THE RED-BELLIED NUTHATCH.

†*SITTA CANADENSIS*, *Linn.*

PLATE CCXLVIII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

While the Brown-headed Nuthatch perambulates the southern districts, the Red-bellied species spends its time in the eastern and northern States, the two dividing the country, as it were, nearly equally between them. The southern limits of this little bird seldom extend farther than Maryland. It is more plentiful in Pennsylvania, particularly in the mountainous parts of that State, and becomes still more abundant as you proceed towards Maine and Nova Scotia, where the greater number spend even the coldest winters. Yet I saw none in Newfoundland, and only one in Labrador, which had probably been blown thither by a gale.

I found it building its nest near Eastport in Maine, on the 19th of May, before the Blue-bird had made its appearance there, and while much ice still remained on the northern exposures. The nest is dug in a low dead stump, seldom more than four feet from the ground, both the male and the female working by turns, until they have got to the depth of about fourteen inches. The eggs, four in number, are small, and of a white colour, tinged with a deep blush, and sprinkled with reddish dots. They raise, I believe, only one brood in the season.

The activity and industry of this little creature are admirable. With the quickness of thought it moves up and down the branches of trees, assuming various positions, examining every hole or cranny in the bark, frequently rapping against it with its bill, and detaching now and then small fragments, in order to get at the insects or larvæ concealed beneath. It searches for its food among the leaves of the tallest pines, along the fences, and on the fallen logs, ever busy, petulant, and noisy, probably never resting except during the night, when, like other species of the tribe, it attaches itself by the feet to the bark, and sleeps head downwards. Like other birds of this genus also, it is careless of man, although it never suffers him to form too close an acquaintance. During the breeding season, they move in pairs, and manifest a strong mutual attachment. Their almost incessant *hink, hink, hink-hink*, is heard at every hop they take, but less loudly sounded than the notes of

the Brown-headed species, the male being more prodigal of noise than the female, which, however, now and then answers to his call.

It is pleasant to see such a pair leading their offspring through the tops of the tall trees of our great pine forests of the north, accompanied by a train of small Woodpeckers and Creepers, all bent on the same object, that of procuring food. Gaily they move from tree to tree, each emitting its peculiar note, and all evincing the greatest sociality. If danger is apparent, dead silence takes place, but as soon as their fear is removed, they become as clamorous and lively as before.

The flight of the Red-bellied Nuthatch is seldom protracted farther than from tree to tree; and in this manner a certain number go south at the approach of winter, some at this season venturing as far as South Carolina, although they are never seen in the maritime districts of that State. They are plentiful during summer in the Pocano mountains of Pennsylvania, and many breed there. Those which remain in our northern States during winter, now and then shew themselves in the orchards and farm-yards, alighting about the eaves of the out-houses, to seek for food.

While at sea, on one of my migrations from Europe to America, and at a distance of 300 miles from land, I saw one of these birds come on board one evening, during a severe gale. It alighted on the rigging, and proceeded at once to search for food in its usual manner. It was caught and brought to me; but although I gave it flies and some bits of cheese, it refused to touch them, generally sitting in the bottom of the cage with its head under its wing, and it died in the course of the night. On opening it, I could not perceive a particle of food in its stomach, so that its sudden death was probably occasioned by inanition and fatigue.

Although this species was not seen by Dr. RICHARDSON in the Fur Countries, it is an inhabitant of the Columbia river district, where it was found by Mr. TOWNSEND.

Male, $4\frac{1}{2}$, 8.

From Maryland to Nova Scotia. Common. One seen in Labrador. Columbia river. Resident.

RED-BELLIED NUTHATCH, *Sitta canadensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 40.

SITTA CANADENSIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 96.

RED-BELLIED NUTHATCH, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 583.

RED-BELLIED NUTHATCH, *Sitta canadensis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 24; vol. v. p. 474.

Adult Male.

Bill straight, of moderate length, very hard, conico-subulate, a little compressed, more or less wedge-shaped at the tip; 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, with a strong hooked claw; the claws arched, compressed, acute.

Plumage soft, blended, with little gloss. Wings rather short, broad, the second and third primaries longest. Tail short, broad, even, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill black. Iris brown. Feet and claws flesh-coloured, tinged with yellowish-green. The general colour of the plumage above is a light leaden-grey, beneath pale brownish-red. The top of the head is bluish-black. A long white line passes over the eye; a broader line of black from the bill to the eye, and beyond it down the neck; the throat white. Primary quills dusky, margined with greyish-blue; tail-feathers blackish, the two middle ones of the general colour of the back; the lateral ones white towards the end.

Length $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches; extent of wings 8; bill along the ridge $\frac{5}{12}$; gap-line $\frac{7}{12}$.
Adult Female.

There is scarcely any perceptible external difference between the sexes, the lower parts of the female being merely a little paler, and the black of the head not so deep.

THE BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH.

+*SITTA PUSILLA*, *Lath.*

PLATE CCXLIX.—MALE AND FEMALE.

Actively and most diligently employed is this little rover ever found in our pine woodlands of the Southern Districts, where it resides all the year, and beyond which it seldom extends, few being ever seen to the eastward of Maryland. Those large tracts of sandy soil that occupy the greater portion of the Floridas, Georgia, and the Carolinas, appear to suit its habits best. It is rather rare in Louisiana, and none go so far as Kentucky. It is the smallest species of Nuthatch as yet found in the United States. Its notes

Red-bellied Nuthatch.

1. Male 2. Female.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Red-Bellied Nuthatch, *Sitta canadensis*, Linn. [Pl. 248]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 179–181. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319361>.

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