GENUS I.—COCCYZUS, *Vieill.* AMERICAN CUCKOO.

Bill of moderate length, rather slender, somewhat arched, much compressed, acute; upper mandible with the dorsal line arched, the ridge rounded, the sides erect toward the end, the edges thin, direct, the tip narrow, decurved; lower mandible with the angle of moderate length, rather wider, the dorsal line decurved toward the end, the sides nearly erect, the edges decurved, the tip narrow; the nostrils small, oblong, operculate. Eyelids bare, except at the margin. Head rather small; neck of moderate length; body slender. Feet rather short; tarsus compressed, rather stout, with seven very broad scutella; toes slender, compressed, anterior united at the base, first small. Claws moderate, arched, compressed, laterally grooved, acute. Plumage soft and blended, somewhat compact on the back. Wings of moderate length, with the first quill very short, the third and fourth longest. Tail very long, cuneate or graduated.

THE YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO.

+COCCYZUS AMERICANUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCLXXV.—MALE AND FEMALE.

Were I inclined, like many persons who write on Natural History, to criticise the figures given by other students, I should find enough to be censured; but as my object is simply to communicate the result of studies to which I have devoted the greater part of my life, I shall content myself with merely recommending to those intent on the advancement of that most interesting science, to bestow a little more care on their representations of the bills, legs and feet of the species which they bring into notice, and let it be seen that they indeed borrow from nature.

From Nature!—How often are these words used, when at a glance he who

has seen the perfect and beautiful forms of birds, quadrupeds or other objects, as they have come from the hand of Nature, discovers that the representation is not that of *living* Nature! But I am deviating from the track which I wish to follow, my desire being simply to give you an opportunity, good reader, of judging for yourself as to the truth of my delineations, and to present you with the results of my observations made in those very woods where the subjects have been found and depicted.

The flight of the bird now before you is rapid, silent, and horizontal, as it moves from one tree to another, or across a field or river, and is generally continued amongst the branches of the trees in our woods. When making its way among the branches, it occasionally inclines the body to either side, so as alternately to shew its whole upper or under parts. During its southward migration, it flies high in the air, and in such loose flocks that the birds might seem to follow each other, instead of their keeping company together. On the other hand, early in March, the greater number enter our southern boundaries singly, the males arriving first, and the females a few weeks after. They do not fly in a continued line, but in a broad front, as, while travelling with great rapidity in a steamboat, so as to include a range of a hundred miles in one day, I have observed this Cuckoo crossing the Mississippi at many different points on the same day. At this season, they resort to the deepest shades of the forests, and intimate their presence by the frequent repetition of their dull and unmusical notes, which are not unlike those of the young bull-frog. These notes may be represented by the word *cow, cow*, repeated eight or ten times with increasing rapidity. In fact, from the resemblance of its notes to that word, this Cuckoo is named *Cowbird* in nearly every part of the Union. The Dutch farmers of Pennsylvania know it better by the name of *Rain Crow*, and in Louisiana the French settlers call it *Coucou*.

It robs smaller birds of their eggs, which it sucks on all occasions, and is cowardly and shy, without being vigilant. On this latter account, it often falls a prey to several species of Hawks, of which the Pigeon Hawk (*Falco columbarius*) may be considered as its most dangerous enemy. It prefers the Southern States for its residence, and when very mild winters occur in Louisiana, some individuals remain there, not finding it necessary to go farther south.

This bird is not abundant anywhere, and yet is found very far north. I have met with it in all the low grounds and damp places in Massachusetts, along the line of Upper Canada, pretty high on the Mississippi and Arkansas, and in every state between these boundary lines. Its appearance in the State of New York seldom takes place before the beginning of May, and at Green Bay not until the middle of that month. A pair here and there seem

to appropriate certain tracts to themselves, where they rear their young in the midst of peace and plenty. They feed on insects, such as caterpillars and butterflies, as well as on berries of many kinds, evincing a special predilection for the mulberry. In autumn they eat many grapes, and I have seen them supporting themselves by a momentary motion of their wings opposite a bunch, as if selecting the ripest, when they would seize it and return to a branch, repeating their visits in this manner until satiated. They now and then descend to the ground, to pick up a wood-snail or a beetle. They are extremely awkward at walking, and move in an ambling manner, or leap along sidewise, for which the shortness of their legs is ample excuse. They are seldom seen perched conspicuously on a twig, but on the contrary are generally to be found amongst the thickest boughs and foliage, where they emit their notes until late in autumn, at which time they discontinue them.

The nest is simple, flat, composed of a few dry sticks and grass, formed much like that of the Common Dove, and, like it, fastened to an horizontal branch, often within the reach of man, who seldom disturbs it. It makes no particular selection as to situation or the nature of the tree, but settles any where indiscriminately. The eggs are four or five, of a rather elongated oval form, and bright green colour. They rear only one brood in a season, unless the eggs are removed or destroyed. The young are principally fed with insects during the first weeks. Towards autumn they become very fat, and are fit for being eaten, although few persons, excepting the Creoles of Louisiana, shoot them for the table.

Whilst at Charleston in South Carolina, in the early part of June, 1837, I was invited by JAMES SMITH RHETT, Esq., residing in the suburbs of that city, to visit his grounds for the purpose of viewing the nest of this bird. This I did in company with my friend Dr. SAMUEL WILSON, and we found ourselves highly gratified, as we were enabled to make the following observations:—

A nest, which was placed near the centre of a tree of moderate size, was reached by a son of the gentleman on whose ground we were. One of the old birds, which was sitting upon it, left its situation only when within a few inches of the climber's hand, and silently glided off to another tree close by. Two young Cuckoos nearly able to fly scrambled off from their tene-ment among the branches of the tree, and were caught by us after awhile. The nest was taken, and carefully handed to me. It still contained three young Cuckoos, all of different sizes, the smallest apparently just hatched, the next in size probably several days old, while the largest, covered with pin-feathers, would have been able to leave the nest in about a week. There were also in the nest two eggs, one containing a chick, the other fresh or lately laid. The two young birds which escaped from the nest, clung so

firmly to the branches by their feet, that our attempts to dislodge them were of no avail, and we were obliged to reach them with the hand. On now looking at all these young birds, our surprise was indeed great, as no two of them were of the same size, which clearly shewed that they had been hatched at different periods, and I should suppose the largest to have been fully three weeks older than any of the rest. Mr. RHETT assured us that he had observed the same in another nest placed in a tree within a few paces of his house, and which he also shewed to us. He stated that *eleven* young Cuckoos had been successively hatched and reared in it, by the same pair of old birds, in one season, and that young birds and eggs were to be seen in it at the same time for many weeks in succession.

On thinking since of this strange fact, I have felt most anxious to discover how many eggs the Cuckoo of Europe drops in one season. If it, as I suspect, produces, as our bird does, not less than eight or ten, or what may be called the amount of *two* broods, in a season, this circumstance would connect the two species in a still more intimate manner than theoretical writers have supposed them to be allied. And if our Cow-pen-bird also drops eight or ten eggs in a season, which she probably does, that number might be considered as the amount of two broods, which the Red-winged Starling usually produces.

I requested Mr. RHETT to write me a letter on the subject, which he did, but, to my great mortification, I am unable to find it. Having mentioned the above facts to my friend Dr. T. M. BREWER, and desired him to pay particular attention to these birds while breeding, he has sent me the following note.

"The fact which you intimated to me last July I have myself observed. The female evidently commences incubation immediately after laying her first egg. Thus I have found in the nest of both species of our Cuckoos one egg quite fresh, while in another the chick will be just bursting the shell; and again I have found an egg just about to be hatched while others are already so, and some of the young even about to fly. These species are not uncommon in Massachusetts, where both breed; and both are much more numerous some years than others."

I found the Yellow-billed Cuckoo plentiful and breeding in the Texas; and it is met with, on the other hand, in Nova Scotia, and even in Labrador, where I saw a few. It has been observed on the Columbia river by Mr. TOWNSEND. No mention is made of it in the Fauna Boreali-Americana. Many spend the winter in the most southern portions of the Floridas.

The eggs measure one inch three and a half eighths in length, seven and a quarter eighths in breadth, and are, as already described, of a uniform greenish-blue colour. They are longer, as well as lighter in their general

colour, than those of the Black-billed Cuckoo. I must not omit to say, that during calm and pleasant nights, the well known notes of this bird frequently fall on the ear of him who may be reposing in his lonely camp, or on that of him who rests on his downy couch. I have often enjoyed this monotonous music in the Floridas, during the winter which I spent there.

The branch, among the foliage of which you see the male and female winging their way, is one of the *papaw*, a tree of small size, seldom more than from twenty to thirty feet in height, with a diameter of from three to seven inches. It is found growing in all rich grounds, to which it is peculiar, from the southern line of our States to central Pennsylvania, seldom farther eastward, here and there only along the alluvial shores of the Ohio and Mississippi. In all other places of like nature you may meet with groves of *papaw* trees, covering an acre or more of ground. The fruit, which is represented in the plate, consists of a pulpy and insipid substance, within which are found several large, hard, and glossy seeds. The rind is extremely thin. The wood is light, soft, brittle, and almost useless. The bark, which is smooth, may be torn off from the foot of the tree to the very top, and is frequently used for making ropes, after it has been steeped in water sufficiently to detach the outer part, when the fibres are obtained, which, when twisted, are found to be nearly as tough and durable as hemp. The numerous islands of the Ohio and all the other western rivers are generally well stocked with this tree.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, *Cuculus carolinensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iv. p. 13.

COCCYZUS AMERICANUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 42.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, *Coccyzus americanus*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 551.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, *Coccyzus americanus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 18; vol. v. p. 520.

Male, $12\frac{1}{2}$, 16. Female, $11\frac{3}{4}$, $15\frac{1}{2}$.

Breeds from Texas to Nova Scotia, and throughout the interior to the eastern bar of the Rocky Mountains. Common. Many spend the winter in the Floridas.

Adult Male.

Bill as long as the head, compressed, slightly arched, acute, scarcely more robust than in many *Sylvia*; upper mandible carinated above, its margins acute and entire; lower mandible carinated beneath, acute. Nostrils basal, lateral, linear-elliptical, half closed by a membrane. Feet short; tarsus scutellate before and behind; toes two before, separated; two behind, one of which is versatile, the sole flat; claws slender, compressed, arched.

Plumage blended, slightly glossed. Wings long, the first quill short, the

long, at its commencement 6 twelfths in width, gradually diminishing to 4 twelfths; the proventriculus, *b c*, 5 twelfths in breadth. The stomach, *c d e*, very large, broadly elliptical, compressed, 1 inch 2 twelfths long, 1 inch in breadth, and when distended seeming to occupy almost the whole cavity of the abdomen; in which respect, as well as in its structure, it is precisely similar to *Cuculuscanorus*; its walls are extremely thin, its muscular coat being formed of a single series of small fasciculi. It is turgid with the remains of insects, among which are a great quantity of hairs, some of them adhering to, or thrust into the inner coat, which is soft, destitute of rugæ, and of a bright red colour. The proventricular glands are large, cylindrical, $1\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths in length and about $\frac{1}{4}$ twelfth in breadth, forming a belt about 9 twelfths in breadth. The pylorus is extremely small, with a thickened margin. The intestine, *e f g h j*, is $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, $3\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths in width, diminishing to $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. The cœca, *i i*, 1 inch 8 twelfths long, $3\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in width for 1 inch 5 twelfths, its extremity obtuse. Cloaca, *j*, oblong, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in width.

Trachea $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, narrow, roundish, flattened toward the lower part, of 60 rings, with five dimidiate rings. The lateral muscles extremely slender, as are the sterno-tracheal. There is one pair only of very slender inferior laryngeal muscles. Bronchi of about 12 half rings.

THE PAPAW TREE.

PORCELIA TRILOBA, *Pursh*, Flor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 383.—ANONA TRILOBA, *Willd.*, Sp. Pl., vol. ii. p. 1267. *Mich.*, Arbr. Forest. de l'Amer. Sept., vol. iii. p. 162, pl. 9.—POLYANDRIA POLYGYNIA, *Linn.*—ANONÆ, *Juss.*

Leaves obovato-cuneate, acuminate, smoothish; outer petals orbiculate; fruits oblong, large, and fleshy. The leaves are from six to ten inches long; the flowers of a rich dark purple.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

1. Male 2. Female.
Papaw Tree.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Yellow-Billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus americanus*, Linn. [Pl. 275]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 293–299. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319390>.

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