Red-breasted Kingbird

1. Spring Plumage & Winter

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

Painted & Col'd by J. T. Bowen, Phila.

as that represented in my plate, and few, even of the younger birds, were without some of the markings peculiar to the summer dress. Their numbers were exceedingly great, and continued without diminution until we reached Galveston Bay in Texas, on the 26th of the same month. How far they proceed beyond that place to spend the winter I am unable to say; but their range over North America is known to be very extensive, as they have been found on the Columbia river on the western coast, on the borders of the great northern lakes, and over the whole extent of the Fur Countries, from the time of their appearance in spring until that of their return southward in autumn.

Although much more abundant along the coast, and in its vicinity, the Red-breasted Snipe is not uncommon in many parts of the interior, especially in autumn, and I have procured many individuals along the muddy margins of lakes, more than three hundred miles in a direct line from the sea. Its migratory movements are performed with uncommon celerity, as many are observed along the coast of New Jersey early in April, and afterwards on the borders of the arctic sea, in time to rear young, and return to our Eastern and Middle Districts before the end of August.

This bird exhibits at times a manner of feeding which appeared to me singular, and which I repeatedly witnessed while at Grande Terre in Louisiana. While watching their manner of walking and wading along sand-bars and muddy flats, I saw that as long as the water was not deeper than the length of their bills, they probed the ground beneath them precisely in the manner of the American Snipe, *Scolopax Wilsoni*; but when the water reached their bodies, they immersed the head and a portion of the neck, and remained thus sufficiently long to satisfy me that, while in this position, they probed several spots before raising their head to breathe. On such grounds as are yet soft, although not covered with water, they bore holes as deep as the soil will admit, and this with surprising rapidity, occupying but a few moments in one spot, and probing as they advance. I have watched some dozens at this work for half an hour at a time, when I was completely concealed from their view. Godwits, which are also borers, probe the mud or moist earth often in an oblique direction, whilst the Woodcock, the Common Snipe, and the present species, thrust in their bills perpendicularly. The latter bird also seizes many sorts of insects, and at times small fry, as well as the seeds of plants that have dropped into the water. Dr. RICHARDSON informs us that "individuals killed on the Saskatchewan plains had the crops filled with leeches and fragments of coleoptera."

The flight of this bird is rapid, strong, and remarkably well-sustained. When rising in large numbers, which they usually do simultaneously, they

crowd together, are apt to launch upwards in the air for awhile, and after performing several evolutions in contrary directions, glide towards the ground, and wend their way close to it, until finding a suitable place, they alight in a very compact body, and stand for a moment. Sometimes, as if alarmed, they recommence their meandering flight, and after awhile return to the same spot, alighting in the same manner. Then is the time when the gunner may carry havoc amongst them; but in two or three minutes they separate and search for food, when you must either put them up to have a good shot, or wait the arrival of another flock at the same place, which often happens, for these birds seldom suffer any of their species to pass without sending them a note of invitation. It is not at all uncommon to shoot twenty or thirty of them at once. I have been present when 127 were killed by discharging three barrels, and have heard of many dozens having been procured at a shot. When wounded and brought to the water, they try in vain to dive, and on reaching the nearest part of the shore, they usually run a few steps and squat among the grass, when it becomes difficult to find them. Those which have escaped unhurt often remain looking upon their dead companions, sometimes waiting until shot at a second time. When they are fat, they afford good eating, but their flesh is at no time so savoury as that of the common American Snipe.

The cry of this species when on wing is a single and rather mellow *weet*. When on the ground I have heard them emit a continued guttural rolling sound, such as is on certain occasions given out by the species last mentioned. Their call-note resembles the soft and pleasing sound of a whistle; but I have never heard them emit it while travelling. Nothing is known respecting their breeding, and yet there can be little doubt that many of them must rear young within the limits of the Union.

By the Creoles of Louisiana the Red-breasted Snipe is named "Becassine de Mer," as well as "Carouk." In South Carolina it is more abundant in the autumnal months than in spring, when I should think they fly directly across from the Floridas toward Cape Hatteras, as my friend Dr. BACHMAN informs me that he never saw one of them in spring in the vicinity of Charleston.

RED-BREASTED SNIPE, *Scolopax noveboracensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 48.

SCOLOPAX GRISEA, Bonap. Syn., p. 330.

SCOLOPAX NOVEBORACENSIS, *New York Godwit*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 398.

BROWN OR RED-BREASTED SNIPE, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 181.

RED-BREASTED SNIPE, *Scolopax noveboracensis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iv. p. 285.

Adult, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$.

Passes in immense numbers from Texas eastward and northward to the highest latitudes, where it breeds, and returns in autumn. Occasionally seen in groups through the interior. Columbia river.

Adult Male in summer.

Bill twice as long as the head, subulate, straight, compressed for more than half its length, depressed towards the end. Upper mandible with the dorsal line declinate at the base, then straight, at the end slightly arched, that part being considerably enlarged, the ridge convex, towards the end flattened, the sides with a narrow groove extending to near the tip, the edges soft and obtuse or flattened, the tip narrowed but blunt. Nostrils basal, linear, very small. Lower mandible with the angle extremely long and narrow, the sides nearly erect, with a longitudinal groove, the edges flattened and directly meeting those of the upper mandible, the extremity enlarged, the tip contracted and rather blunt.

Head rather small, oblong, narrowed anteriorly, the forehead elevated and rounded. Neck rather short. Body rather full. Legs of moderate length, slender; tibia bare below, scutellate before and behind; tarsus with numerous scutella before, smaller ones behind, and reticulated sides; toes very slender, free, with numerous scutella above, flattened and slightly marginate beneath; first very small and elevated, third with its claw scarcely so long as the tarsus, lateral toes nearly equal, the outer connected with the middle by a web. Claws small, slightly arched, compressed, rather acute.

Plumage very soft, blended, rather dense, on the fore part of the head very short. Wings long, narrow, pointed; primaries rather broad, tapering to an obtuse point, the first longest, the rest rapidly graduated; secondaries broad, obliquely terminated, with the inner web projecting beyond the outer; the inner much elongated, one of them reaching to half an inch of the tip of the wing when it is closed. Tail moderate, nearly even, the middle feathers a little longer, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill dark olive. Iris reddish-hazel. Feet light yellowish-olive, claws black. Upper parts brownish-black, variegated with light brownish-red, the feathers being margined and the scapulars obliquely barred with that colour. Hind part of back, upper tail-coverts and tail-feathers light reddish-buff, obliquely barred with black, the bars on the tail seven or eight, and its tip white. Wing-coverts and secondaries greyish-brown, margined with greyish-white; the secondary coverts tipped with white, the quills tipped and obliquely banded with the same; alula, primary coverts and quills brownish-black, the shaft of the first quill white. From the base of the bill to the eye, and surrounding it, a dull reddish-white band; loreal space dusky. All the lower parts dull orange-red, with streaks and spots of black, more numerous along the sides, and on the tail-coverts.

Length to end of tail $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches, to end of wings 10, to end of claws $11\frac{1}{2}$; extent of wings $18\frac{1}{8}$; wing from flexure $6\frac{1}{8}$; tail $2\frac{1}{2}$; bill along the ridge $2\frac{1}{8}$; along the edge of lower mandible $2\frac{1}{8}$; bare part of tibia $\frac{1}{2}$; tarsus $1\frac{2}{8}$; middle toe and claw $1\frac{1}{8}$; hind toe and claw $\frac{3}{8}$; inner toe and claw 1; outer toe and claw $\frac{7}{8}$. Weight $3\frac{1}{4}$ oz.

Adult in winter.

The bill, iris, and feet as in summer. Upper part of head and hind neck dusky grey, with which the feathers of the fore part of the back, scapulars and wing-coverts are margined, their central parts being brownish-black. A white band from the bill over the eye; margins of eyelids also white. Hind part of back and tail barred with dusky as in summer. Quills as in summer, the inner marked with grey in place of brownish-red. Loral space, cheeks, and sides of the neck, pale grey; throat and lower parts white; the sides, axillary feathers, and lower tail-feathers, barred with dusky; lower wing-coverts dusky, edged with white, and having a central streak of the same. Individuals exhibit great differences in the length of the bills and tarsi.

On the upper mandible internally are three series of minute papillæ, which become larger on the palate. While the upper mandible is flat beneath, the lower is deeply concave, and its crura elastic and capable of being separated near the base to the distance of three-fourths of an inch. The tongue, which is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, and of a slender form, carinate beneath, with the tip pointed, lies in the deep hollow of the lower mandible, and being deeply concave above, leaves a vacant space, by which, when the bill is immersed in the mud and the tips separated, the food passes along. The œsophagus is $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter, and nearly uniform. The proventriculus, *a, b, c*, is bulbiform, its diameter 6 twelfths. The stomach, *c, d, e, f*, is an

oblong gizzard of moderate strength, with the lateral and inferior muscles decided, the tendons large, its length 1 inch, its breadth 8 twelfths. The epithelium is dense, tough, with numerous longitudinal rugæ, and of a reddish colour. The contents of the stomach were very small hard hemispherical seeds and vegetable fibres. The intestine, *f, g, h*, $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, its diameter 3 twelfths in its upper part; the cœca $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, and from 1 to 2 twelfths in diameter, with the extremity obtuse.

The trachea is wide, flattened, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $2\frac{3}{4}$ twelfths broad at the top, gradually diminishing to 2 twelfths; the rings about 130. The contractor muscles are very thin, the sterno-tracheal slender; and there is a pair of inferior laryngeal. The bronchial half rings are about 25.

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