

GENUS I.—CORVUS, *Linn.* CROW.

Bill rather long, stout, considerably compressed; upper mandible with the dorsal line declinate and arched, the sides somewhat convex, the edges nearly straight, and overlapping, the notches faint, the tip declinate, rather sharp; lower mandible with the angle rather long, and of moderate width, the dorsal line ascending, and slightly convex, the edges direct, the tip narrow. Nostrils basal, lateral, round, covered by narrow stiff feathers directed forwards. Head large, ovate; neck rather short; body robust. Legs of moderate length, strong; tarsus stout, compressed, with eight scutella; toes of moderate length, stout, first and second nearly equal, fourth longer, and slightly adherent at the base. Claws strong, arched, compressed, acute. Plumage compact, glossed. Wings long, with the first quill short, the fourth longest. Tail of moderate length, rounded. Roof of upper mandible concave, with five ridges; tongue emargined and papillate at the base, horny toward the end, thin-edged, with the point slit.

THE RAVEN.

+ CORVUS CORAX, *Linn.*

PLATE CCXXIV.—MALE.

Leaving to compilers the task of repeating the mass of fabulous and unedifying matter that has been accumulated in the course of ages, respecting this and other remarkable species of birds, and arranging the materials which I obtained during years of laborious but gratifying observation, I will now attempt to delineate the manners of this species which I have noted in the course of a life chiefly spent in studying the birds of my native land, where I have had abundant opportunities of contemplating their manners, and of



Raven

Old Male

Thick-shell bark Hickory

admiring the manifestations of the glorious perfections of their Omnipotent Creator.

There, amid the tall grass of the far-extended prairies of the West, in the solemn forests of the North, on the heights of the midland mountains, by the shores of the boundless ocean, and on the bosom of the vast lakes and magnificent rivers, have I sought to search out the things which have been hidden since the creation of this wondrous world, or seen only by the naked Indian, who has, for unknown ages, dwelt in the gorgeous but melancholy wilderness. Who is the stranger to my own dear country that can form an adequate conception of the extent of its primeval woods,—of the glory of those columnar trunks, that for centuries have waved in the breeze, and resisted the shock of the tempest,—of the vast bays of our Atlantic coasts, replenished by thousands of streams, differing in magnitude, as differ the stars that sparkle in the expanse of the pure heavens,—of the diversity of aspect in our western plains, our sandy southern shores interspersed with reedy swamps, and the cliffs that protect our eastern coasts,—of the rapid currents of the Mexican Gulf, and the rushing tide streams of the Bay of Fundy,—of our ocean-lakes, our mighty rivers, our thundering cataracts, our majestic mountains, rearing their snowy heads into the calm regions of the clear cold sky?

In the United States, the Raven is in some measure a migratory bird, individuals retiring to the extreme south during severe winters, but returning towards the Middle, Western, and Northern Districts at the first indications of milder weather. A few are known to breed in the mountainous portions of South Carolina, but instances of this kind are rare, and are occasioned merely by the security afforded by inaccessible precipices, in which they may rear their young. Their usual places of resort are the mountains, the abrupt banks of rivers, the rocky shores of lakes, and the cliffs of thinly-peopled or deserted islands. It is in such places that these birds must be watched and examined, before one can judge of their natural habits, as manifested amid their freedom from the dread of their most dangerous enemy, the lord of the creation.

There, through the clear and rarified atmosphere, the Raven spreads his glossy wings and tail, and, as he onward sails, rises higher and higher each bold sweep that he makes, as if conscious that the nearer he approaches the sun, the more splendid will become the tints of his plumage. Intent on convincing his mate of the fervour and constancy of his love, he now gently glides beneath her, floats in the buoyant air, or sails by her side. Would that I could describe to you, reader, the many musical inflections by means of which they hold converse during these amatory excursions! These sounds doubtless express their pure conjugal feelings, confirmed and rendered

more intense by long years of happiness in each other's society. In this manner they may recall the pleasing remembrance of their youthful days, recount the events of their life, and express the pleasure they enjoy.

Now, their matins are over; the happy pair are seen to glide towards the earth in spiral lines; they alight on the boldest summit of a rock, so high that you can scarcely judge of their actual size; they approach each other, their bills meet, and caresses are exchanged as tender as those of the gentle Turtle Dove. Far beneath, wave after wave dashes in foam against the impregnable sides of the rocky tower, the very aspect of which would be terrific to almost any other creatures than the sable pair, which for years have resorted to it, to rear the dearly-cherished fruits of their connubial love. Midway between them and the boiling waters, some shelving ledge conceals their eyry. To it they now betake themselves, to see what damage it has sustained from the peltings of the winter tempests. Off they fly to the distant woods for fresh materials with which to repair the breach; or on the plain they collect the hair and fur of quadrupeds; or from the sandy beach pick up the weeds that have been washed there. By degrees, the nest is enlarged and trimmed, and when every thing has been rendered clean and comfortable, the female deposits her eggs, and begins to sit upon them, while her brave and affectionate mate protects and feeds her, and at intervals takes her place.

All around is now silent, save the hoarse murmur of the waves, or the whistling sounds produced by the flight of the waterfowl travelling towards the northern regions. At length the young burst the shell, when the careful parents, after congratulating each other on the happy event, disgorge some half-macerated food, which they deposit in their tender mouths. Should the most daring adventurer of the air approach, he is attacked with fury and repelled. As the young grow up, they are urged to be careful and silent:—a single false movement might precipitate them into the abyss below; a single cry during the absence of their parents might bring upon them the remorseless claws of the swift Peregrine or Jerfalcon. The old birds themselves seem to improve in care, diligence, and activity, varying their course when returning to their home, and often entering it when unexpected. The young are now seen to stand on the edge of the nest; they flap their wings, and at length take courage and fly to some more commodious and not distant lodgment. Gradually they become able to follow their parents abroad, and at length search for maintenance in their company, and that of others, until the period of breeding arrives, when they separate in pairs, and disperse.

Notwithstanding all the care of the Raven, his nest is invaded wherever it is found. His usefulness is forgotten, his faults are remembered and multiplied by imagination; and whenever he presents himself he is shot at, because

from time immemorial ignorance, prejudice, and destructiveness have operated on the mind of man to his detriment. Men will peril their lives to reach his nest, assisted by ropes and poles, alleging merely that he has killed one of their numerous sheep or lambs. Some say they destroy the Raven because he is black; others, because his croaking is unpleasant and ominous! Unfortunate truly are the young ones that are carried home to become the wretched pets of some ill-brought-up child! For my part, I admire the Raven, because I see much in him calculated to excite our wonder. It is true that he may sometimes hasten the death of a half-starved sheep, or destroy a weakly lamb; he may eat the eggs of other birds, or occasionally steal from the farmer some of those which he calls his own; young fowls also afford precious morsels to himself and his progeny;—but how many sheep, lambs, and fowls, are saved through his agency! The more intelligent of our farmers are well aware that the Raven destroys numberless insects, grubs, and worms; that he kills mice, moles, and rats, whenever he can find them; that he will seize the weasel, the young opossum, and the skunk; that, with the perseverance of a cat, he will watch the burrows of foxes, and pounce on the cubs; our farmers also are fully aware that he apprises them of the wolf's prowlings around their yard, and that he never intrudes on their corn-fields except to benefit them;—yes, good reader, the farmer knows all this well, but he also knows his power, and, interfere as you may, with tale of pity or of truth, the bird is a Raven, and, as LAFONTAINE has aptly and most truly said, “*La loi du plus fort est toujours la meilleure!*”

The flight of the Raven is powerful, even, and at certain periods greatly protracted. During calm and fair weather it often ascends to an immense height, sailing there for hours at a time; and although it cannot be called swift, it propels itself with sufficient power to enable it to contend with different species of Hawks, and even with Eagles when attacked by them. It manages to guide its course through the thickest fogs of the countries of the north, and is able to travel over immense tracts of land or water without rest.

The Raven is omnivorous, its food consisting of small animals of every kind, eggs, dead fish, carrion, shell-fish, insects, worms, nuts, berries, and other kinds of fruit. I have never seen one attack a large living animal, as the Turkey Buzzard and Carrion Crow are wont to do; but I have known it follow hunters when without dogs, to feed on the offals of the game, and carry off salted fish when placed in a spring to freshen. It often rises in the air with a shell-fish for the purpose of breaking it by letting it fall on a rock. Its sight is exceedingly acute, but its smell, if it possesses the sense, is weak. In this respect, it bears a great resemblance to our Vultures.

The breeding season of this bird varies, according to the latitude, from the

beginning of January to that of June. I have found young Ravens on the banks of the Lehigh and the Susquehanna rivers on the 1st of May; about ten days later on those of the majestic Hudson; in the beginning of June on the island of Grand Manan off the Bay of Fundy; and at Labrador, as late as the middle of July. The nest is always placed in the most inaccessible parts of rocks that can be found, never, I believe, on trees, at least in America. It is composed of sticks, coarse weeds, wool, and bunches of hair of different animals. The eggs are from four to six, of a rather elongated oval shape, fully two inches in length, having a ground colour of light greenish-blue, sprinkled all over with small irregular blotches of light purple and yellowish-brown, so numerous on the larger end, as almost entirely to cover it. The period of incubation extends to nineteen or twenty days. Only one brood is raised in a year, unless the eggs or young be removed or destroyed. The young remain in the nest many weeks before they are able to fly. The old birds return to the same nest for years in succession; and should one of them be destroyed, the other will lead a new partner to the same abode. Even after the young have made their appearance, should one of the parents be killed, the survivor usually manages to find a mate, who undertakes the task of assisting in feeding them.

The Raven may be said to be of a social disposition, for, after the breeding season, flocks of forty, fifty, or more, may sometimes be seen, as I observed on the coast of Labrador, and on the Missouri. When domesticated, and treated with kindness, it becomes attached to its owner, and will follow him about with all the familiarity of a confiding friend. It is capable of imitating the human voice, so that individuals have sometimes been taught to enunciate a few words with great distinctness.

On the ground the Raven walks in a stately manner, its motions exhibiting a kind of thoughtful consideration, almost amounting to gravity. While walking it frequently moves up its wings as if to keep their muscles in action. I never knew an instance of their roosting in the woods, although they frequently alight on trees, to which they sometimes resort for the purpose of procuring nuts and other fruits. They usually betake themselves at night to high rocks, in situations protected from the northerly winds. Possessing to all appearance the faculty of judging of the coming weather, they remove from the higher, wild and dreary districts where they breed, into the low lands, at the approach of winter, when they are frequently seen along the shores of the sea, collecting the garbage that has been cast to land, or picking up the shell-fish as the tide retires. They are vigilant, industrious, and, when the safety of their young or nest is at stake, courageous, driving away Hawks and Eagles whenever they happen to come near, although in no case do they venture to attack man. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to

get within shot of an old Raven. I have more than once been only a few yards from one while it was sitting on its eggs, having attained this proximity by creeping cautiously to the overhanging edge of a precipice; but the moment the bird perceived me, it would fly off apparently in much confusion. They are so cunning and wary, that they can seldom be caught in a trap; and they will watch one intended for a fox, a wolf, or a bear, until one of these animals comes up, and is taken, when they will go to it and eat the alluring bait.

While at Little Macatina Harbour, on the coast of Labrador, in July 1833, I saw a Raven's nest placed under the shelvings of the rugged and fearful rocks that form one side of that singular place. The young were nearly fledged, and now and then called loudly to their parents, as if to inquire why our vessel had come there. One of them in attempting to fly away fell into the water. It was secured, when I trimmed one of its wings, and turned it loose on the deck along with some other birds. The mother, however, kept sailing high over the schooner, repeating some notes, which it seems the young one understood, for it walked carefully to the end of the bowsprit, opened its wings, and tried to fly, but being unable, fell into the water and was drowned. In a few days the rest of the family left the place, and we saw no more of them. Some of the sailors who had come to the harbour eight years in succession, assured me that they had always observed the Ravens breeding there. My whole party found it impossible to shoot one of the old ones, who went to the nest and left it with so much caution, that the task of watching them became irksome. One afternoon I concealed myself under a pile of detached rocks for more than two hours. The young frequently croaked as I was waiting there, but no parent came; so I left the place, but the next moment the female was seen from the deck of the Ripley. She alighted in the nest, fed her young, and was off again before I could reach within shooting distance. It was at this place that I observed how singularly well those birds could travel to and from their nest, at a time when I could not, on account of the fog, see them on wing at a greater distance than twenty or thirty yards. On the 29th of the same month, young Ravens were seen in flocks with their parents; but they were already very shy.

I found a nest of this bird at a narrow part of the Lehigh in Pennsylvania, in a deep fissure of the rocks, not more than twenty feet above the water, the security afforded by which had probably been considered as equivalent to that which might have been gained by a greater height of rock. The nest, in fact, hung over the stream, so that it was impossible to reach it either from above or from below. Many years ago, I saw another placed immediately beneath the arch of the Rock Bridge in Virginia. It was

situated on a small projecting stone scarcely a foot square; yet the Raven appeared quite satisfied as to the security of her brood on that narrow bed. This extraordinary production of Nature is placed on the ascent of a hill, which appears to have been rent asunder by some convulsion of the earth. The fissure is about 200 feet deep, and above 80 in width under the arch, narrowing to 40 or so at the bottom. The thickness of the arch probably exceeds 30 feet, and increases at either end. At the bottom is seen the water of what is called Cedar Creek, gently meandering in its rocky channel. The place, when I saw it, was graced by handsome trees, and in some positions there was a pleasing view of the "Blue Ridge" and the "North Mountain." Tradition reports that General WASHINGTON threw a dollar over the bridge from the creek below.

I have already stated that some Ravens breed as far south as the Carolinas. The place to which they resort for this purpose is called the Table Mountain, which is situated in the district of Pendleton, and of which I extract an account from DRAYTON'S Views of South Carolina. "The Table Mountain is the most distinguished of all the eminences of the State. Its height exceeds 3000 feet, and thirty farms may be discerned at any one view from its top by the unaided eye. Its side is an abrupt precipice of solid rock, 300 feet deep, and nearly perpendicular. The valley underneath appears to be as much below the level as the top of the mountain towers above it. This precipice is called the Lover's Leap. To those who are in the valley, it looks like an immense wall stretching up to heaven, and the awe which it inspires is considerably increased by the quantities of bones which lie whitening at its base,—the remains of various animals which had incautiously approached too near its edge. Its summit is often enveloped in clouds. The gradual ascent of the country from the sea-coast to this western extremity of the State, added to the height of this mountain, must place its top more than 4000 feet above the level of the Atlantic Ocean; an eminence from which vessels crossing the bar of Charleston might be seen with the aid of such improved glasses as are now in use. Large masses of snow tumble from the side of this mountain in the winter season, the fall of which has been heard seven miles. Its summit is the resort of deer and bears. The woods produce mast in abundance; Wild Pigeons resort to it in such numbers as sometimes to break the limbs of trees on which they alight."

A friend of mine, who is an excellent observer of the habits of birds, has told me that he saw a Raven's nest in the high lands of New York placed in a deep fissure of a rock, in the immediate vicinity of that of a Golden Eagle. I chanced one day, while in the Great Pine Forest of Pennsylvania, to stop, for the purpose of resting and refreshing myself, at a camp with JEDIAH IRISH. We had seen some Ravens that day, and our conversation returning

to them, the person employed in preparing the food of the woodcutters told us, that whenever she chanced to place a salt mackerel or other fish in the brook running from the spring near the camp, "the Raven was sure to carry it away in less than an hour." She firmly believed that it had the power of smelling the fish as she carried it from the hut to the water. We went to the spot with her, and, leaving a fish there, returned to our homely meal, but on visiting the place several hours after, we found it untouched. "The Raven perhaps smelt the powder in our guns!" At all events, it did not choose to come that day.

The flesh of this bird is tough and unfit for food, but this indicates its great strength. When wounded, it bites severely, and scratches with its claws as fiercely as a Hawk. Like the latter also, it disgorges indigestible substances, as bones, hair, and feathers.

This species is plentiful on the Rocky Mountains and along the Columbia river, and also abounds in the Fur Countries, and, according to Dr. RICHARDSON, visits the remotest islands of the Polar seas. It frequents the Barren Grounds even in the most intense winter colds, its movements being directed in a great measure by those of the herds of Rein Deer, Musk Oxen, and Bison, which it follows, ready to assist in devouring such as are killed by beasts of prey or by accident. He relates a curious instance of the propensity it shews to appropriate to itself any metallic substance. "Mr. KENDAL, in crossing the heights of land which divide the waters that flow towards Hudson's Bay, from those which fall into the Arctic Sea, saw a Raven flying off with something in his claws, pursued by a number of his clamorous companions. The bird being fired at dropped the object of contention, which proved to be the lock of a chest!" Mr. TOWNSEND informs me that on the Columbia river the Ravens constantly attend on the salmon fisheries, and that during winter they are very expert at discovering the small tents raised by the Indians for the purpose of saving their fish. They are in all those districts constant attendants upon the hunters, for the purpose of devouring the offal of all such game as may be slaughtered.

Although I have found eggs of this species which measured rather more than two inches in length, by an inch and three-eighths, others did not measure more than one inch and seven-eighths by an inch and four-twelfths. They also differ considerably in the tint of their ground-colour, as well as in their markings.

RAVEN, *Corvus Corax*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. ix. p. 136.

CORVUS CORAX, Bonap. Syn., p. 56.

CORVUS CORAX, *Raven*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 290.

RAVEN, *Corvus Corax*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 202.

RAVEN, *Corvus Corax*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 1; vol. v. p. 476.

Feathers of the fore neck lanceolate and elongated; tail much rounded; plumage deep black, glossed with blue and purplish-blue, the lower parts with green. Young with the feathers of the throat oblong, the upper parts less glossy, the lower dull greyish-black.

Male, 26, 50.

From the Highlands of South Carolina, northward to the Polar Seas. Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio, Canada. Rocky Mountains and Columbia river. Rather common in some parts.

THE THICK SHELL-BARK HICKORY.

JUGLANS SULCATA, *Pursh*, Flor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 637.—*J. LACINIOSA*, *Mich. Arbr. Forest. de l'Amer. Sept.*, vol. i. p. 199, pl. 8.—*MONGECIA POLYANDRIA*, *Linn.*—*TEREBINTHACEÆ*, *Juss.*

Leaves pinnate, with about nine obovato-lanceolate, acuminate, serrate leaflets, which are downy beneath, the terminal one nearly sessile and attenuated at the base; fruit roundish, with four longitudinal prominences; nut nearly globular, slightly compressed, smooth, with an elongated tip. It occurs from Louisiana to Massachusetts, although not, I believe, farther eastward, and also exists in the whole of the western country, as far as I have travelled. It grows in almost every kind of soil, and in some parts acquires a great size. When detached, it forms a fine ornament to the meadows and fields. The wood, which is hard and extremely pliant, is greatly esteemed for various purposes, and when kept dry is lasting. Excepting the Pacan nuts, none in America are considered equal to those of the present species. They are generally collected after falling, late in autumn, and are abundant in most of our markets, large quantities being shipped to Europe.



Raven

Old Male.

Thick-shell bark Hickory.



Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Raven, *Corvus corax*, Linn. [Pl. 224]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 78–86. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319337>.

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