

slightly arched, much compressed, tapering to a very acute point. Plumage blended; form and wings of moderate length, broad, convex, with the second and third quills longest; tail very short, much rounded, of twelve weak feathers; lower coverts almost as long.

PURPLE GALLINULE.

†GALLINULA MARTINICA, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCIII.—MALE.

Reader, although you may think it strange, I candidly assure you that I have experienced a thousand times more pleasure while looking at the Purple Gallinule flirting its tail while gaily moving over the broad leaves of the water-lily, than I have ever done while silently sitting in the corner of a crowded apartment, gazing on the flutterings of gaudy fans and the wavings of flowing plumes. Would that I were once more extended on some green grassy couch, in my native Louisiana, or that I lay concealed under some beautiful tree, overhanging the dark bayou, on whose waters the bird of beauty is wont to display its graceful movements, and the rich hues of its glossy plumage! Methinks I now see the charming creature gliding sylph-like over the leaves that cover the lake, with the aid of her lengthened toes, so admirably adapted for the purpose, and seeking the mate, who, devotedly attached as he is, has absented himself, perhaps in search of some secluded spot in which to place their nest. Now he comes, gracefully dividing the waters of the tranquil pool, his frontal crest glowing with the brightest azure. Look at his wings, how elegantly they are spread and obliquely raised; see how his expanded tail strikes the water; and mark the movements of his head, which is alternately thrown backward and forward, as if he were congratulating his mate on their happy meeting. Now both birds walk along clinging to the stems and blades, their voices clearly disclosing their mutual feelings of delight, and they retire to some concealed place on the nearest shore, where we lose sight of them for a time.

Now, side by side, they look for the most secure spot among the tall rushes that border the lake, and there they will soon form a nest, removed



Purple Gallinule

Adult Male. Spring Plumage

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

Engraved & Colored by J. T. Bowen Phila.

alike from danger to be dreaded from the inhabitants of the land as of the water. On the thick mass of withered leaves are deposited the precious eggs, from which in time emerge the dusky younglings, that presently betake themselves to the water, over which they wander, guided by their affectionate parent, until it becomes expedient for the party to disperse.

The Purple Gallinule is a constant resident in the United States, although peculiar to our southern districts, where I have met with it at all seasons. It is in the Floridas, the lower parts of Alabama, and among the broad marshes bordering the Gulf of Mexico, in Lower Louisiana, that I have observed its habits. Beyond the Carolinas eastward, it is only met with as an accidental straggler. It never, I believe, ascends the Mississippi beyond Memphis, where indeed it is but rarely seen; but between Natchez and the mouths of the great river, it is abundant on all the retired bayous and small lakes. The southern portions of Georgia are also furnished with it; but in South Carolina it is rare. Proceeding south-westward along the Gulf of Mexico, I have found it as far as Texas, where it breeds, as well as in Louisiana, where I observed it coming from the south in May, 1837.

Having studied the habits of this bird under every advantage in Louisiana, and especially in the neighbourhood of New Orleans, and the mouths of the Mississippi, I will now, good reader, place before you the results of my observation. In the summer months, the Purple Gallinules remove with their broods to the prairies or large savannahs bordering the bayous or lakes on which they have bred, and remain in those places, which are generally covered with thick and tall grass, until the beginning of September, when the vegetation having been dried up by the intense heat and drought, neither food nor sufficient concealment can be obtained. The young birds usually abandon these plains first, and while the colour of their plumage is still green, instead of purplish-blue, which tint, however, is assumed before the return of spring. During all this while, its notes are as frequently heard as during the breeding season. They resemble the delicate whistling sounds of the Blue-winged Teal during its residence with us. At this season also its flesh is best, although it never equals that of the Fresh-water Marsh-hen, *Rallus elegans*, or of the Sora Rail, *Rallus carolinus*.

On the approach of winter, all the Purple Gallinules leave the savannahs, and betake themselves to the immediate vicinity of ponds, bayous, or rivers, where through experience they become shy, vigilant, and cunning. They seldom remove from one place to another, or travel at all, unless by night, although in sequestered parts they feed both on land and on the water by day.

The Purple Gallinule breeds at a remarkably early period of the year. I have found young birds in their jetty down clothing in February, and they

have been observed in the same month by the keepers of the lighthouse at the south-west Pass of the Mississippi, at Key West, and in other places. The parent birds are sometimes so very intent on saving their young, as to suffer themselves to be caught. At this period their calls are almost incessantly heard during the whole night, and are elicited during the day by any musical or remarkable noise. The nest is generally placed among a kind of rushes that are green at all seasons, round, very pithy, rarely more than five feet high, and grow more along the margins of ponds than in the water itself. The birds gather many of them, and fasten them at the height of two or three feet, and there the nest is placed. It is composed of the most delicate rushes, whether green or withered, and is quite as substantial as that of the Common Gallinule, flattish, having an internal diameter of eight or ten inches, while the entire breadth is about fifteen. The eggs, which are from five to seven, rarely more, are very similar to those of the Common Gallinule, being of a light greyish-yellow, spotted with blackish-brown. The young are at first quite black, and covered with down. They are fully fledged by the first of June, when, as I have said, they and their parents remove to the wet savannahs in the neighbourhood.

The jerking motions of the tail of this bird, whenever it is disturbed, or attracted by any remarkable object, are very quick, and so often repeated as to have a curious appearance. It runs with great speed, and dives with equal address, often moving off under water with nothing but the bill above. The lightness and ease with which it walks on the floating plants are surprising, for in proceeding they scarcely produce any perceptible disturbance of the water. When swimming in full security, they move buoyantly and gracefully, throwing the head forward at every propelling motion of the feet. The flight of this species is less swift than that of the Common Gallinule, or of the Rails, unless when it is travelling far, when it flies high, and advances in a direct course by continued flappings; but when it is in its breeding or feeding grounds, its flight is slow and short, seldom exceeding thirty or forty yards, and with the legs hanging down; and it alights among the herbage with its wings spread upwards in the manner of the Rails. It often alights on the low branches of trees and bushes growing over the water, and walks lightly and gracefully over them.

It is seldom that more than one Purple Gallinule is shot at a time, unless in the beginning of the love-season, when the male and female are apt to swim or walk close together. The male at this period is said to be able to inflate the frontal plate while strutting, but I have never been fortunate enough to observe this.

The Purple Gallinule not unfrequently alights on ships at sea. While at the Island of Galveston, on the 26th of April, I was offered several live

individuals by the officers of the Boston frigate, which they had caught on board. My friend JOHN BACHMAN once received three specimens that had been caught three hundred miles from land, one of them having come through the cabin window. He also obtained from the Hon. Mr. POINSET a fine specimen caught on board, on the Santee river, in South Carolina, in May. It is easily kept alive if fed with bread soaked in milk; and on this food I have known several that remained in good health for years. In Louisiana, where it is called *Rale Bleu*, its flesh is not held in much estimation, but is used by the negroes for making gombo.

My friend BACHMAN considers this species as rather scarce in South Carolina and Georgia, but states that it breeds there, as he has occasionally observed pairs on the head waters or preserves of rice plantations during summer, but never met with any in winter. The extreme limit of its range eastward is the neighbourhood of Boston, where a few individuals have been procured.

PURPLE GALLINULE, *Gallinula Porphyrio*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. ix. p. 67.

GALLINULA MARTINICA, Bonap. Syn., p. 336.

PURPLE GALLINULE, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 221.

PURPLE GALLINULE, *Gallinula martinica*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iv. p. 37.

Male, $13\frac{1}{2}$, $21\frac{1}{2}$.

Breeds and resides from Texas to South Carolina. Stragglers are seen as far as Massachusetts. Up the Mississippi to Memphis. Rather common in Louisiana and Florida.

Frontal plate blue; bill carmine, tipped with yellow; head, fore part of neck, and breast, purplish-blue; abdomen and tibial feathers dusky; sides and lower wing-coverts green; lower tail-coverts white; upper parts olivaceous-green; sides of neck, and outer part of wings, greenish-blue.

Weight of one individual $7\frac{1}{2}$ oz., of another $8\frac{1}{2}$, both males; of a fourth 7 oz.; of a fifth $5\frac{1}{2}$; and of a sixth only $4\frac{1}{2}$.

The female is somewhat smaller, but similar to the male, the frontal plate is less extended, and the tints of the plumage a little less vivid.

The young are at first covered with black down. When fledged they are olivaceous on the upper parts, dull purple beneath; the bill dull green. After the first moult, the bill is light carmine, greenish-yellow at the end, the head dark purple; the plumage coloured as above described, but less brilliant, the tarsi and toes greenish-yellow.

In a male bird the tongue is 10 twelfths of an inch long, sagittate at the base, with conical papillæ, of which the outer are larger, slightly concave above, horny towards the end, which is thin, rather obtuse, and lacerated. On the middle line of the roof of the mouth anteriorly is a row of large

blunt papillæ, behind which are two rows; aperture of posterior nares linear. Œsophagus 7 inches long, of moderate width, its greatest diameter, at the lower part of the neck, where it is a little dilated, 8 twelfths. Proventriculus $1\frac{2}{12}$ long; its glandules $1\frac{1}{12}$ long. Stomach a large and powerful gizzard, broadly elliptical, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $1\frac{5}{12}$ broad, its lateral muscles large, the tendons covering nearly their whole surface, the left muscles $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, the right $\frac{5}{12}$, the cuticular lining moderately rugous. Intestine 21 inches long, from $\frac{5}{12}$ to $\frac{3}{12}$ in diameter. Rectum $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches; cœca 2, their diameter $\frac{3}{12}$ towards the end.

Trachea, moderately extended, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, its greatest breadth $3\frac{1}{12}$, its least $1\frac{1}{12}$. Its rings 130, very slender, unossified, collapsed, and owing to their narrowness in the middle line before and behind, seeming as if broken there; bronchi with 15 half-rings. The contractor muscles moderate, the sterno-tracheal slender; a pair of muscles on the lower larynx, from the lower rings of the trachea to the membrane over the first bronchial ring.

In the mouth was a small frog, in the pharynx two, in the Œsophagus two more, a large piece of root, numerous fragments of insects, and a leach; the frogs $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. In the gizzard were seeds, and fragments of white fleshy roots.

THE COMMON GALLINULE.

+GALLINULA CHLOROPUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCIV.—MALE.

The two species of Gallinule which occur in the United States are confined within a comparatively small range in that extensive country, the southern portions of which appear to suit them better, at all seasons of the year, than the other districts. The Common Gallinule is extremely abundant during winter along the rivers, fresh-water creeks, lagoons, ponds and lakes between the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern shores of the Floridas, while in spring and summer a good number migrate eastward into the Carolinas, and now and then a few stragglers may be seen on the fresh waters of the Middle Districts, beyond which none, to my knowledge, have



Purple Gallinule

Adult Male. Spring Plumage

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

Engraved & Colored by J. T. Bowen Phil.



Audubon, John James. 1842. "Purple Gallinule, *Gallinula martinica*. Linn. [Pl. 303]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 5, 128–132. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319417>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/124982>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319417>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/319417>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

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>.