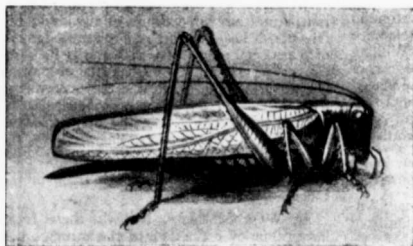


RAMBLES WITH NATURE STUDENTS.

By MRS. BRIGHTWEN, Author of "Wild Nature Won by Kindness," etc.

THE GREAT GREEN GRASSHOPPER
(*Acrida Viridissima*).

As the fields are now teeming with grasshoppers, large and small, it will be quite easy and well worth while to capture a few and note their curious form and varied markings. Those we find in the meadows are usually of



THE GREAT GREEN GRASSHOPPER.

the same tint of green as the grass on which they feed; but if we collect these insects from a bare chalky soil, they will be grey-coloured so as to imitate the general tone of the ground they rest upon.

There is also a very handsome species which is a tree-dweller, and may be found at this season in some localities by shaking oak branches; in other places I hear of their being caught in hazel hedges and on sunny banks, where they are easily secured with a small butterfly-net.

I kept a specimen of this insect a few years ago and found it a very interesting pet. A glass globe covered with a piece of net forms a suitable home for it, and, although it prefers flies and small insects, it will eat raw meat and succulent cabbage-stalks.

No one could fail to admire the exquisitely-brilliant green of this insect with its golden eyes, its long delicate wings, which, however,

BIRD'S FOOT
TREFOIL.

it does not seem to use except when they are expanded to break the force of its fall from tree branches.

The antennæ are long and tapering, and my specimen, being a female, possessed an extended ovipositor.

This species measures from two and a half to three inches from head to tail, and, taking into account its size and brilliant colouring, it is perhaps one of the most striking of our British insects.

Its habits are very dainty, every speck of dust is at once removed from its legs and feet; the tapering antennæ are drawn through its feelers, and they also cleanse the delicate wing-cases. In fact, as one watches all this going on, one is led to wish that all human beings could be persuaded to learn from this lowly creature to perform their toilets as carefully.

BIRD'S FOOT-TREFOIL
(*Lotus Corniculatus*).

Seeing the sparrows busily feeding upon the seed-pods of the bird's foot-trefoil, which grows much too freely upon my lawn, I have been led to reflect upon the great value to wild birds of the various weeds which cover every piece of waste ground.

The many weeks of dry weather we have had this summer have brought the birds almost to starvation point. The lawns are hard and cracked with the continual sunshine, so that the thrushes and blackbirds can find no worms or slugs, and very naturally they resort to the fruit gardens in the absence of other food.

The mountain ash and elderberries are also eagerly sought for and devoured, and then weeds are resorted to and keep the famished birds alive until the welcome rains restore their accustomed insect diet.

Few people seem to know that wild birds need feeding quite as much in a long dry summer as in a hard winter, and a pan of water is also a great luxury to our feathered friends.

All kinds of finches feed greedily upon thistle seeds, and many other species seek for their favourite chickweed and groundsel, plantain, vetches and hawkweed.

Other weeds are the resort or shy birds that we seldom see in the act of feeding, because their keen sight and hearing give them warning of our approach, and they slip away under cover until we have passed by.

Wild pigeons, if they do a good deal of harm in eating more than their share in the corn-fields, also do some good by feeding upon charlock or wild mustard, one of the most troublesome weeds the farmer has to contend with. They also eat the seeds of various polygonums which are sure to abound in fallow land.

We see then that weeds are really wayside provisions for the feathered tribes, and fulfil an important office in maintaining their lives when other resources fail.

The illustration shows the

resemblance between the trefoil pods and a bird's foot, hence the appropriateness of its name. It is a happy time for the humble bees when this plant, with its pretty yellow blossoms, is out in flower—the lawn is so covered with the busy little insects one can hardly walk without treading upon them.

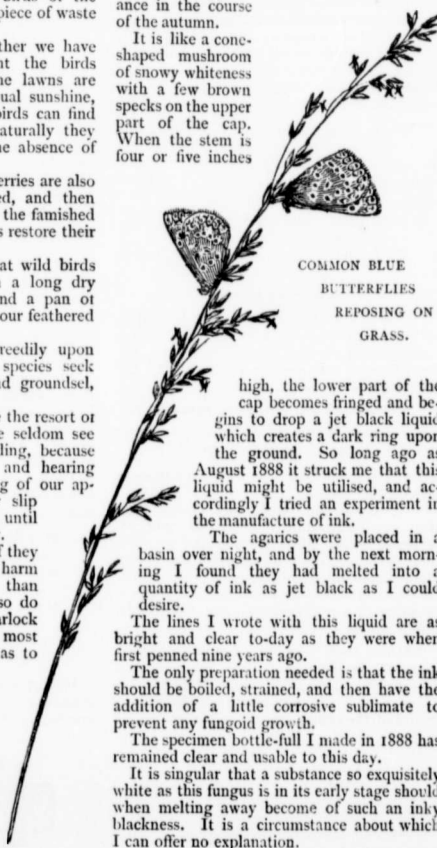
HOME-MADE INK.

A curious fungus known as the maned agaric (*Coprinus comatus*) is now growing in abundance in a grassy nook behind some evergreens, where it always makes its appearance in the course of the autumn.

It is like a cone-shaped mushroom of snowy whiteness with a few brown specks on the upper part of the cap. When the stem is four or five inches



COPRINUS COMATUS.

COMMON BLUE
BUTTERFLIES
REPOSING ON
GRASS.

high, the lower part of the cap becomes fringed and begins to drop a jet black liquid which creates a dark ring upon the ground. So long ago as August 1888 it struck me that this liquid might be utilised, and accordingly I tried an experiment in the manufacture of ink.

The agarics were placed in a basin over night, and by the next morning I found they had melted into a quantity of ink as jet black as I could desire.

The lines I wrote with this liquid are as bright and clear to-day as they were when first penned nine years ago.

The only preparation needed is that the ink should be boiled, strained, and then have the addition of a little corrosive sublimate to prevent any fungoid growth.

The specimen bottle-full I made in 1888 has remained clear and usable to this day.

It is singular that a substance so exquisitely white as this fungus is in its early stage should when melting away become of such an inky blackness. It is a circumstance about which I can offer no explanation.