TURDUS PILARIS, Linn.

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Fieldfare.

Turdus pilaris, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 291.

Silvia pilaris, Savi.

Merula pilaris, Selby, Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 160.

Arceuthornis pilaris, Kaup.

THE Fieldfare and Redwing are so intimately associated, that when the mind reverts to one, the thoughts are naturally led to the other. Both are migrants, which come to this country in autumn for the purpose of spending the winter; and both simultaneously depart again in spring, to breed and pass the summer in Norway, Lapland, and Russia. Like the Jackdaw and the Rook, they frequently unite in large flocks; but this band of brotherhood is broken up at the period of reproduction; each then goes its own way, and selects its own locality,—the larger bird or Fieldfare nesting in communities, the smaller or Redwing more solitarily.

The countries bordering the Arctic Circle are more quickly influenced by the retiring of the sun than those further south, hence in the early part of autumn or the months of September and October insect-life becomes more scarce; and, as no haws or berries are produced there, the great hordes of these birds are necessitated to proceed further south, some to the British Islands, others to France and Spain, and others to southern Russia and Persia: from north to south at one season, and *vice versâ* at the opposite period, are the directions in which these birds and most migratory animals move. There are those who ease their consciences by considering the destruction of a migrant fair sport; and there are persons who will sneak beneath the hedgerows the entire day for a chance shot at a Fieldfare, but who will allow the Thrush and the Blackbird to fly off unscathed from the ditch along which they are creeping.

On their arrival in the autumn, the Fieldfares spread themselves so generally over the whole of the British Islands, that there is no part of the country in which the bird may not be found, if the weather be open. Arable lands, pastures, extensive heaths, and commons are principally resorted to: there it hops over the surface of the ground, and searches for the insects, grubs, and other larvæ which constitute its food. If frost sets in, the berry-bearing trees of the hedgerow afford it a supply; if the weather becomes still more severe, and this kind of food scant, a southerly and westerly movement takes place, and an asylum is sought in the warm and moist counties of Devonshire and Cornwall; here it remains until the weather breaks, when it again returns to its former localities. In this way the bird spends the winter and awaits the return of the sun, some remaining until the end of April, and even till the beginning of May, before they wing their way across the northern seas to their summer home. But do they all go? Does not a remnant remain behind and breed in some part of Scotland? I think sufficient evidence has been adduced by various writers that such is the case; but I must caution my readers not to mistake for it the Missel-Thrush, which of late years has become very numerous in that country. I have no intention of casting a doubt upon the truthfulness of those who have asserted that the Fieldfare breeds in the British Islands; for some of their remarks are certainly worthy of consideration, and, I think it likely, may be founded in fact, and that now and then a pair, or a few pairs, may remain and breed in some suitable locality in the Highlands. On this head the late Mr. St. John says:—"30th of April: the Fieldfares are still here, but not in numbers as they were a few days ago, when large flocks passed by, on their way to the northward. A few pairs I am told breed in the large woods near the Spey; and in 1848 I was shown a nest and eggs brought from that district by a brother of Mr. Dunbar, who described it as having been placed near the ground." In some remarks communicated to the 'Field' by Mr. Alexander Fraser, of Barncluith, Hamilton, N. B., he says:—"I observe that several of your correspondents mention as rare the seeing of the Fieldfare in Scotland as late as May. About a fortnight ago I had pointed out to me a nest supposed to be a Missel-Thrush's. The bird was evidently sitting. Two days after, the nest had been harried, and the eggs taken away; however, I have the nest itself. It answers Hewitson's description exactly. To-day I have discovered another nest of the same bird. It has at present only one egg—a Fieldfare's undoubtedly. The gamekeeper here tells me he has frequently seen nests of the same bird; I also myself think I have observed it before. I believe it is generally supposed not to breed in this country; here are at least two instances to the contrary. Both nests were built in the first cleft of young trees, about 14 feet from the ground."

Mr. Hewitson, who, with the enthusiasm of a true lover of nature, was induced to proceed on a bird-nesting expedition to the coast of Norway in the summer of 1833, accompanied by his friends John Hancock and B. Johnson, when speaking of this bird, says:—"Intending that the Fieldfare should be our *avant-courier* to its native land, it was with peculiar interest that we watched its long lingering in our own for weeks

after our Blackbirds and Thrushes had commenced their nidification. It was not until the end of April that the last of them took their departure from our neighbourhood. In a few days afterwards, on the 14th of May, we enjoyed the pleasure of again seeing them in their own wild native woods, engaged so early after their arrival in all the bustle of preparation for the production of other colonies to visit us in future years. We had been out all day, rambling through those almost impassable forests; and after having climbed many a tree to no purpose—to nests of the previous summer, which we supposed must have once been tenanted by the birds of which we were in search—were returning home, weary and disappointed, when suddenly the monotonous silence was broken by the loud harsh cries of a colony of Fieldfares, which, alarmed at our approach, were anxiously watching over their newly established dwellings. We very soon forgot our toils in the delight which we experienced at the discovery of several of their nests, and were surprised to find them, so contrary to the habits of the rest of the genus with which we are acquainted, breeding in society. Their nests (two hundred or upwards of which were found within a small circle in the forest) were at various heights above the ground, from four to thirty or forty feet or upwards, and mixed with old ones of the preceding summer: they were, for the most part, placed against the trunk of the spruce-fir tree; some were, however, at a considerable distance from it, towards the smaller end of the thicker branches. They resemble most nearly those of the Ring-Ouzel: the outside is composed of sticks and coarse grass, and weeds gathered wet, matted together with a small quantity of clay, and lined with a thick bed of fine dry grass. None of them yet contained more than three eggs, although we afterwards found that five were more commonly the number than four, and that even six were very frequent. They are very similar to those of the Blackbird, and even more so to those of the Ring-Ouzel and the Redwing, but do not vary so much; indeed so closely do the eggs of the four species resemble each other, that a drawing of one would suffice for all. They are all so closely freckled throughout, that the colour of the freckles predominates; they all have a variety in which the ground-colour is most seen, the red-brown spots being larger and much more sparingly sprinkled."

Speaking of the bird in Lapland, Mr. Wheelwright says:—"The Fieldfare was, next to the Brambling, the commonest bird in these forests, and its hoarse laughing cackle followed us wherever we went in the fir-forest; and I never saw the Fieldfare breeding anywhere else. It did not breed here in colonies; for although the nests are seldom far apart, we never found two in the same tree. I think no Thrush's egg is subject to so much variation as the egg of the Fieldfare; and it would be almost impossible to describe it better than that it much resembles that of the Blackbird, but is usually more highly coloured. We took our first nest on the 25th of May, and our last on the 7th of July, at which time some of the young were able to fly."

Mr. H. E. Dresser informs me that he "found a nest just outside the town of Uleåborg, on the 13th June, 1861, containing seven eggs; and another close to it, containing five. So many as seven are, I believe, seldom found in one nest."

Desirous, like Mr. Hewitson, to see the Fieldfare in its native woods, I proceeded to Norway, for this and other reasons, in the year 1856, accompanied by Mr. Wolf. We found the bird breeding on the Dovrefjeld in abundance, and the only difference from Mr. Hewitson's description which we noticed was that all the nests we saw were placed among the stunted birch-trees; but this was doubtless due to the circumstance of our being far above the pine-forests.

The summer dress of the Fieldfare is much darker in all its tints, particularly on the breast, and richer in colour in every respect than during its sojourn in this country. The sexes are alike in colour at both seasons. In the young the bill is very much swollen at the gape, and nearly white, blending into purplish brown towards the tip; the tarsi and toes are also purplish brown; and the inside of the mouth brilliant yellow; like young Thrushes, they have also very distinct triangular spots of brown on the abdomen. In confirmation of what I have said as to the Fieldfare occasionally staying very late in this country, I may mention that John Box, Esq., of White Place, near Maidenhead, allowed his keeper to shoot the fine examples from which my figures were made on the 19th of April 1864.

Besides the countries above mentioned, the Fieldfare frequents all parts of Europe, goes as far south in winter as the Atlas range in Africa, and is also found at the same season in Asia Minor and the northern parts of Persia.

The figures on the accompanying Plate, and the nest, are all of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Fieldfare, *Turdus pilaris* [Pl. 35]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323849>.

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