GENUS II.—PICA, *Briss.* MAGPIE.

Bill of moderate length, stout, considerably compressed; upper mandible with the dorsal line declinate and arched, the sides convex, the ridge narrow, the edges nearly straight and overlapping, the notches faint, the tip declinate, and rather sharp; lower mandible with the angle rather long and wide, the dorsal line ascending and slightly convex, the edges inclinate, the tip narrow. Nostrils basal, lateral, roundish, covered by narrow stiff feathers directed forwards. Head large, ovate; neck rather short; body compact. Legs of moderate length, strong; tarsus stout, compressed, with eight scutella; toes of moderate length, stout, first large, stronger; lateral nearly equal, third considerably longer. Claws strong, arched, compressed, acute. Plumage full, soft, blended. Wings of moderate length, much rounded, the first quill very short, extremely narrow and falciform, fourth and fifth longest. Tail very long, graduated. Digestive organs as in *Corvus*.

THE COMMON MAGPIE.
+PICA MELANOLEUCA, *Vieill.*

PLATE CCXXVII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

Although Magpies are abundant in the north-western portions of the United States, and are met with as far north as the Saskatchewan river, where, according to Dr. RICHARDSON, some of them spend the winter, none have yet been seen nearer the shores of the Atlantic than the head waters of the Red river in Louisiana, where they were seen in abundance by the lamented Colonel PIKE, then a lieutenant in the United States' army. His notice, although already published by WILSON, so well describes the habits of this species, that I repeat it here with pleasure. "Our horses," he says,

"were obliged to scrape the snow away to obtain their miserable pittance; and, to increase their misfortune, the poor animals were attacked by the Magpies, who, attracted by the scent of their sore backs, alighted on them, and, in defiance of their wincing and kicking, picked many places quite raw; the difficulty of procuring food rendering those birds so bold as to alight on our men's arms, and eat meat out of their hands." To CLARKE and LEWIS, however, is due the first introduction of this bird into the Fauna of the United States. These intrepid travellers first observed the Magpie near the great bend of the Missouri, although it was known to have been obtained at the fur-trading factories of the Hudson's Bay Company.

There is a difference of opinion as to the identity of the Magpie of America and that of Europe. THOMAS NUTTALL, who has seen those of both countries, as well as their nests, and observed their habits, assures me, that he looks upon them as clearly of the same species. Captain SABINE thought differently, and CHARLES BONAPARTE, after remarking in his "Observations on the Nomenclature of WILSON," that "it is not a little singular that this species, which is so common in every part of Europe, should be confined in its range on this continent to the western and northern regions," thus plainly indicating his belief of their identity, names it, in a list of European and North American Birds, published in London in April 1838, "*Pica Hudsonica*. Nob." the European bird being at the same time ticketed "*Pica melanoleuca*." Mr. SWAINSON, in the Fauna Boreali-Americana, remarks on comparing them:—"We cannot perceive the slightest difference whereon to build even the character of a variety, much less a species;" and this truly is my own opinion.

The following notice regarding our bird was given me by my friend THOMAS NUTTALL:—"On the 15th of July, arriving at the borders of the Shoshonee, or Snake river, we first met with the Common Magpie on our route, mostly accompanied by the Raven, but there were no Crows. The young birds were so familiar and greedy, approaching the encampment in quest of food, as to be easily taken by the Indian boys, when they soon become reconciled to savage domesticity. The old birds were sufficiently shy, but the young were observed hopping and croaking around us, and tugging at any offal of flesh meat thrown out, like so many Vultures. Differing so far from the proscribed and persecuted Magpies of Europe, these, at least the young, seemed evidently to court the advantages of society in supplying them with food, and betrayed scarcely any alarm on our approach. If chased off for an instant, they returned the next, and their monotonous and gluttonous croak was heard around us at all hours of the day. The dryness of the season, and the scarcity of insects and small birds, urged them no doubt to this unusual familiarity with their doubtful friend

and frequent enemy, man. By the borders of streams in the central table-land of the Rocky Mountains, in several places we saw the old nests of the Magpie, made usually in low but thick bushes in the usual manner, barricaded over and floored with interlaced twigs. We scarcely ever saw them at all in the heavy forests of the Lower Columbia, any more than the Platte and Missouri, in all which places they are merely accidental visitors. They are not uncommon, however, in the vicinity of Monterey in Upper California. Their common call is *pay pay*, and the usual low social chatter when approaching their companions. I one day observed a small flock, and among the fraternity heard one chattering familiarly in the varied tune of the Cat-bird, as he sat on a bough by the water, where birds might become his prey. At another time I observed a flock of young Magpies boldly persecuting other birds, and chasing even Pigeon Hawks."

The following characteristic account of the habits of the Magpie as observed in Scotland, I have extracted from my friend MACGILLIVRAY'S "History of British Birds." "It is generally distributed in Britain, being more or less common in all the cultivated and wooded districts of England and Scotland, both in the interior and along the coast, although nowhere numerous, on account of the hostility of gamekeepers, gardeners, and sportsmen of all degrees. There, on the old ash that overshadows the farm-yard, you may see a pair, one perched on the topmost twig, the other hopping among the branches, uttering an incessant clatter of short hard notes, scarcely resembling any thing else in nature, but withal not unpleasant, at least to the lover of birds. How gracefully she of the top twig swings in the breeze! Off she starts, and directing her flight towards the fir wood opposite, proceeds with a steady, moderately rapid, but rather heavy flight, performed by quick beats of her apparently short wings, intermitted for a moment at intervals. Chattering by the way, she seems to call her mate after her; but he, intent on something which he has spied, hops downwards from twig to branch, and descends to the ground. Raising his body as high as possible, and carrying his tail inclined upwards, to avoid contact with the moist grass, he walks a few paces, and spying an earthworm half protruded from its hole, drags it out by a sudden jerk, breaks it in pieces, and swallows it. Now, under the hedge he has found a snail, which he will presently detach from its shell. But something among the bushes has startled him, and lightly he springs upwards, chattering the while, to regain his favourite tree. It is a cat, which, not less frightened than himself, runs off toward the house. The Magpie again descends, steps slowly over the green, looking from side to side, stops and listens, advances rapidly by a succession of leaps, and encounters a whole brood of chickens, with their mother at their heels. Were they unprotected, how deliciously would the Magpie feast, but alas,

it is vain to think of it, for with fury in her eye, bristled plumage, and loud clamour, headlong rushes the hen, overturning two of her younglings, when the enemy suddenly wheels round, avoiding the encounter, and flies off after his mate.

There again, you perceive them in the meadow, as they walk about, with elevated tails, looking for something eatable, although apparently with little success. By the hedge afar off are two boys with a gun, endeavouring to creep up to a flock of Plovers on the other side. But the Magpies have observed them, and presently rising fly directly over the field, chattering vehemently, on which the whole flock takes to wing, and the disappointed sportsmen sheer off in another direction.

The food of the Magpie consists of testaceous mollusca, slugs, larvæ, worms, young birds, eggs, small quadrupeds, carrion, sometimes grain and fruits of different kinds, in search of which it frequents the fields, hedges, thickets, and orchards, occasionally visits the farm-yard, prowls among the stacks, perches on the house-top, whence it sallies at times, and examines the dunghill and places around. Although it searches for larvæ and worms in the ploughed fields, it never ventures, like the Rook, and several species of Gull, to follow the plough as it turns over each successive furrow. It has been accused of picking the eyes of lambs and sickly sheep, I think with injustice; but it sometimes carries off a chicken or duckling, and sucks an egg that may have been dropt abroad.

It is extremely shy and vigilant in the vicinity of towns, where it is much molested, but less so in country places, although even there it is readily alarmed. When one pursues it openly, it flits along the walls and hedges, shifts from tree to tree, and at length flies off to a distance. Yet it requires all its vigilance to preserve its life; for, as it destroys the eggs and young of game birds, it is keenly pursued by keepers and sportsmen, so that one might marvel to find it maintaining its ground as a species, and yet it is not apparently diminishing in most parts of the country.

On the ground it generally walks in the same manner as the Crows, but occasionally leaps in a sidelong direction. The sounds which it emits are a sort of chuckling cry or chatter, which it utters when alarmed, as well as when it wishes to apprise other birds of danger. On the appearance of a fox, a cat, or other unfriendly animal, it never ceases hovering about it, and alarming the neighbourhood by its cries, until the enemy has slunk away out of sight.

It generally keeps in pairs all the year round, accompanies its young for some weeks after they first come abroad, and after the breeding season retires at night to the copses or woods, where sometimes a considerable number meet together. It begins to construct its nest early in March,

selecting as its site the top of some tall tree, a poplar, an ash, an elm, sometimes a willow, or a beech; or, in defect of such in a favourite locality, placing it in a thick bush of hawthorn, holly, or other low tree, or even in a hedge. It is a large, and therefore generally very conspicuous fabric, of a spheroidal or elliptical form, composed first of a layer of twigs, on which is laid a quantity of mud; then a dome of twigs, frequently hawthorn or sloe, but as often of any other kind, loosely but securely interlaced; while the bottom of the interior is lined with fibrous roots; and there is left in the side an aperture not much larger than is barely sufficient to admit the bird. The eggs are from three to six, and differ considerably in form and colouring. In general, they are regularly ovate, or a little pointed, about an inch and five-twelfths long, eleven and a half twelfths or an inch across; but sometimes more elongated by one-twelfth of an inch, or abbreviated by nearly the same quantity. Frequently they are pale green, freckled all over with umber-brown and light purple, and sometimes pale blue or bluish-white, or greenish-white, with smaller spots and dots of the same dark colours, so as very nearly to resemble the eggs of the Jay, which however are smaller."

CORVUS PICA, Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 157.

MAGPIE, *Corvus Pica*, Wils. Amer. Orn.

CORVUS PICA, Bonap. Syn., p. 57.

MAGPIE, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 219.

COMMON MAGPIE, *Corvus Pica*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iv. p. 408.

Bill black; head, neck, fore part of breast and back black, glossed with green and blue; middle of the back greyish-white; scapulars white; smaller wing-coverts black, secondary coverts, alula and primary coverts splendent with green and blue; primaries black, glossed with green, their inner webs white, except at the end, and for some way along their margin; secondaries bright blue, changing to green, their inner webs greenish-black; tail splendent with bright green, changing to greenish-yellow, purplish-red, bluish-purple, and dark green at the end; breast and sides pure white; legs, abdomen, lower tail-coverts, and lower wing-coverts, black.

Male, $18\frac{1}{2}$, $22\frac{1}{2}$.

Interior of Texas, West Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Rocky Mountains, and Saskatchewan. Common. Resident.

Common Magpie.

1. Male 2. Female.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Common Magpie, *Pica melanoleuca*, Vieill. [Pl. 227]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 99–103. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319340>.

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