

Much has been said in a general way, by all writers on ornithology, about certain species of birds living on insects, and certain other species living on seeds; but we have many that change their diet according to the season of the year, and it cannot properly be included in either of these groups. Another important consideration is, to determine whether the insects destroyed by the birds are injurious or beneficial in farm or garden. Even on this point there is still some difference of opinion in regard to the true position of certain species.

Among the seed eaters, similar difficulties occur, as many birds are known to feed freely on whatever suitable seeds are available, without considering whether they are nexious to the farmer or not. In this way a bird may, during one part of the season, be doing the farmer good service, and at another he may be doing injury in a corresponding degree. In this connection I would mention the case of the bob-o-link, which, while with us, lives almost entirely on insects, and is considered highly beneficial, but when in vast flocks it reaches the rice fields in the south, it annually entails a loss of thousands, if not of millions, of dollars on the planters, by the destruction of the crops. With the foregoing facts in view, it will be seen how nearly impossible it is, in the present state of our knowledge, to form anything like a positive idea of the economic value of our birds; but we know enough of the habits of many of the species to believe that the balance for good is in their favor, and so let us protect and encourage them as far as in our power.

Among our garden birds, no one is better known than the robin, and a cheerful, joyous fellow he is, turning his bright red breast to the east in the early spring morning, and hailing the rising sun with his *heartly* if not very *musical* ditty. That he is fond of fruit cannot be disputed, and he is a good judge, taking only the finest of the cherries, but he is also known to destroy large numbers of cutworms, caterpillars, grubs and beetles, whose ravages might have far exceeded his own.

Dr. King of River Falls, who has, at the request of the State of Wisconsin, prepared the most exhaustive report I know of on the food of birds, says regarding the robin:—"In its method of obtaining food, and in the situation from which its food is gleaned, the robin performs a very important work, and one for which few other birds are so well adapted. So important is this work, that the small quantity of fruit it consumes is but a stingy compensation for the services which it renders, and I know of no bird whose greater abundance is likely to prove of more service to the country. Its eminently terrestrial habits, its fondness for larvæ of various kinds, its ability to obtain those which are hidden beneath the turf, give it a usefulness in destroying cutworms in the larval state which no other bird possesses in the same degree, and for this feature of its economy alone, its greater abundance should be encouraged."

Another familiar garden bird, now less numerous than formerly, is the cat-bird, which, like the robin, is a member of the thrush family; and it, too, delights in the society of man. It is not so much a city bird as the robin, neither is it found in the heavily timbered woods. Its choice of a residence is in the garden of our suburban villas, or near a log house on the edge of a clearing. In such places its lithe, handsome form may be seen gliding among the shrubbery, and its rich melodious notes, when heard morning and evening, are often mistaken for those of the brown thrush. Its food consists largely of insects, and in the season it also takes the berries of our wild and cultivated bushes, but a careful examination has shewn that the balance of work done has been in favor of the gardener, so by all means give the cat-bird the benefit, and encourage his presence in the garden, where his lively manners are always interesting.