

study. There are few studies more interesting than comparative anatomy and every ornithologist requires to know enough of the principles of classification to be able to group the birds intelligently. But classification should be given the subordinate place ; for just as human life—the actions which are moulded by man's reason, by his impulses, emotions, and aspirations—is a higher and grander theme for contemplation and profound thought than is a human skeleton, wonderful as it is, so the study of a bird's life and the influences which operate upon it deserve more attention than do a bird's bones and feathers.

Teach your students something about the facts of bird-life and they will naturally turn to classification that they may have convenient pigeon-holes for the storing and assorting of their facts. But if you attempt to instruct them in classification first, they are apt to think that ornithology consists entirely of long names that are hard to pronounce, hard to remember, and harder still to comprehend. Many a bright student who would have gained immensely—gained for himself and for his fellows—by becoming interested in natural history, has been turned from the pursuit by an unwise use of the old fashioned text-book.

Even now in some of our schools, and indeed in some colleges, the instruction in natural history subjects is confined exclusively to anatomy and classification, with some excursions into the domain of embryology. The blighting effect of such instruction is alas! too apparent. We see its influence every day in the ignorance which intelligent writers display regarding our birds.

The elementary portion of a field-naturalist's studies is not difficult to master, nor is a highly developed intellect required to insure satisfactory results. The chief requisite is natural aptitude—a talent for the work—

though this may be acquired. To gain success one should have a sensitive ear, a quick eye, a faculty for rapid observation combined with a ready perception of cause and effect, and a retentive memory. But all of these requisites can be cultivated, and many a young student is surprised at the end of his first season in the field to find how much more accurate are his ears and eyes, and how much more he hears and sees.

To accomplish much at this, as at every other undertaking, a man must have patience and energy, and above all must be deeply devoted to his work. But these, too, come with practice, and many a dull school boy turns out a keen and enthusiastic bird lover.

The best time to study the habits of birds is while they are building their nests for then they are the most active, sing most frequently, and display their most interesting characteristics.

With some of our migratory species the custom obtains for flocks of the males to arrive first, in the spring, the females appearing some five to ten days later, but most of our birds come in mixed flocks. Unless the weather is so cold and food correspondingly scarce that the struggle for existence occupies all their energies they commence their mating at once upon arrival at their breeding ground, though some pairs will have made considerable advance in this delicate business during the journey north.

In this matter of mating birds differ from quadrupeds, for among the higher order of birds, at least, polygamy is almost unknown. Each male selects a female and after inducing her to mate with him—after a courtship in which the females display considerable coquetry and demand considerable coaxing—the pair remain constant for the year at least, and with some species the pairing is for life.