THE BLUE JAY.

† GARRULUS CRISTATUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCXXXI.—MALE AND FEMALES.

Reader, look at the plate in which are represented three individuals of this beautiful species,—rogues though they be, and thieves, as I would call them, were it fit for me to pass judgment on their actions. See how each is enjoying the fruits of his knavery, sucking the egg which he has pilfered from the nest of some innocent Dove or harmless Partridge! Who could imagine that a form so graceful, arrayed by nature in a garb so resplendent, should harbour so much mischief;—that selfishness, duplicity, and malice should form the moral accompaniments of so much physical perfection! Yet so it is, and how like beings of a much higher order, are these gay deceivers! Aye, I could write you a whole chapter on this subject, were not my task of a different nature.

The Blue Jay is one of those birds that are found capable of subsisting in cold as well as in warm climates. It occurs as far north as the Canadas, where it makes occasional attacks upon the corn cribs of the farmers, and it is found in the most southern portions of the United States, where it abounds during the winter. Every where it manifests the same mischievous disposition. It imitates the cry of the Sparrow Hawk so perfectly, that the little birds in the neighbourhood hurry into the thick coverts, to avoid what they believe to be the attack of that marauder. It robs every nest it can find, sucks the eggs like the Crow, or tears to pieces and devours the young birds. A friend once wounded a Grouse (*Tetrao umbellus*), and marked the direction which it followed, but had not proceeded two hundred yards in pursuit, when he heard something fluttering in the bushes, and found his bird belaboured by two Blue Jays, who were picking out its eyes. The same person once put a Flying Squirrel into the cage of one of these birds, merely to preserve it for one night; but on looking into the cage about eleven o'clock next day, he found the animal partly eaten. A Blue Jay at Charleston destroyed all the birds of an aviary. One after another had been killed, and the rats were supposed to have been the culprits, but no crevice could be seen large enough to admit one. Then the mice were accused, and war was waged against them, but still the birds continued to be killed; first the smaller, then the larger, until at length the Keywest Pigeons; when it was

Blue Jay

1 Male. 2 & 3 Female

Trumpet flower. *Bignonia radicans.*

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

Lith. & Printed & Col. by J. T. Bowen. Philad.

discovered that a Jay which had been raised in the aviary was the depredator. He was taken out, and placed in a cage, with a quantity of corn, flour and several small birds which he had just killed. The birds he soon devoured, but the flour he would not condescend to eat, and refusing every other kind of food soon died. In the north, it is fond of ripe chestnuts, and in visiting the trees is sure to select the choicest. When these fail, it attacks the beech nuts, acorns, pears, apples, and green corn.

While at Louisville, in Kentucky, in the winter of 1830, I purchased twenty-five of these birds, at the rate of $6\frac{1}{4}$ cents each, which I shipped to New Orleans, and afterwards to Liverpool, with the view of turning them out in the English woods. They were caught in common traps, baited with maize, and were brought to me one after another as soon as secured. In placing them in the large cage which I had ordered for the purpose of sending them abroad, I was surprised to see how cowardly each newly caught bird was when introduced to his brethren, who, on being in the cage a day or two, were as gay and frolicsome as if at liberty in the woods. The new comer, on the contrary, would run into a corner, place his head almost in a perpendicular position, and remain silent and sulky, with an appearance of stupidity quite foreign to his nature. He would suffer all the rest to walk over him and trample him down, without ever changing his position. If corn or fruit was presented to him, or even placed close to his bill, he would not so much as look at it. If touched with the hand, he would cower, lie down on his side, and remain motionless. The next day, however, things were altered: he was again a Jay, taking up corn, placing it between his feet, hammering it with his bill, splitting the grain, picking out the kernel, and dropping the divided husks. When the cage was filled, it was amusing to listen to their hammering; all mounted on their perch side by side, each pecking at a grain of maize, like so many blacksmiths paid by the piece. They drank a great deal, eat broken pacan nuts, grapes, dried fruits of all sorts, and especially fresh beef, of which they were extremely fond, roosted very peaceably close together, and were very pleasing pets. Now and then one would utter a cry of alarm, when instantly all would leap and fly about as if greatly concerned, making as much ado as if their most inveterate enemy had been in the midst of them. They bore the passage to Europe pretty well, and most of them reached Liverpool in good health; but a few days after their arrival, a disease occasioned by insects adhering to every part of their body, made such progress that some died every day. Many remedies were tried in vain, and only one individual reached London. The insects had so multiplied on it, that I immersed it in an infusion of tobacco, which, however, killed it in a few hours.

On advancing north, I observed that as soon as the Canada Jay made its

appearance, the Blue Jay became more and more rare; not an individual did any of our party observe in Newfoundland or Labrador, during our stay there. On landing a few miles from Pictou, on the 22nd of August, 1833, after an absence of several months from the United States, the voice of a Blue Jay sounded melodious to me, and the sight of a Humming-bird quite filled my heart with delight.

These Jays are plentiful in all parts of the United States. In Louisiana, they are so abundant as to prove a nuisance to the farmers, picking the newly planted corn, the peas, and the sweet potatoes, attacking every fruit tree, and even destroying the eggs of pigeons and domestic fowls. The planters are in the habit of occasionally soaking some corn in a solution of arsenic, and scattering the seeds over the ground, in consequence of which many Jays are found dead about the fields and gardens.

The Blue Jay is extremely expert in discovering a fox, a racoon, or any other quadruped hostile to birds, and will follow it, emitting a loud noise, as if desirous of bringing every Jay or Crow to its assistance. It acts in the same manner towards Owls, and even on some occasions towards Hawks.

This species breeds in all parts of the United States, from Louisiana to Maine, and from the Upper Missouri to the coast of the Atlantic. In South Carolina it seems to prefer for this purpose the live oak trees. In the lower parts of the Floridas it gives place in a great measure to the Florida Jay; nor did I meet with a single individual in the Keys of that peninsula. In Louisiana, it breeds near the planter's house, in the upper parts of the trees growing in the avenues, or even in the yards, and generally at a greater height than in the Middle States, where it is comparatively shy. It sometimes takes possession of the old or abandoned nest of a Crow or Cuckoo. In the Southern States, from Louisiana to Maryland, it breeds twice every year; but to the eastward of the latter State seldom more than once. Although it occurs in all places from the sea-shore to the mountainous districts, it seems more abundant in the latter. The nest is composed of twigs and other coarse materials, lined with fibrous roots. The eggs are four or five, of a dull olive colour, spotted with brown.

The Blue Jay is truly omnivorous, feeding indiscriminately on all sorts of flesh, seeds, and insects. He is more tyrannical than brave, and, like most boasters, domineers over the feeble, dreads the strong, and flies even from his equals. In many cases in fact, he is a downright coward. The Cardinal Grosbeak will challenge him, and beat him off the ground. The Red Thrush, the Mocking-bird, and many others, although inferior in strength, never allow him to approach their nest with impunity; and the Jay, to be even with them, creeps silently to it in their absence, and devours their eggs and young whenever he finds an opportunity. I have seen one go its round from

one nest to another every day, and suck the newly laid eggs of the different birds in the neighbourhood, with as much regularity and composure as a physician would call on his patients. I have also witnessed the sad disappointment it experienced, when, on returning to its own home, it found its mate in the jaws of a snake, the nest upset, and the eggs all gone. I have thought more than once on such occasions that, like all great culprits, when brought to a sense of their enormities, it evinced a strong feeling of remorse. While at Charleston, in November 1833, Dr. WILSON of that city told me that on opening a division of his aviary, a Mocking-bird that he had kept for three years, flew at another and killed it, after which it destroyed several Blue Jays, which he had been keeping for me some months in an adjoining compartment.

The Blue Jay seeks for its food with great diligence at all times, but more especially during the period of its migration. At such a time, wherever there are chinquapins, wild chestnuts, acorns, or grapes, flocks will be seen to alight on the topmost branches of these trees, disperse, and engage with great vigour in detaching the fruit. Those that fall are picked up from the ground, and carried into a chink in the bark, the splinters of a fence rail, or firmly held under foot on a branch, and hammered with the bill until the kernel be procured.

As if for the purpose of gleanings the country in this manner, the Blue Jay migrates from one part to another during the day only. A person travelling or hunting by night, may now and then disturb the repose of a Jay, which in its terror sounds an alarm that is instantly responded to by all its surrounding travelling companions, and their multiplied cries make the woods resound far and near. While migrating, they seldom fly to any great distance at a time without alighting, for like true rangers they ransack and minutely inspect every portion of the woods, the fields, the orchards, and even the gardens of the farmers and planters. Always exceedingly garrulous, they may easily be followed to any distance, and the more they are chased the more noisy do they become, unless a Hawk happen to pass suddenly near them, when they are instantly struck dumb, and, as if ever conscious of deserving punishment, either remain motionless for awhile, or sneak off silently into the closest thickets, where they remain concealed as long as their dangerous enemy is near.

During the winter months they collect in large numbers about the plantations of the Southern States, approach the houses and barns, attend the feeding of the poultry, as well as of the cattle and horses in their separate pens, in company with the Cardinal Grosbeak, the Towhee Bunting, the Cow Bunting, the Starlings and Grakles, pick up every grain of loose corn they can find, search amid the droppings of horses along the roads, and enter the

corn cribs, where many are caught by the cat and the sons of the farmer. Their movements on the wing are exceedingly graceful, and as they pass from one tree to another, their expanded wings and tail, exhibiting all the beauty of their graceful form and lovely tints, never fail to delight the observer.

Although this species proceeds up the Missouri river to the eastern declivities of the Rocky Mountains, it is not found on the Columbia. Dr. RICHARDSON says that it "visits the Fur Countries, in summer, up to the 56th parallel, but seldom approaches the shores of Hudson's Bay." He is, however, mistaken when he says that "it frequents the Southern States only in winter;" for it is found there at all seasons, and breeds in every district of them, as well as in the Texas, where I found it, although it was rare. The eggs measure an inch and half an eighth in length, and seven-eighths in breadth.

BLUE JAY, *Corvus cristatus*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 2.

CORVUS CRISTATUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 58.

GARRULUS CRISTATUS, *Blue Jay*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 293.

BLUE JAY, *Corvus cristatus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 11; vol. v. p. 475.

Feathers of the head elongated, oblong; tail much rounded. Upper parts light purplish-blue; wings and tail ultramarine, secondaries, their coverts, and tail-feathers barred with black, and tipped with white; a narrow band margining the forehead, loreal space, and a band round the neck, black; throat and cheeks bluish-white; lower parts greyish-white, tinged with brown.

Male, 12, 14.

Breeds from Texas eastward and northward to the Fur Countries, and as far as the bases of the Rocky Mountains. Abundant. Resident in the Middle, Interior, and Southern States.

The roof of the mouth is rather flat, anteriorly with three ridges; the lower mandible moderately con-

cave with a median ridge; posterior aperture of nares linear, 8 twelfths long, with the edges papillate; width of mouth $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. The tongue is $9\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, emarginate and papillate at the base, flat above, horny toward the end, with the tip slit and lacerated. The œsophagus, *a b c*, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, 6 twelfths wide at the commencement, but suddenly tapering to 3 twelfths. The lobes of the liver are very unequal, the right being 1 inch 2 twelfths in length, the other 9 twelfths. The stomach, *c d e*, is very large, of a broadly elliptical, compressed form, 1 inch in length, 10 twelfths in breadth; its lateral muscles of considerable thickness, the left being 4 twelfths; the tendons large; the epithelium very dense, tough, rugous, of a dark brown colour. It is filled with remains of insects and mineral substances. The intestine, *e f g h i*, is $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, from 4 twelfths to $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in width; the cœca, *h*, 3 twelfths long, $\frac{1}{2}$ twelfth wide, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches distant from the extremity; the cloaca, *i*, ovate, 8 twelfths in breadth.

The trachea is 2 inches 5 twelfths long, considerably flattened toward the lower part; its rings 56 in number, rather broad, and well ossified, with two additional dimidiate rings; the bronchi of moderate size, with 12 half rings. The lateral muscles are rather slender; there are four pairs of inferior laryngeal muscles.

THE TRUMPET-FLOWER.

BIGNONIA RADICANS. *Pursh*, Flor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 420.

ULTRAMARINE JAY.

†GARRULUS ULTRAMARINUS, *Bonap.*

PLATE CCXXXII.—ADULT MALE.

Although the Ultramarine Jay has been described by Mr. SWAINSON, in his Synopsis of the Birds of Mexico, under the name of *Garrulus sordidus*, I retain the specific name "*ultramarinus*," previously given by the Prince of MUSIGNANO. The only observations respecting its habits that I am aware have been made, are the following, for which I am indebted to my friend THOMAS NUTTALL.

Blue Jay

1 Male. 2 & 3 Female

Trumpet flower. *Bignonia radicans.*

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

Lith. & Printed & Col. by J. T. Bowen. Philad.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Blue Jay, *Garrulus cristatus*, Linn. [Pl. 231]."
The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories 4, 110–115. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319344>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/125069>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319344>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/319344>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.