



LONG-LEGGED BIRDS.—THE WHOOPING CRANE—YOUNG AND OLD.

You do not have any difficulty in telling a bird from any other animal; though birds among themselves show wonderful differences, yet you are never in doubt whether a particular specimen is a bird or not. Yet how great the difference between a humming-bird, not larger than some insects, and with a flight so rapid that you can hardly see its wings, and a domestic goose, which rarely flies, is awkward in all its movements, and large enough for a dinner for a whole family. Some birds feed only on other birds, or small quadrupeds, and such other animals as they can catch; others live on insects; still others find their food in various seeds and fruits; then when we come to the sea-shore, or the great lakes, we find birds that live upon fish, which they catch in deep water, or along shore, where the water is shallow. If birds all lived upon one thing, they would soon find a scarcity of food, and it is very interesting to observe that each class of birds is so formed that it can best get its living in one particular way. A look at a hawk, with its fierce bill and powerful claws, shows that it is intended to prey upon living creatures; if a duck, with its broad, blunt bill, and clumsy web-feet, should try to carry off a young rabbit, what poor work it would make of it! It would get along no better than would a hawk if obliged to swim and dive to the bottom of the river for its dinner. Wherever we look, whether at birds, at quadrupeds, or other animals, or even at plants, we find that each and all are especially adapted to live in a certain manner, and in particular places, and it is not possible for any thinking person, even a child, to fail to see that all this has not happened by chance. Men do not build locomotive engines to run upon the water, or construct steam-boats to travel on the land, and it is very plain that the Creator designed those different forms of birds and other creatures for a particular purpose. If a naturalist is studying birds (and it is so with other departments), he finds those which get their

living in a particular manner, are constructed, or built, so to speak, on a similar plan, and he groups the birds according to this plan as shown in their structure. You would not class the duck and the hen, or the pigeon and the hawk together, and while you, perhaps, could not tell at once all their differences, you know that they are fitted in their feet, their bills, and all their parts, each for a particular mode of life. Everybody, even young people, are naturalists to some extent. Those who make a special study of birds, are called *ornithologists*, as they study ornithology—a pretty long word, but perhaps it will not seem hard or difficult to remember if you know that it means “bird-discourse,” or as we may say “bird-talk”; the name, when it was found necessary to have one, was made from the Greek *ornis*, a bird, and *logos*, a discourse, and means the science of birds. Ornithologists differ as to the manner in which they group or classify birds, but they nearly all agree in having a group or order of Waders. These are birds with very long bill, neck, and legs, and a very short tail; the leg is also bare of feathers for some distance above the lower joint, and they mostly live in marshes, or on the shores near the water. These are further divided into several sub-orders, on account of minor differences, but they all agree in the leading points here named. The Waders include birds of various sizes, from the little plovers and sand-pipers, up to the bitterns, the herons, and the cranes. To show the general appearance of the Waders, and at the same time give the portrait of a rather rare bird, here is a picture of what is called the Whooping Crane, which is found in the States of the Valley of the Mississippi, in the Gulf States, and occasionally in the Middle States. It is one of the grandest of our native birds, it being between four and five feet long. Its plumage is entirely white, except some black on the wings, its legs are black, the head carmine. The two birds shown in the engraving, are not different

cranes, but an old and a young one. The young does not appear in a white dress the first season, but goes about in modest gray and brown, and it has been mistaken for a different bird. The flight of this crane is very high and rapid, and as they pass far over head, their coarse note, which gives them the name of Whooping Crane, may be heard for a great distance. It is stated that when mating, the male birds have severe fights, and that their cries at this time have been heard for three miles. They feed upon small fishes, frogs and other reptiles, and upon the roots of various plants that grow in muddy places. As they pass from North to South, they are said to stop on the sweet-potato fields, to search for any potatoes that may be left in digging. Travellers on the far western prairies, where the air is so peculiar that all distant things are strangely magnified, tell numerous stories of being deceived by this bird. One teamster followed one of these cranes for several miles, thinking that it was a mule that had strayed from the camp; and an old hunter has been known to crawl a long distance on his belly to get a shot at what he took for an antelope, and he only found out his mistake when his antelope took wing and flew off as a Whooping Crane. They are exceedingly quick to catch the least sound, and if once alarmed, they keep on the alert. It is said that these birds were formerly found in New Jersey and other Eastern States, but they have been killed off or frightened away from all the thickly settled parts of the country. That any one should wish to kill such a noble bird, that is not useful for food, and does no harm to any one, seems not only thoughtless, but wicked. We do not envy the feelings of one who, for the sake of shooting something, can stop the flight of this beautiful white Crane, and see it drop a lifeless mass of useless flesh and blood-stained feathers. Audubon states that they become very tame in captivity, and he gives an account of the odd and suspicious ways of one that he had.