

## Nature Study Class.—V.

W. H. MOORE.

The sun is bright, the air is clear,  
 The darting swallows soar and sing,  
 And from the stately elms I hear  
 The bluebird prophesying spring.

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Enjoy thy youth, it will not stay;

\* \* \* \* \*

For O! it is not always May!

—Longfellow.

No, it is not always May! It is now June, but this year we had March in April, a part of April in May, and why not a part of May in June?

Many of you have watched for the arrival of the birds from the south, for the appearance of various insects which have passed the winter months in a torpid state, some as mature specimens, others in the chrysalis form, and some in the egg-stage of life. Many are more specially interested in plants, and have looked longingly for flowers that some seasons would have been in bloom weeks earlier than they are this season.

Amateurs who have followed our nature study class this year have watched the colours of the twigs of other shrubs and trees, besides the one mentioned in an early article, and have seen how the bright colours of red, yellow and other shades are gradually fading as the foliage and flowers appear. Many will notice for the first time that trees and shrubs that are fertilized by the wind have borne their catkins of bloom before the leaves have appeared; examples are alder and white birch. Take notice, also, when the buds appear for next year's catkins. Observe also the structure of the blue iris flowers, commonly spoken of as blue flags.

Those who live near large tracts of intervale lands have perhaps heard during some of the cloudy days we have had and during the evenings, the ventriloquial song of the Wilson's snipe. The sound seems to arise from the very earth near where you stand, from the right, from the left, or high over head, and when you at last think you have located the exact spot from which the sound arises, it will apparently come from some distant place. Should we be able to locate the call or noise during the day, we will see high overhead a small bird in erratic flight, and when the sound is produced a vigorous beating with the wings accompanies it. The old people called this bird the heather bleater, probably

being acquainted with the same antics and calls of the English snipe upon the moors of Britain.

I hear the cry of their voices high,  
 Falling dreamily through the sky,  
 But their forms I cannot see. —Longfellow.

Closely related to the Wilson's snipe is a bird of beautifully variegated plumage, the ground colour of which is brownish; this also sings at night. It is the American woodcock. Its habitat is more about alder swamps and swales than on the intervals which are inhabited by the first-named bird. Sometimes in warm evenings we may hear the love song of the woodcock, and observe its peculiar erratic and interesting flight as the male pays court to the female of his choice. At first we hear a sort of buzz, buzz call, then the male flies spirally up into the air, and, as he mounts upward, pours forth a sweet musical ditty of tweeps and twitterings. When the song is ended the bird drops like a plummet to the earth, alighting beside his mate. They caress each other, the buzzing calls are given a few times, then the aerial song and flight is reproduced; such is the programme of their evening's entertainment, and pleased is the bird-observer who is thus entertained. But let us follow them later on in their family affairs. The nest is merely a slight depression among leaves upon the ground. Four eggs are laid and carefully cared for and incubated by the female. Special provision has been made whereby the female is enabled to keep the eggs sufficiently warm for incubation purposes. The eggs are sometimes laid while the earth is still cold and damp, and the mother bird huddles the eggs close against her body—between the feather tracts of her under-parts. Having the eggs held so close to her, and her colours blending beautifully with her surroundings, the parent bird is not easily discovered, nor does she fly from the nest unless about to be stepped upon. The young are as zealously cared for as are the eggs—even more so—for the female will carry the young to places of safety when enemies are crowding upon them too closely. When not upon their feeding grounds, the woodcocks in late summer may be found in grain fields, bush-grown pastures, or in clumps of woods. In the evening they fly to their feeding grounds along some stream where the earth is easily probed by their long slender bills as they search for the lusty, succulent angleworms, of which their diet is composed.

The last of the bird migrants have arrived from their winter sojourn in the south. The arrival