bill, no doubt intended for its mate. In a short while, the pair came near us, and both were shot. In the female we found an egg, which was pure white, but with the shell yet soft and thin. On the 6th of July, while my son was creeping among some low bushes, to get a shot at some Red-throated Divers, he accidentally started a female from her nest. It made much complaint. The nest was placed in the moss, near the foot of a low fir, and was formed externally of beautiful dry green moss, matted in bunches like the coarse hair of some quadruped, internally of very fine dry grass, arranged with great neatness, to the thickness of nearly half an inch, with a full lining of delicate fibrous roots of a rich transparent yellow. It was 5 inches in diameter externally, 2 in depth, $2\frac{1}{4}$ in diameter within, although rather oblong, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ deep. In one nest we found a single feather of the Willow Grouse. The eggs, five in number, average $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch in length, are proportionally broad, of a light sea-green colour, mottled toward the larger end with brownish spots and blotches, a few spots of a lighter tint being dispersed over the whole. This description differs greatly from that of the nest and eggs of this species given by others, who, I apprehend, have mistaken for them those of the Fox-tailed Sparrow, or the *Anthus Spinoletta*. We found many nests, which were all placed on the ground, or among the

moss, and were all constructed alike. They deposit their eggs from the beginning to the end of June. In the beginning of August, I saw many young that were able to fly, and by the 12th of that month the birds had already commenced their southward migration. The young follow their parents until nearly full grown.

The food of this species, while in Labrador, consists of small coleopterous insects, grass-seeds, and a variety of berries, as well as some minute shell-fish, for which they frequently search the margins of ponds or the sea-shore. At the approach of autumn, they pursue insects on the wing, to a short distance, and doubtless secure some in that manner.

The song of the White-crowned Finch consists of six or seven notes, the first of which is loud, clear, and musical, although of a plaintive nature; the next broader, less firm, and seeming merely a second to the first; the rest form a cadence diminishing in power to the last note, which sounds as if the final effort of the musician. These notes are repeated at short intervals during the whole day, even on those dismal days produced by the thick fogs of the country where it breeds, and where this species is of all the most abundant. The White-throated Finch was also very plentiful, and we found it breeding in the same localities.

The flight of this interesting bird is usually low, swift, and greatly protracted. It is performed without any jerk of the tail. They migrate mostly by day—I say *mostly*, because while crossing a great arm of the sea, like the Gulf of St. Lawrence, they perhaps may not always be able to accomplish their transit in one day.

I have met with this bird in almost every portion of the United States during early spring and autumn, but always either single or in very small groups. I have shot some near New Orleans in April, at Cincinnati, and near New York in May. They reach the Magdeleine Islands, Newfoundland, and the coast of Labrador, about the first of June. Those which I have seen on their passage through the United States were perfectly silent, and usually frequented low bushes and grape-vines, the fruit of which they eagerly eat, but never entering the woods. In every instance I found them as gentle and unsuspicious as whilst at Labrador.

In the plate are to be seen two of these birds, drawn many years ago, one of them a male in full summer plumage, the other a female in the winter dress. I have no doubt that this species retires far south in Mexico, to spend the winter. It is nearly allied to the White-throated and Fox-tailed Sparrows, and in its winter plumage it may perhaps prove to be the *Fringilla ambigua* of my friend NUTTALL.

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

Breeds from Newfoundland and Labrador northward. Abundant. Migratory. Passes southward in autumn beyond the Texas.

WHITE-CROWNED BUNTING, *Emberiza leucophrys*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iv. p. 49.

FRINGILLA LEUCOPHRYS, Bonap. Syn. p. 479.

FRINGILLA (ZONOTRICHIA) LEUCOPHRYS, *White-crowned Finch*, Swains. and Rich., F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 255.

WHITE-CROWNED BUNTING, or FINCH, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 479.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, *Fringilla leucophrys*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 88; vol. v. p. 515.

Adult Male.

Bill very short, robust, conical, acute; upper mandible scarcely broader than the lower, both almost straight in their outline, rounded on the sides, with the edges inflected and sharp; the gap-line very slightly deflected at the base, and not extending to beneath the eye. Nostrils basal, roundish, partially concealed by the feathers. Head rather large, neck short, body full. Legs of moderate length, rather strong; tarsus longer 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 soft and rather blended above, loose beneath. Wings short and curved, rounded, the third quill longest, the second and fourth almost as long. Tail rather long, nearly even, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill reddish-orange, tipped with brown. Iris reddish-brown. Feet pale brown. The head is marked with three stripes of white, and four of deep black. Back and wing-coverts dark reddish-brown, with pale grey margins, the posterior part of the back and upper tail-coverts lighter brown. Quills and tail dark brown, margined with pale; the tip of the smaller coverts white, as are those of some of the primary coverts, which, with the secondary quills, have chestnut-brown edges. Throat and belly white; sides of the neck and the breast dull purplish-grey; the flanks and under tail-coverts pale brownish-grey.

Length $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; extent of wings $10\frac{1}{2}$; bill along the ridge $\frac{4\frac{1}{2}}{12}$, along the edge $\frac{7}{12}$; tarsus $\frac{10}{12}$.

Adult Female.

In its summer dress, the female resembles the male at that season; but in winter the white lines on the head are less pure, the dark lines are reddish-brown, but the tints of the other parts are nearly similar, these circumstances being the same in the male.

Length $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

The lower mandible is broader than the upper, and deeply concave; the

palate ascending, with two longitudinal ridges, forming a soft protuberance at their junction anteriorly; the upper mandible beneath with three ridges and four grooves. Tongue 4 twelfths long, deeper than broad, with a median groove above, and tapering to an acute point. Œsophagus, *a b c*, 2 inches 3 twelfths in length, its greatest width when dilated 5 twelfths. Proventriculus, *b c*, 3 twelfths in breadth. Stomach, *d e*, placed obliquely, 6 twelfths long, $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths broad, its lateral muscles large and distinct, the lower muscle also prominent, but thin, the epithelium as usual, with strong longitudinal rugæ. Intestine, *e f g h i j*, 8 inches long, from 2 twelfths to $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in breadth; cœca, *i*, $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, and $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth in breadth, 9 twelfths distant from the extremity, *j*. Trachea 1 inch 8 twelfths long, the rings 70 with 2 dimidiate, pretty firm and a little flattened. Bronchial half rings about 12. Muscles as usual, the inferior laryngeal moderately large.

THE SUMMER GRAPE.

VITIS ÆSTIVALIS, var. *SINUATA*, *Pursch*, *Flor. Amer. Sept.*, vol. i. p. 169.

This variety has large cordate leaves, which are less deeply lobed, and with large marginal teeth. It occurs in all the barren lands of the Western Country, particularly in those of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Illinois. Although it seldom attains much strength of stem, it spreads broadly on the bushes, and forms beautiful festoons. The grapes are juicy and agreeable to the taste. They are fully ripe by the middle of August, and remain hanging until destroyed by the frost. When wild pigeons happen to be abundant where it grows, they speedily devour the fruit.

White-crowned Finch.

1. Male. 2. Female.

Wild Summer Grape

Audubon, John James. 1841. "The White-Crowned Finch, *Fringilla leucophrys*, Gmel. [Pl. 192]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 3, 157–161. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319305>.

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