

SKETCHES OF CANADIAN WILD BIRDS.

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THE ORCHARD ORIOLE.

This species is seven inches in length. The plumage of the male, on the upper parts, is dusty black, that on the lower parts, brownish-chestnut, while that of the female has a grayish hue above, and light yellow beneath. It is quite common in the central states, but is rather rare in Canada, being only a summer visitor to the southern counties of Ontario. It frequents orchards and willow-groves, where it forms its curiously woven nest among the weeping branches. This structure is composed of dry grass, wool, and other fibrous materials, the eggs, four to six in number, are of a bluish white colour, dotted with dark spots. It feeds upon small fruits, and many species of insects in their various stages of development. Its long, needle-shaped bill enables it to construct its wondrous nest, on which account it is sometimes called the tailor bird. Its plumage undergoes various changes of colouring, and it does not acquire its adult livery until the fourth year. Its rapidly repeated notes are not so loud as those of the Baltimore Oriole.

THE PIREOS.

The Pireos are a small but very interesting genus of birds, in some respect nearly allied to the Warblers. In size, colour, and general habits they are much alike, the chief difference being in the colour of the eyes, of some of the species, these organs being red in one species, and white in another. They are all remarkable for their modes of nest-building. The most common in the central parts of Ontario is the red-eyed species, which is also called the Weaver bird.

THE RED-EYED PIREO.

The original home of this species was the wild backwood. There, in the early part of summer, from the earliest settlement of the Canadian wilderness, it has been observed by the pioneer, the sportsman, and the naturalist, to form its basket-shaped nest, and rear its young; but, as much of the wildwoods have been destroyed by the onward progress of the backwoodsmen, and extensive orchards and shady plantations have sprung up around the human residences, these birds are now often seen in those places, and their pleasant warbling notes may be heard as they glean their insect prey among the deep foliage, from the early part of June to the days of September, and here their nests are occasionally found. The length of this species is five inches, the plumage on the upper parts is of a greenish ash-colour, on the lower parts it has a whitish hue, there is also a dark band on each side of the head above the eye. The formation of the nest of this species is remarkable; this is generally suspended from the fork of a small horizontal branch, and above three inches in diameter, the twigs are united by some fibrous materials, which forms the rim of the nest, which, when finished, resembles a small basket, and is composed of dry leaves, wool, fibers of bark, moss, and spiders' webs, the inside being lined with the stalks of maple seeds. The eggs, four or five in number, are white, with a few dark spots on the large end.

THE WARBLING FINCHES.

The American Goldfinch, known also as the yellow bird or wild Canary, and the pretty blue Warbler or Indigo bird, are the most common and remarkable species of this group.

THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH.

This species, commonly called the wild Canary, and also the black-cap, is among the most common and familiar of our wild birds. The male is between four and five inches in length, and its plumage is a bright golden yellow—except the wings, tail, and crown of the head, which are black; the female lacks the dark cap, and her general plumage is greenish yellow. It is an early spring visitor; indeed, small flocks of them are often seen in the winter season, feeding on the buds of the fruit trees, and among the evergreens; at this period the plumage of all resembles that of the past season, which is a mottly green. Generally they appear to resort to the Southern States until the moulting season is over, when they again return northwards, and usually associate in companies until the month of July, when they begin the labours of nidification, then the female forms a compact warm nest in the fork of a small tree or bush, or on an outspreading branch, generally not high from the ground, and often in the fruit, or shade trees surrounding human habitations, and in this she deposits five or six eggs of a blueish-white colour. The materials used in the formation of the nest, are wool, fibers of bark, rotten wood, hair, and thistle down; these are so firmly put together by the bill and feet of the bird, assisted by its saliva, that the nest after serving the purpose for which it is formed, often stands the weather of several successive seasons. This species frequents orchards, gardens, shrubberies, willow swamps, and the margins of the woods and water courses where there is low underwood, and in all such places, its nest may be found from the early part of July until October. Its flight is rapid and peculiar from the undulating, zigzag manner in which it is performed; and at each rise or fall of the body it generally, especially in the nesting season, repeats its peculiar notes, or warbles parts of its song, which pleasant melody is also often heard in the vicinity of its nesting places. And when the female is nesting, and during the time of incubation, her nest may easily be discovered by her peculiar call, in answer to the voice of her mate. When the thistle tops are in bloom, numbers of these birds may be seen picking out the down, and devouring the seeds, upon which they largely subsist during the autumn months. Its food appears to be largely vegetable, and it carries food to its young in a kind of pouch formed by an expansion of the gullet, and this it emits by a pumping process like that of the pigeon. Both parents supply the young with food, and, as they give them a large supply at a feed, they leave them, especially in damp weather, for hours at a time, and thus in some cases during heavy rains the whole brood perish from exposure.

THE INDIGO BIRD.

The male of this species is a neat and beautiful bird, his colour being a deep indigo blue; while that of the female is dusty brown above and greyish beneath. In length it is about five inches. It frequents the margins of the woods

in particular localities where there is a thick growth of underwood, and among the foliage of this it loves to glean its insect food, and warble its cheery notes, as well as conceal itself when it becomes aware of the presence of man; and in such places, in the forks of some low bush, generally well hidden by the thick leaves, the female forms her nest. This structure is formed of dry leaves and withered stalks, lined with fine dry grass and hair, the eggs are four or five in number, and of a pure white colour. Its migratory movements appear to be regulated by the opening of the leaves, and the first frost of autumn.

THE WARBLERS.

Under the term Warblers are arranged a very numerous and widely diffused group of little birds, of which thirty species are summer residents, or spring and autumn visitors of Ontario. They are all remarkable for their small size, variegated plumage, active movements, warbling melodies, and as being in general, residents of the wild woods, or deep shady places. They are all migratory, feed on insects, and are more or less gifted with the powers of song. Their nests are generally placed in deep concealment, but, while some place their nests in mossy banks or the roots of fallen trees, others prefer the leafy shrub, the tangled vine, or the tops of high trees, as the situation for the cradle of their progeny, and from these diverse propensities it is difficult to obtain accurate knowledge of all their habits, especially as some species that may be found nesting one season in one locality, may never again be seen in that vicinity. In the present sketches, I will give a brief notice of only those whose nests have been collected in this neighbourhood.

THE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER.

This species is the most beautiful of all the Warblers. The general plumage of the male is deep black, with a few white and orange spots on the wings and tail, the throat is a brilliant orange, and as it spreads its wings and flirts among the green foliage of the thick underwood, it has a most attractive appearance. The plumage of the female, though also beautiful, is dull compared to that of her consort. It does not make its appearance in the central parts of Ontario until the forest trees have assumed the emerald garb of summer, and then it is seldom seen, except in the deep shade of the thick underwood, where only a momentary glance can be obtained of its gaudy plumage, as it gleams among the shrubs, and lower branches of some thick wood, at the same time repeating a few low notes. It seems to avoid the approach of mankind, and retreats into the deep brushwood whenever it becomes aware of the human presence; even the notes of his mate, when her nest is disturbed, will scarcely bring forth the male from his concealment. It feeds on various species of small insects, in their various stages of development. The female forms an elegant, round, and firm nest in the fork of a small tree, or bush, generally a young maple. This is composed of fibrous woody matter, strips of fine bark, firmly interwoven together. The eggs are four in number, of a bluish white hue, dotted with brownish spots.

(To be continued.)