

neck short; body short. Tarsi rather short, stout, compressed, with eight scutella; toes long, much compressed; first very long, second much shorter than fourth; anterior toes adherent at the base. Claws long, arched, much compressed, laterally grooved, acute. Plumage very soft and blended. Small bristles at the base of the upper mandible. Wings rather long, first quill extremely small, third and fourth longest. Tail short, of twelve feathers broad, nearly even. Upper mandible slightly concave, with three ridges; tongue slender, very thin, with the point abrupt and terminated by strong bristles; œsophagus without dilatation; stomach rather large, roundish, moderately muscular; intestine rather short and wide; cœca very small.

THE WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH.

+*SITTA CAROLINENSIS*, *Linn.*

PLATE CCXLVII.—MALE AND FEMALES.

Only four species of Nuthatch have as yet been observed within the limits of the United States. My opinion however is, that at least two more will be discovered:—one larger than any of those known, in the high wooded plains bordering the Pacific Ocean; the other, of nearly the size of the present species, towards the boundary line of Texas and the United States.

Although the species now under consideration is found in all parts of our extensive country, it is yet the least numerous; there being to appearance more than three of the Brown-headed, and two of the Red-bellied, for every one of the White-breasted. It is an inhabitant of the forest and the orchard, frequently approaching to the very doors of the farm-houses during winter, when it is not unusually seen tapping at the eaves beneath the roof, thrusting itself into barns and houses, or searching for food among the poultry *on the ground*, where it moves prettily by short hops. During summer it gives a preference to the interior of the forest, and lives in a retired and secluded manner, especially during the breeding season. Although a lively bird, its actions are less animated, and it exhibits less petulance and restlessness than the other species. It moves alertly, however, when searching for food, climbing or retrograding downwards or sidewise, with cheerfulness and a

degree of liveliness, which distinguish it at once from other birds. Now and then it has a quaint look, if I may so speak, while watching the observer, clinging to the bark head downward, and perhaps only a few feet distant from him whom it well knows to be its enemy, or at least not its friend, for many farmers, not distinguishing between it and the Sap-sucker, (*Picus pubescens*,) shoot at it, as if assured that they are doing a commendable action.

During the breeding season, the affection which this bird ordinarily shews to its species, is greatly increased. Two of them may be seen busily engaged in excavating a hole for their nest in the decayed portion of the trunk or branch of a tree, all the time congratulating each other in the tenderest manner. The male, ever conspicuous on such occasions, works in earnest, and carries off the slender chips, chiselled by the female. He struts around her, peeps into the hole, chirrup at intervals, or hovers about her on the wing. While she is sitting on her eggs, he seldom absents himself many moments; now with a full bill he feeds her, now returns to be assured that her time is pleasantly spent.

When the young come from the egg, they are fed with unremitting care. They now issue from their wooden cave, and gently creep around its aperture. There, while the genial rays of the summer's sun give vigour to their tender bodies, and enrich their expanding plumage, the parents, faithful guardians to the last, teach them how to fly, to ascend the tree with care, and at length to provide for their own wants. Ah! where are the moments which I have passed, in the fulness of ecstasy, contemplating the progress of these amiable creatures! Alas! they are gone, those summer days of hope and joy are fled, and the clouds of life's winter are mustering in their gloomy array.

This species breeds twice in the year, in the Southern and Middle States; seldom more than once to the eastward of New York. In the State of Maine, they work at their nest late in May; in Nova Scotia not until June. Farther north I did not find them. Sometimes they are contented with the hole bored by any small Woodpecker, or even breed in the decayed hollow of a tree or fence. The eggs, five or six in number, are dull white, spotted with brown at the larger end. They are laid on detached particles of wood.

The notes of the White-breasted Nuthatch are remarkable on account of their nasal sound. Ordinarily they resemble the monosyllables *hānk*, *hānk*, *kānk*, *kānk*; but now and then in the spring, they emit a sweeter kind of chirp, whenever the sexes meet, or when they are feeding their young.

Its flight is rapid, and at times rather protracted. If crossing a river or a large field, they rise high, and proceed with a tolerably regular motion; but when passing from one tree to another, they form a gently incurvated sweep.

They alight on small branches or twigs, and now and then betake themselves to the ground to search for food.

Their bill is strong and sharp, and they not unfrequently break acorns, chestnuts, &c., by placing them in the crevices of the bark of trees, or between the splinters of a fence-rail, where they are seen hammering at them for a considerable time. The same spot is usually resorted to by the Nuthatch as soon as it has proved to be a good and convenient one. A great object seems to be to procure the larvæ entombed in the kernels of the hard fruits, insects being at all times the favourite food of these birds. They are fond of roosting in their own nest, to which I believe many return year after year, simply cleaning or deepening it for the purpose of depositing their eggs in greater security. Like others of the tribe, they hang head-downwards to sleep, especially in a state of captivity.

The young obtain their full plumage during winter. The only differences between the male and the female are, a slight inferiority of the latter as to size, and a somewhat less depth of colouring. Like the other species, they now and then alight on a top branch for an instant, in the manner used by other birds.

This lively roamer of our forests extends its rambles from the Texas, where I found it abundant, to the shores of the Columbia river, from which country specimens were brought by Mr. TOWNSEND. It is not mentioned as having been found in the Fur Countries.

WHITE-BREASTED AMERICAN NUTHATCH, *Sitta carolinensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 10.

SITTA CAROLINENSIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 96.

WHITE-BREASTED AMERICAN NUTHATCH, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 581.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, *Sitta carolinensis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 299; vol. v. p. 473.

Adult Male.

Bill straight, of the length of the head, very hard, conico-subulate, a little compressed, acute; upper mandible with the dorsal outline very slightly arched, the edges sharp towards the point; lower mandible smaller, of equal length, straight. Nostrils basal, round, half-closed by a membrane, partially covered by the frontal feathers. The general form is short and compact. Feet rather strong, the hind toe stout, and as long as the middle toe, with a strong hooked claw; the claws arched, compressed, acute.

Plumage soft, blended, with little gloss, excepting on the head. Wings rather short, broad, the second primary longest. Tail short, broad, even, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill black, pale blue at the base of the lower mandible. Iris dark brown.

Feet brown. The upper part of the head and the hind neck deep black, glossed with blue, that colour curving down on either side of the neck at its base. The back, wing, and tail-coverts, and middle feathers of the tail light greyish-blue. Quills black, edged with bluish-grey; three lateral tail feathers black, with a broad band of white near the end, the rest black, excepting the middle ones. The sides of the head, space above the eye, fore neck and breast white; abdomen and lower tail-coverts brownish-red, with white tips; under wing-coverts black.

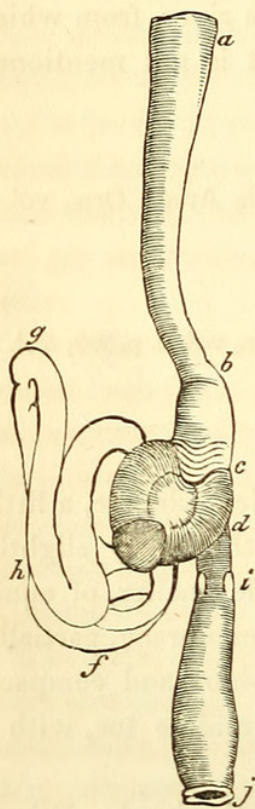
Length $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches, extent of wings 11; bill along the ridge $\frac{8}{12}$, along the gap $\frac{10}{12}$; tarsus $\frac{8}{12}$, middle toe $\frac{10}{12}$.

Adult Female.

The female resembles the male.

Common from Texas to Maine. Throughout the interior to the Columbia. Resident.

On the roof of the mouth are three anterior ridges, of which the middle is larger; both mandibles are slightly concave, the lower with a median elevated line. Tongue 6 twelfths long, emarginate and finely papillate at the base, slender, very thin, the point abrupt, and terminated by several strong



bristles. Œsophagus, *a b c*, 1 inch 10 twelfths long, funnel-shaped at the commencement, its width being there 4 twelfths, and then gradually diminishing to 2 twelfths. The stomach, *c d*, is rather large, broadly elliptical, $7\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths long, 6 twelfths broad; its lateral muscles thin; the epithelium slightly rugous. It is filled with insects and larvæ. Intestine, *e f g h*, rather short and wide, 7 inches in length, its greatest width 2 twelfths; the rectum, *i j*, 3 twelfths wide; the cloaca 4 twelfths; the cæca, *i*, 2 twelfths long, $\frac{3}{4}$ twelfth in breadth, and 10 twelfths from the extremity. The trachea is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 1 twelfth in breadth; its rings feeble, 75 in number. The sterno-tracheal muscles very slender; the inferior laryngeal form on each side a small knob, inserted into the last half ring in its whole extent. Bronchial half rings about 12. There is on each side an elongated salivary gland, about $\frac{3}{4}$ twelfth in breadth. The hyoid bones are not unusually elongated. In the form of the tongue the Nuthatches resemble the Titmice.



White-breasted Nuthatch.

1. Male. 2 & 3. Female



Audubon, John James. 1842. "The White-Breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta carolinensis*, Linn. [Pl. 247]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 175–178. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319360>.

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