

The Flicker.

THE FLICKER, THE GOLDEN-WINGED WOODPECKER,
WIDGEON W., PIGNON W., HIGH HOLE, YOPPLE
YARUP.

It is remarkable that the learned names of this bird are outnumbered by its common names; of the former there are only four, while there are seven of the latter. I think we may easily trace the origin of most of the common names of this species. Flicker was derived from its resemblance to the loud song of the bird, *tick-ah, tick-ah, tick-ah*, &c., rapidly uttered. High-hole is a name given it from its habit of nesting in high holes made near the summit of tall trees. Yopple is plainly a corruption of high-hole, coming from hurried and careless pronunciation and careless listening. Yellow-hammer comes from its loud hammering on the branches of trees and its yellow plumage. I cannot explain the etymology of yarup.

The flicker attracts observation in my neighborhood where it is a new comer. Its peculiar ways, its loud notes, and its extraordinary vivacity gains everybody's attention. A young lady wrote me some years since, from Cohasset, to inquire the name of a bird called a yopple by the farmers of that place. After describing the bird, she mentioned as one of its peculiarities, a habit of making holes in the sides of barns in winter and taking refuge in them. I replied that it was probably the golden-winged woodpecker; and she found my conjecture to be right. Dr. Brewer alludes to this habit of the bird, and mentions a pair of flickers that took shelter in his barn; and he remarked that while they could come and go freely through the doors and windows, they preferred to use the holes they had made in the most solid parts of the barn.

I am indebted to ladies for a great part of my information concerning the habits of birds. A lady in West Medford said to me that for several successive mornings she had been disturbed by a singular noise outside and near her chamber window. After carefully watching she discovered a flicker standing on the roof of her porch, making the sound by drawing his bill repeatedly across the zinc. The bird seemed to have no motive for this act except its own amusement. It is rarely that any of the lower animals amuse themselves by making artificial sounds. In this case the flicker seemed to imitate the boy who draws a stick across the palings of a fence as he passes along the road. A somewhat similar case is related by Dr. Brewer in regard to a tame golden robin. It delighted in occasional acts of mischief, such as putting its bill through lace curtains, seeming to enjoy the sound produced by rending the threads with its beak.

The flicker is usually a very shy bird; so that the ubiquitous boy-with-a-gun can seldom get near enough to shoot one. But there are some birds which are very shy in their natural habits that seem to change their nature as soon as they find themselves in the midst of human population. A lady in my neighborhood informed me that in the winter before last a flicker came often into her yard and fed with her doves. All insectivorous birds, when very hungry, will take farinaceous food, and hunger may have caused the tameness of her feathered guest. The bluejays which have been long colonized in my vicinity are as tame as robins; while the robins, which are very tame when rearing their young in our gardens and orchards, become shy as soon as they leave us in September, and forage in loose flocks in the domain of the boy gunner. They grow shy as soon as they no longer sing.

The flicker in its feeding habits differs from other woodpeckers by taking a part of its food from the ground. Mr. Augustus Fowler, of

Danvers, writes in the *Naturalist* that he has seen one feasting upon the inhabitants of an ant-hill. He then speaks of its diligence in taking borers from the orchard trees, finding their exact location by listening against the hole. The scratching noise made by the grub when gnawing the wood betrays it, when the woodpecker drives its bill directly through the wood and draws out the borer. Two or three pairs of these birds, if they were constant occupants of a farm, would exterminate the borers from its orchards. But the public has not yet arrived at that point of intelligence that would lead the people to cherish the wild birds with reference to their utility. While our men and women of the highest education and culture are riding hippogriffs, the rest of the community who have any leisure are either reading novels or killing the birds. There is only here and there a solitary voice of warning; but nobody hears it. All are listening to Plato!

It is a fact that ought to be humiliating to our national pride, that the only general movement which has been made in this country for the encouragement and protection of birds was made in behalf of the pestiferous house-sparrows. Consider, too, that all this was done when it ought to have been well known that these birds, in their native Europe, have always been regarded as a nuisance. The increase and extent of public libraries have been the cause of this ignorance. In former days, when there were no such opportunities for young people to regale themselves with fiction, they could read these facts in some odd volume of natural history on the domestic shelf. Any such volume would be neglected at the present time for a tale in the newspaper, or an enticing story from the public library. In this way our public libraries keep our youth in ignorance of almost everything which is useful.

Mr. Gentry says of the flicker, "The young when about two weeks old, climb to the mouth of the nest and receive their food; but in a week more they quit the hole, and betake themselves to the upper branches of the tree, where they are fed and where they gambol round the trunk and boughs, after the fashion of children playing hide and seek." This elevated site renders them, while thus amusing themselves, perfectly safe from the majority of their natural enemies.

Whether the loud notes of the flicker deserve to be called a song, or merely a cry, is a question that cannot be very definitely answered. If it be a song, the flicker is the only known woodpecker that sings. In one sense the cry of a peacock or the cackling of a goose may be considered a song. The cry of the loon, as heard booming over the waters of a solitary lake in the forest, is a sound that fills the mind with wild and picturesque images; but we do not call it a song. The cry of the upland plover, which is heard all summer in the region where it breeds, is modulated precisely like that of the loon. It is indeed a perfect miniature imitation of it, and it is highly musical; but we do not call it a song.

Mr. Gentry, who represents the notes of the flicker as "h'wit-ah, h'wit-ha, h'wit-ha," etc., finds "both sweetness and sublimity in the strain." He must do this by the force of imagination; for to ordinary ears these notes are not very musical. But to the imagination indeed we owe nearly all the pleasure we derive from the songs of birds. A horse or an ox never listens to the song of a bird; and there are men to whom the notes of the sweetest songsters are no music at all. It will not be denied that the songs of birds are intrinsically musical. At the same time we must admit that without the aid of imagination we should be quite indifferent to their songs. The pleasant illusions associated with them produce

their greatest charms. In young persons of either sex there is no better evidence of an imaginative habit of mind than their susceptibility to deep impressions from the songs of birds. WILSON FLAGG.

The flicker is an abundant bird in Canada, where it is commonly known as the "High Hole," "Pivart," and other names. During the fall months it is particularly numerous and the individuals congregate in large bodies. Its eggs are laid in the abandoned nests of other species of woodpeckers.—Eg.

Economic Tree Planting, How and Where.

There is much of this country, especially Ontario, that little feels the need of special or extensive tree planting. But might it not be asked, "Cannot something be done for the timber growing interests of the country even now, while the land is being cleared?" It is possible, from the first, to save portions of the grand old primitive forests unharmed and untouched for the use of future generations. A country depleted of its trees is unfit for human habitation, and will soon be classed among the "deserts of the earth." By the phrase "economic tree planting" it would be well to understand tree planting on economical principles, something illustrated on a systematic scale. The work might be done by individual effort or by the legislature. It would be well to consider, 1st, the sources of timber supply; 2nd, the management of timber supply, and 3rd, plan of operations. The sources of timber supply are seeds, sprouts, coppices, budding and grafting, and, lastly, layers. The first three are the most generally relied on for the timber supply. Seeds are the numerous germs of vegetable existence annually matured by the trees themselves for the special purpose of individual propagation. Tropical tree seeds have wonderful powers of longevity. Sprouts are offshoots that in the case of many kinds of trees start freely from underground buds on the roots of the parent trees. They are easily transplanted. Coppices are wood growths from buds on the stumps of trees, previously cut down for timber uses. The following are trees that most readily sprout at the stump after the tree has been cut off, viz.: the ash, elm, oak, poplar, cotton wood, willow, linden, chestnut, mountain ash, sycamore, birch, alder and hazel. Budding and grafting, when practised, is merely for the advancement of certain scarce and valuable timbers. Layering is only applicable to a few sorts of trees, and is never done on an extensive scale. Seedlings must be at the base of all propagation. In the management of seeds it was recommended to adhere closely to the known and acknowledged laws governing the life habits of the parent plant. The management should be placed only in the hands of experts. The system of transplanting young trees, as practised by the best men of the times, is firmly believed in. In planting, it was preferable to place the seedlings in nursery beds for a year or two than at once to plant in permanent situations. Better attention could be given when the rows were near together. When the trees were about five or seven feet high they might be fixed in a permanent situation. Timber planting requires a large amount of capital, of time, of labor, of faith. At no very distant date our forest supply will inevitably give out. We should then do our best to meet the want which will be created. Concerted action is absolutely necessary to insure success and to attain ultimate results.—B. Gott, Arkona, Ont.

—Old lady reading head-line in paper
"Arabi throwing up fresh earth-works!"
"Why, how sick he must be, poor man!"