TURDUS MUSICUS, Linn

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Thrush.

Turdus musicus, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 79.

—— *philomelos*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 382.

Sylvia musica, Savi, Orn. Tosc., tom. i. p. 211.

Merula musica, Selb. Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 162.

ON no one of our native birds have more poetical effusions been written than the Thrush. Nor is this surprising, for it is one of the earliest of the spring birds to serenade us in our gardens, to pour forth its powerful notes in our woods, and to enliven our hedgerows with its wondrous song. From February until August, with but little intermission, its voice gladdens our islands, from the far west to the most eastern promontory, from the southern islet of Hampshire to Caithness and the Hebrides. Everywhere the tameness of its disposition and the melody of its song procure it friends and protectors. I believe there is no other member of the genus to which this bird belongs that can compete with it in the vigour and volubility of its notes. Its power in this respect appears to be so perfectly innate, that the young display it when only a few months old; but of course their tones are far less spirited and varied than those of the old males, when they take up a position in the woods and sing against each other during the sitting of the females; so soon, however, as the eggs are hatched, their songs are less frequently heard, and both sexes become fussy and attentive to the little ones, which soon grow to the size of their parents, and resemble them in their colours and markings. The young being able to shift for themselves, another nest is commenced, and the birds breed a second time; hence it is that the woods ring with the song of the males as merrily in June as they did in April. After this, both old and young leave the woods and betake themselves to open fields of turnips and other crops, where the damp ground affords them an abundant supply of snails, worms, and insects. It is a question whether some of them, both old and young, do not at this season entirely quit the drier districts for others of a more humid character: they certainly do so in some parts of our island; we also know that in autumn great numbers arrive from foreign parts, probably from Norway and Sweden. On the continent the Thrush is a more regular migrant than with us, and during its passage south the bird is unmercifully shot and taken in springes for the purposes of the table. In Belgium Thrush-catching is quite an institution, and many persons and even families take to the woods for the purpose. The following interesting account of this practice has been kindly communicated to me by Mr. Box, a friend already mentioned in this work, and who for a long time resided in Belgium and the Ardennes.

“La Tenderie—Grive- or Thrush-catching in Belgium.”

“The Thrush is a great source of amusement to the middle, and of profit to the lower, classes during its autumnal migration. Many families of Liege, Luxemburg, Limburg, Namur, parts of Hainault and Brabant, choose this season for their period of relaxation from business, and devote themselves to the taking of this bird with horse-hair springes. The shop-keeper of Liege and Verviers, whose house in the town is the model of comfort and cleanliness, resorts with his wife and children to one or two rooms in a miserable country village to enjoy the sport he has been preparing for with their help during the long evenings of the preceding winter; in the course of which he has made as many as from 5000 to 10,000 horse-hair springes, and prepared as many pieces of flexible wood, rather thicker than a swan-quill, in and on which to hang them. He hires what he calls his ‘Tenderie,’ being four or five acres of underwood about three to five years old, pays some thirty shillings for permission to place his springes; and his greatest ambition is to retain for several years the same ‘Tenderie’ and the same lodging, which he improves in comfort from year to year. The springes being made and the season of migration near, he goes for a day to his intended place of sojourn, and cuts as many twigs about 18 inches in length as he intends to hang springes on: there are two methods of hanging them; in one the twig is bent into the form of the figure 6 (fig. 1), the tail end running through a slit cut in the upper part of the twig; the other method is to sharpen a twig at both ends and insert the points into a grower or stem of underwood, thus forming a bow of which the stem forms the string (fig. 2); below the springe, and hanging from the lower part of the bow, is placed a small branch with three or four berries of the mountain ash (there called *Sorbier*); this is fixed to the bow by inserting the stalk into a slit in the wood. The hirer of a new

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

'Tenderie,' three or four acres in extent, is obliged to make zigzag foot-paths through it, to cut away the boughs which obstruct them, and even to hoe and keep them clean. Having thus prepared himself, he purchases one or two bushels of the berries of the mountain ash, with the stalks to which they grew, and which are picked for the purpose after they are red but before they are ripe, to prevent their falling off; these he lays out on a table in the loft or attic. The collection of these berries is a regular trade, and the demand for them is so great that, although planted expressly by the side of the roads in the Ardennes, they have been sold as high as £2 the bushel; but the general price is five francs. We will now suppose our Thrush-catcher arrived at his lodging in the country, that he has had his foot-paths cleared by the aid of a labourer, and that he is off for his first day's sport. He is provided with a basket, one compartment of which holds his twigs bent or straight, another his berries; his springes being already attached to the twigs, he very rapidly drives his knife into a lateral branch and fixes them, taking care that the springe hangs neatly in the middle of the bow, and that the lower part of the springe is about three fingers' breadth from the bottom; by this arrangement the bird alighting on the lower side of the bow and bending his neck to reach the berries below him, places his head in the noose, and finding himself obstructed in his movements attempts to fly away; but the treacherous noose tightens round his throat, and he is found by the sportsman hanging by the neck, a victim of misplaced confidence.

"The workman (who at this season earns a second harvest by this pursuit) carries on his industry in wilder districts, or he frequently obtains permission from his employer to set springes in his master's woods; in this case he supplies the family with birds, which are highly appreciated as a delicacy, especially when almost covered with butter, with a few juniper-berries, and some bacon cut into small dice, and baked in a pan; the rest of his take he sells at from 5*d.* to 10*d.* per dozen.

"No person who has not lived in the country can imagine the excitement among all classes when the Grives arrive. If the morning be foggy, it is a good day for Grives; if bright, bad 'Tenderie.' The reason is obvious: when the birds arrive in a fog, they settle at once in the woods; if bright, they fly round about seeking the most propitious place for food. I may observe, a singular feeling of honour is engendered by this pursuit. Nobody would think of injuring his neighbour's 'Tenderie.' A sportsman would carefully avoid deranging the springes. If when shooting in your own covers a few are taken for the table, you would hang a franc piece conspicuously in an empty springe for every dozen birds taken. The law is very severe on poachers who place a springe *on the ground* to take Partridges, Woodcocks, or Snipes; but of three feet *above* ground the law says nothing, and, save as a trespasser, the placer of springes in the trees of a wood *not* his own property would not be punishable. The number taken is prodigious; as many as 150 Thrushes have been found executed in a 'tenderie' in one morning. The younger members of families of the highest rank commonly follow this amusement before a gun is placed in their hands.

"It may be readily imagined that before 5000 springes are set in a 'Tenderie' of four or five acres, a fortnight or three weeks will have elapsed, even should the grocer, linendraper, or publican be assisted by his wife and children: the amusement is common to all the family—wife, boys, and girls. Many a small tradesman eats little else during his vacation at his 'Tenderie' besides Grives and bacon. From Liege to Tilff, thence to Aywaille, on the rivers Meuse, Ourthe, and the Amblève to Chaudfontaine on the Vesdre, where the rivers are for miles shut in by precipitous banks covered with low woods, scarcely an acre is unlet for 'Tenderie' during the months of August, September, October, and November. The first fortnight of August is occupied in preparations, the rest of the time is the harvest of Grives."

Mr. Box tells me that this species, "the Redwing, and the Fieldfare are all caught in this manner and sold as Grives; but the true Grive is the Song-Thrush. The latter is obtained from the end of August to the second week in September, the Redwing at the end of September and in October, and the Fieldfare at the end of October and in November. A few Ring-Ousels and Blackbirds are often caught among the Thrushes."

The account above given is very instructive, as showing how much more numerous these Meruline birds are in Belgium during the autumn than with us, a circumstance which may be due to this country not lying in the direct line of their migrations.

Besides Britain, the Thrush ranges over all parts of Europe, and even goes a good way into the Arctic Circle—probably as far as the fir-forests extend. It also ranges over the whole of North Africa, and many parts of Egypt and Persia.

It would be superfluous to give a further account of the breeding of the Thrush than is comprised in the passing notices of it already included in this paper. Every schoolboy knows that the lining of its nest is composed of rotten wood with an admixture of water and mud to hold it together; neither have its beautiful blue eggs dotted with black been unobserved.

The accompanying Plate represents a nest and eggs, with their frequent accompaniment, the dog-rose.

The figure of the bird is a representation of an old male, of the natural size, with a reduced figure of a female in the distance.

Gould, John. 1873. "Thrush, *Turdus musicus* [Pl. 32]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323846>.

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