REGULUS CRISTATUS, Ray.

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Golden-crested Wren, or Kinglet.

Regulus cristatus, Ray, Syn., p. 79, A. 9.

Motacilla Regulus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 338.

Sylvia Regulus, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 548.

Regulus auricapillus, Selb. Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 229.

— *flavicapillus*, Naum. Vög. Deutsch., t. 47. fig. 110 (female).

— *vulgaris*, Gould, Birds of Europe, vol. ii. pl. 148. fig. 2.

WHY should not that numerous assemblage of little birds which we see passing along the face of the wood, flitting from spray to spray, from branch to branch, be all composed of the same species as they appear to be when looking at them from a distance? They seem very similar, and are all alike engaged in one object—that of taking insects. One would suppose that Nature's end and purpose would be equally answered if they were all the same; but such is not the case, for, like the Swallow, the House-, and the Sand-Martin, which all hawk over the same pool at one time, or the three species of Willow-Wrens, which are frequently found on the branches of the same tree, the assembly of little birds above referred to is composed of two or three kinds of Tits and Golden-crested Wrens, few or many of each, as the case may be. There are times, however, when these little Kinglets do not consort with other birds: when they may be seen by themselves, scrutinizing the leafy branches of the trees of the forest, the garden, and the hedgerow, more particularly the plantations of firs, and especially the spruce. To look for a Golden-crested Wren in a fir-wood, without being directed to its immediate whereabouts by its note, would be like looking for a needle in a field of grass, with the like chance of detecting the object of search. This is the reason why the assertion is so frequently made, by persons who have not attended to the subject, that they have never seen a Goldcrest; it is probable, however, that the bird is nearer to them than they are aware, and that the deodara, and certainly the yew or silver firs growing on their lawn, are tenanted by one or more pairs engaged in nesting and rearing their young. Five different nests have I seen at one time, hanging beneath the yew and fir branches, in the beautiful garden of Formosa, in the spring of 1863. One reason why this bird is not generally recognized is its small size, and the circumstance of the golden plumes of the crown being enclosed between the two folds of feathers which surmount the eye; there are times, however, when these crests are displayed to the best advantage; and truly beautiful they are. The above remark applies to the bird in summer; and it would be supposed that when Boreas has come, and our woods have bowed to his will, they would no longer offer a suitable asylum to this apparently delicate little bird; such, however, is not the case, for even if the thermometer be at zero, the Goldcrest is still among the fir-trees, seeking for insects in the most sheltered spots, prying into the head of every shoot, or hanging Tit-like beneath the branches, or perchance he has betaken himself to the quickset hedge running out from the wood into the open fields, or he may have sought refuge in the low gullies where the Woodcock has its shelter, or in the furze-brake where the fox is coiled round and asleep.

From the Land's End in Cornwall, throughout England to the border, and thence throughout Scotland to the Orkneys and the Western Islands, and from the north to the south of Ireland, this bird is everywhere dispersed, always in sufficient numbers to be considered a common species, yet nowhere very numerous. I now come to a part of the bird's habits and economy which is truly astonishing. It is the power this frail little creature possesses of crossing the North Sea, and that, too, at a season when the strongly built ship trembles under the power of the elements, and the fleet steamer seeks safety in harbours of refuge.

In cold and blustering November, the numbers of this little sprite already existing in our island are greatly increased by flocks of hundreds migrating hither from the opposite shores of Norway, as is supposed. On this subject Mr. Selby mentions that "on the 24th and 25th of October 1822, after a very severe gale, with thick fog, from the north-east (but veering, towards its conclusion, to the east and south of east), thousands of these birds were seen to arrive upon the sea-shore and sandbanks of the Northumbrian coast, many of them so fatigued by the length of their flight, or perhaps by the unfavourable shift of wind, as to be unable to rise again from the ground; and great numbers were in consequence caught or destroyed. The flight must have been immense in number, as its extent was traced through the whole length of the coasts of Northumberland and Durham. There appears little doubt of this having been a migration from the more northern provinces of Europe (probably furnished by the pine-forests of Norway, Sweden, &c.), from the circumstance of its arrival being simultaneous with that of large flights of the Woodcock, Fieldfare, and Redwing."

To this I append a note from Mr. Stevenson, giving an account of a similar migration of the bird to the coast of Norfolk :—

“The Golden-crested Wren is very common in Norfolk throughout the year, nesting in the fir-plantations and shrubberies. That these fairy-like little creatures brave the perils of a sea-voyage in autumn, and, leaving more northern countries, swell the numbers of our usual visitants, there can no longer be any doubt, from their frequent appearance on the coasts at such seasons in an exhausted state, and the fact of specimens being picked up dead at the foot of our lighthouses, having flown, with other nocturnal migrants, against the upper windows, dazzled and attracted by the glare of the lamps. The most striking instance, however, of their migration in large numbers was witnessed by my friend Captain Longe, of Great Yarmouth, on the morning of the 2nd of November 1862. He says, in a letter to me, ‘As I was walking to Hemsby, about 7.30, when it was just daylight, about half a mile out of Yarmouth, on the Caister road, my attention was attracted to a small bush overhanging the marsh-dyke which borders the pathway, by the continuous twittering of a small bird. On looking closely, I found the bush, small as it was, literally covered with Golden-crested Wrens. There was hardly an inch of twig that had not a bird on it; and even from my rough attempt at calculation at the time, I feel sure there were at least between 200 and 300. Most of them were either females or young birds, having a *lemon*-coloured crest. They were perfectly tame; and although I sat down on the other side of the ditch within six feet and watched them for some time, they did not attempt to fly away; but one (or more) would occasionally rise off its perch and hover like a Butterfly, and settle again in some other position. I went the next morning to look for them, but they were all gone: the wind had been easterly, with much fog.’ I have lately seen the spot where this flight had settled themselves before proceeding inland, and found it close to the sandhills which run parallel with the coast, and not more than two or three hundred yards from the sea-beach.”

It would be highly interesting to ascertain whether these migrants return again in the spring to the countries whence they came, like the Redwing and Fieldfare; or whether these vast accessions are due to some extraneous cause, such as an unusual severity in the season prompting them to seek a more genial clime, or an undue increase in the number of individuals, rendering the removal of a portion of them necessary for the general welfare. It is surely due to one or other of these causes; for how ill-adapted is this little bird for the performance of so long a journey without the chance of a rest by the way! The subject is indeed a mystery, and most puzzling to us all. Independently of England, this bird inhabits Europe generally, the northern portions of Africa, probably the Himalayas, China, and Japan; at least Golden Crests which closely resemble our own birds inhabit those countries.

The nest of the Golden-crested Wren is as beautiful as the bird that makes it. A fine example, taken by myself at Loudwater, on the 2nd of May 1858, from the sunny side of a silver spruce, was formed of green moss, masses of cobwebs, and little patches of wool, warmly lined with soft feathers; it was suspended to the underside of a branch by numerous filaments, apparently composed of spiders' webs and fibres of wool; in form it was nearly spherical, but much flattened at the top, the upper edge being pressed inwards, as it were, so that the aperture was considerably smaller than the interior, which measured $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, while the opening was barely $1\frac{1}{2}$. This nest contained eight eggs, of a delicate pearly salmon-colour, minutely freckled at the larger end with ochre-brown in the form of a zone.

The young birds, when they leave the nest, have no trace whatever of the golden crown; at the second moult, however, these feathers begin to appear, and are fully assumed by the end of the ensuing autumn, when the crown of the female becomes lemon-, and that of the male rich yellow.

To give a description of so common a bird would be superfluous when it is accurately portrayed on the opposite Plate, and I shall have to point out wherein it differs from the Fire-crested Wren (*Regulus ignicapillus*) in my account of that species.

The Plate represents two males, a female, and a nest on a branch of the Silver Fir, all of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Golden-crested Wren, or Kinglet, *Regulus cristatus* [Pl. 69]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323883>.

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