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A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO SOME OF OUR COMMON BIRDS.

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People desiring to become acquainted with birds, those lovable, pretty and useful friends of man, are sometimes bewildered and discouraged by the mass of material which offers itself in nature itself, or in the books which they consult. To help in overcoming these primary difficulties is the object of this paper. How elevating it is to know the birds one meets with, to recognize them by their form, color, behavior, flight and song, to become acquainted with these companions of one's work or walks! How much more beauty and satisfaction can then be got out of life! No one need be discouraged from forming at least a passing acquaintance with them. A little hard work, patience, close observation and perseverance will do it.

The families and species treated of here are loosely arranged in the relative order of abundance and probability of their being seen. The list is more especially for the Ottawa district, but many of the species are of almost continental distribution.

The Finches.—Everyone is familiar with the appearance of birds of the Finch family from our common and least desired neighbor, the English Sparrow. The chief characteristic is the thick, conical bill. A useful species of this family is the CHIPPING SPARROW, *Spizella socialis*. The English name is from its call and alarm note, chip, chip, etc.; its song is a locust-like trill, *lillillillill*, etc. It is smaller and more slender in shape than the English Sparrow. Its *bright chestnut crown* and grayish white line over the eye serve to identify it. Found in gardens, tree-lined streets and the borders of woods.

As common as the Chipping is the SONG SPARROW, *Melospiza cinerea melodia*. About the size of the English Sparrow, more roundish in build; much streaked with black, brown and gray, below whitish, streaked with black with a larger *blotch in centre of breast*. Its chief mark is its cheerful song beginning with usually three long notes, thus: "Olit, olit, olit, chip, chip, chip, che-char, che wiss, wiss wiss," or "Maids, maids, maids, put on your teakettles, teakettles-ettle-ettle" (Blanchan). It likes places with at

least some water and a few bushes near by, but is also found in city lots and gardens.

When passing through large meadows or pastures, you may often hear a subdued, penetrating high wiry song, something like *ptsip, ptsip, ptsip zee-ee-ee-e-e-e* (Blanchan). The bird uttering it will be seen on a tall grass or weed stem. That is the SAVANNA SPARROW. It is streaked above and below like the Song Sparrow, but *has not the blotch* on the breast; besides, it has yellow above the eye and on the bend of the wing.

Like the Song Sparrow in shape and size is also the SWAMP SPARROW, *Melospiza georgiana*. It frequents marshy places in meadows and woods, and is the darkest of our Sparrows, having darker brown and more black above, no streaks on the gray below. Its song is : *lellellellell*, etc.

When walking through lanes and fields, a sparrow-like bird will be seen to mount the fences or stumps, which, when flying away, exhibits *two outer tail feathers of pure white*. This is the VESPER SPARROW or Bay-winged Bunting, *Pooecetes gramineus*. It is probably our least pretty Sparrow, gray all over, streaked with brown and black, wing near the bend rich brown. Its song, breathing the dreamy repose of the summer meadow, is not so jubilant as that of the Song Sparrow, but still pleasing, thus : *Dee dee ree-deree deree dee dee*, etc, or, *chewee, chewee, chewee, teera leera, leera lee*, which, though insignificant in itself, when sung as the bird's vesper song, late in the quiet summer evening, is inspiring.

Another member of the Finch family exhibiting the two outer white tail feathers in flight and having the song of the Swamp Sparrow, is the well known JUNCO or SNOWBIRD, *Junco hiemalis*. It is slaty bluish black, brownish in the females, which together with the whitish bill and white in the tail and the jerky flight near thickets, makes its identification easy.

A very pretty bird is the WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, *Zonotrichia albicollis*. More noticeable by its sweet song than by its bodily appearance, it is rich chestnut, streaked with black above, grayish below, throat white. From the pine and spruce woods and thickets, can be heard its sweet, somewhat plaintive whistle of from one long drawn out note to as many as ten. Some hear

it flute: *Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*; others, *Sow your wheat, Peverly, Peverly*; again others, *Dear Canada, Canada, Canada*.

Closely allied to this, and handsomer still, is the WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. It stays with us a week or two during migration, is then sometimes very abundant and can be easily recognized by its white on the crown between black lines, the rich chestnut and bluish gray of the upper and under parts respectively. The song is low and soft, somewhat like that of the Vesper Sparrow.

The little GOLDFINCH or Thistle-bird (also known as the Wild Canary), *Astragalinus tristis*, singing *perchicoree* in its undulating flight, is well known—at least in summer. It is a hardy little bird and sometimes stays all winter in quite northerly latitudes. Then, however, both sexes are of a dull olive brown color.

Similar to this in size, shape, note and behavior is the little REDPOLL, *Acanthis linaria*. It is gray, streaked with brown and blackish all over and can be told best by its *crimson crown*. Old males also have a delicate pink on their breast. This and the next four species are hardy birds, breeding north to the limit of tree-growth and coming south in winter only and then not very far.

Together with the Redpoll, like it in appearance, may then be seen also the PINE SISKIN, *Spinus pinus*. Its field mark is a bright *yellow wing bar*. The large red bird often seen feeding on berries of various trees during late fall and in winter is the PINE GROSBEEK, *Pinicola enucleator leucura*. It has a very thick bill, as its name suggests and is very fearless, allowing of close approach. It is a distinct ornament to city streets in winter.

Then may also be seen the AMERICAN and the WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS, *Loxia leucoptera minor* and *leucoptera*. They feed chiefly on the seeds of pines and spruces, which they abstract from the cones by prying the scales apart with their crossed bills. They are red, the former *brick red*, the latter *crimson red*, together with a *white wing bar*. In size they are like the House Sparrow.

Then there is the PURPLE FINCH, *Carpodacus purpureus*, which breeds a little further south than the last. It is about the size of the common sparrow, *crimson* or *purple-red*, the females and young males grayish with black and brownish streaks; plainer looking than the English Sparrow. It breeds commonly at Ottawa.

The FOX SPARROW, *Passerella iliaca*, seen mostly during migration, is a large, stately sparrow, bright reddish-brown, especially the tail and similar spots, and streaks below.

The TREE SPARROW, *Spizella monticola*, is also a northern breeder and is abundant in Ontario and southward in migration and winter only. It has the *bright chestnut crown* of the Chippy, though a larger bird, and the *blackish-brown spot* on the middle of the breast, like the Song Sparrow, but no streaks around it. It is found in woods and thickets.

Another winter visitor from the North is the SNOWFLAKE, *Plectrophenax nivalis*. This can at once be told by the preponderance of *white* in its plumage.

A member of this family which, on account of its beauty would perhaps not be recognized as such, is the ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK, *Zamelodia ludoviciana*. When it flies you see a *network of black and white* on wings and tail; head entirely black; under the wings and a triangle on the breast a beautiful cherry-red; rest of under parts white. It frequents open woods and deciduous trees, park-like groves, etc. Its song is as fine as its plumage. It is larger than the English Sparrow and has a very thick whitish bill.

A speck of rich tropical coloration, as it were, is the INDIGO BUNTING, *Cyanopiza cyanea*. It is rather scarce in the Ottawa district but commoner as one goes south. It is lustrous blue, *deep indigo* on the head and neck, lighter on the back. The female is brown, with a tinge of blue on wings and tail. It likes to sit on telegraph wires or poles or dry branches, and pours forth a fine sustained medley of song, in quality like the perching song of the Goldfinch. In size it is like the Chippy, much smaller than the Bluebird. These are the common members of the Finch family.

The next family of birds after the Finches is that of the Tanagers, of which we have but one member in Canada, and that one is so brilliant in coloration that it immediately attracts attention. It is another bit of tropical luxuriance and prodigality of color transplanted to our sterner climate. This is the SCARLET TANAGER, *Piranga erythromelas*. The head and body are a brilliant scarlet, the wings and tail black, thus making identification and remembrance of it very easy. This species seems to be increasing its numbers in Canada. This spring it was reported in more places and greater numbers than before.



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