

## THE SUMMER RED-BIRD.

†PYRANGA ÆSTIVA, *Gmel.*

PLATE CCVIII.—ADULT MALE, YOUNG MALE, AND FEMALE.

This beautiful species is of solitary habits, preferring at all times the interior of the forests, but not the densest parts of them. I have observed that woods interspersed with what are called *scrubby* hickories or stunted oaks, are favourite resorts of the Summer Red-birds.

Their residence in the United States scarcely exceeds four months. None remain in any of the more southern parts of our districts. Indeed, by the middle of September, it would be difficult to see a single pair in the forests of Louisiana. So very tender do they seem to be in regard to cold, or even temperate weather, that they seldom go farther north than Boston, or the shores of Lake Erie, but prefer the sandy woodlands all along the eastern shores, as far as Massachusetts.

Their flight is performed in a gliding manner when passing through the woods, generally amidst the top branches of trees. Whilst migrating, they rise high above the trees, and pursue their journeys only during the day, diving towards dusk into the thickest parts of the foliage of tall trees, from which their usual unmusical but well-known notes of *chicky-chucky-chuck* are heard, after the light of day has disappeared. This species feeds principally on insects, and especially coleoptera, some of which are often of larger size than a bird of the dimensions of the Summer Red-bird might be supposed capable of swallowing. It seldom alights on the ground, but prefers pursuing insects on the wing, which it frequently does from the dried twigs at the extremity of the branches.

The construction of the nest of this richly clad species is nearly the same in all parts of the Union in which it breeds. It is frequently fixed on a branch crossing a road, or an opening of some description, or, if in the woods, in some partially cleared space. It is usually placed low on a horizontal branch. It is composed externally of dried stalks of weeds, and is finished within with fine grass, arranged in a slovenly manner. It is so insecurely fastened to the branch, that it may be shaken off by striking the latter smartly. The female lays four or five eggs of a light blue colour. The male and female sit upon them alternately for twelve days, and are as anxious about their safety as most species. The young are seen about the





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1. Male. 2. Female. 3. Young Male.

*Wild Muscadine. Vitis rotundifolia Mich.*







beginning of June, and follow their parents until the time of the migration of the latter, which takes place a fortnight earlier than that of the young birds. They raise only one brood in a season.

The alterations of plumage which appear in the young birds between the period at which they leave the nest, and the ensuing spring, are as great as those of the Orchard Oriole. They are at first nearly of the colour of the female. The males become a little mottled with dull reddish-orange, towards the time of their departure for the south, the females only deepening their tints.

I have several times attempted to raise the young from the nest, but in vain. Insects, fruits, and eggs, mixed with boiled meat of various kinds, always failed, and the birds generally died in a very few days, uttering a dull note, as if elicited by great suffering. The same note is emitted by the young in their state of freedom, when, perched on a branch, they await the appearance of their parents with their proper food.

I found this species in the Texas about the middle of April, when it was arriving from the south. At this period many of the males were in full plumage, while almost as many were imperfect; but I observed that before we left Galveston, about the middle of May, scarcely one was met with in the latter state; and, although a considerable number reach even our middle Atlantic districts, in a mottled and incomplete livery, it is the opinion of my friend Dr. BACHMAN, as well as my own, that the males obtain all the beauty of their colours when about twelve months old. This opinion is founded on the fact, that mottled birds of this species are comparatively but rarely found in the act of breeding. I now feel almost quite certain that too great an extent of time has hitherto been supposed necessary for this bird to acquire its perfect plumage; and this is equally the case with several other species. My friends Mr. HARRIS and Dr. TRUDEAU have procured female Summer Red-birds almost as red as the males. They were obtained while breeding, and I am informed by these gentlemen that such cases are not rare. This bird sings pleasantly during the spring, for nearly half an hour in succession, and, although its notes have some resemblance to those of the Red-eyed Vireo, they are sweeter and more varied, surpassing, indeed, those of the Baltimore-bird, and nearly equalling those of the Orchard Oriole.

I have represented an adult male, his mate, and a young bird in its singularly patched state, to enable you to judge how different a family of these birds must appear to the eye of a person unacquainted with the peculiarity of their differences and changes of plumage.

The *vine* on which you see them is usually called the *Muscadine*. It grows everywhere in Louisiana, and the State of Mississippi, and that most luxuriantly. In those States you may see vines of this species fifteen inches



in diameter near the roots, either entwined round the trunk of a large tree, and by this means reaching the top branches and extending over them and those of another tree, or, as if by magic, swinging in the air, from roots attached at once to some of the uppermost branches. In favourable seasons, they are laden with grapes, which hang in small clusters from every branch, from which, when they are fully ripe, a good shake will make them fall in astonishing quantity. The skin is thick and very tough, the pulp glutinous, but so peculiarly flavoured as to be very agreeable to the taste. These grapes are eaten by most people, although an idea prevails, in Lower Louisiana particularly, that the eating of them gives rise to bilious fevers. For my part, I can well say, that the more I have eaten of them the better I have found myself; and for this reason seldom lost an opportunity of refreshing my palate with some of them in my rambles. I am equally confident, that their juice would make an excellent wine. Another absurd opinion prevails in Louisiana, which is, that the *common blackberries*, however ripe and pleasant, produce biles; although the country people make use of a strong decoction of the root as a cure for dysentery.

Male,  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , 11.

From Texas to Massachusetts. In the interior to Canada. Abundant. Migratory.

SUMMER RED-BIRD, *Tanagra æstiva*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 95.

TANAGRA ÆSTIVA, Bonap. Syn., p. 105.

SUMMER RED-BIRD, *Tanagra æstiva*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 469.

SUMMER RED-BIRD, *Tanagra æstiva*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 232; vol. v. p. 518.

Adult Male.

Bill rather short, robust, tapering, compressed, acute; upper mandible a little convex in its dorsal outline, convex on the sides, the acute edge slightly notched near the tip, which is a little declinate; lower mandible also a little convex in its dorsal outline, with the edges inflected. Nostrils basal, lateral, round. Head large. Body rather long. Feet shortish; tarsus compressed, anteriorly scutellate, about the length of the middle toe; outer toe united at the base to the middle one; claws arched, compressed, acute.

Plumage soft, blended, glossy. Wings of ordinary length, the second quill longest. Tail slightly emarginate, of twelve acute feathers.

Bill yellowish-brown above, bluish below. Iris hazel. Feet and claws light greyish-blue. The whole plumage is vermilion, brighter on the lower parts, excepting the tips and inner webs of the quills, which are tinged with brown.

Length  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches, extent of wings 11; bill along the ridge  $\frac{7}{12}$ , along the gap 1; tarsus  $\frac{5}{8}$ .



## Adult Female.

The general colour above is light brownish-green, the sides of the head and the under parts generally brownish-yellow; larger wing-coverts dusky, edged with yellow; quills deep brown, externally margined with yellowish-red; tail-feathers of the same colour. The bill, eyes and legs are of the same tints as in the male.

Dimensions nearly the same.

## Young Male.

Dull vermilion, spotted with dull green.

The palate is ascending, concave in the middle, with two ridges, and a small soft prominence in front; the upper mandible has three ridges beneath, of which the lateral are broader. The posterior aperture of the nares is linear, and papillate on the edges. The tongue is 7 twelfths long, somewhat triangular, sagittate and papillate at the base, fleshy and convex above, the point horny, thin-edged and lacerated. The width of the mouth is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths. The œsophagus is 2 inches 10 twelfths long, its greatest width 4 twelfths. The stomach is very small, broadly elliptical,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  twelfths long, 5 twelfths in breadth; its lateral muscles rather small; the epithelium thin, tough, and longitudinally rugous. Intestine  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches long, from 2 twelfths to 1 twelfth in breadth; cœca extremely small, scarcely distinct from the intestine. The trachea is 2 inches long, about 1 twelfth in breadth; its rings about 75. Bronchial half rings about 15. The muscles are as usual; the inferior laryngeal very small. Salivary glands very slender, extending to behind the articulation of the lower jaw.

## THE WILD MUSCADINE.

VITIS ROTUNDIFOLIA, *Mich.*, Flor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 231. *Pursch*, Flor. Amer., vol. i. p. 169.—PENTANDRIA MONOGYNIA, *Linn.*—VITES, *Juss.*

Leaves between heart-shaped and kidney-shaped, nearly equally toothed, shining on both sides.





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Audubon, John James. 1841. "The Summer Red-Bird, *Pyrranga aestiva*, Gmel. [Pl. 208]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 3, 222–225. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319321>.

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