

Natural History.

The Woodpecker.

A correspondent from Port Hope, referring to a statement by a writer in this journal that the marks of the Woodpecker were an index of the presence of the borer or other insects, expresses his dissent, and affirms his belief that the bird in question attacks young smooth-barked and sound trees, for the purpose of sucking the sap; that in this way they frequently girdle the tree, and ultimately kill it, as he found from his own observation. saying, he says, lost a valuable plum tree from the attacks of these birds. The same correspondent condemns the importation of the House Sparrow into this country, believing it to be an unmitigated pest, and that the Hedge Sparrow would be a much more desirable acquisition. In his letter he further laments the introduction of Lincolnshire sheep, and their recognition in the prize list of our Agricultural Shows, saying that he would "encourage the importer of such sheep by putting him in the Penitentiary for two years, and feeding him on Lincolnshire mutton." He will doubtless be comforted by finding no mention of the obnoxious breed in the Prize List of the Provincial Association, and, as we have ourselves no partiality for the said mutton, we will not now discuss that question, but pass on to the birds. We have only a word or two by the way for the sparrow, but must attempt a

more emphatic vindication of the Woodpeckers. The House Sparrow (*Pyrgila Domestica*) and the Hedge Sparrow (*Accentor Modularis*), though somewhat resembling one another on a casual observation, are in reality very different birds, belonging not only to different genera, but to widely separated families. The former, or true sparrow, is a member of the Finch family, included in the sub-order *Conirostres* or conical beaked birds, while the latter belongs to another sub-order, the Tooth billed birds (*Dentirostres*), and is closely allied to the Blue bird and other warblers. Of the two, perhaps the denizen

of the hedges is the less omnivorous; both, however, destroy an immense number of insects, and are esteemed on that account most useful in their native haunts; but it doubtless admits of question whether their introduction into Canada, where we have already so many insectivorous birds, is called for or desirable. We shall perhaps do better by carefully protecting our feathered friends that are native to the country. Prominent among them are the much maligned and interesting family of Woodpeckers.

The peculiar habits and formation of this

and the claws are strong and sharply hooked, so that the bird can retain a firm hold of the tree to which it is clinging, while it works away at the bark or wood with its bill. The tail, too, is furnished with very stiff and pointed feathers, which are pressed against the bark, and form a kind of support on which the bird can rest a large proportion of its weight. The breast bone, moreover, is not so prominent as in the generality of flying birds, in order to enable the Woodpecker to press its breast closely to the tree; and the beak is long, strong, and sharp.

These modifications aid the bird in cutting away the wood, but there is yet a provision needful to render the woodpecker capable of seizing the little insects on which it feeds, and which lurk in small holes, tubes, and crannies into which the beak could not penetrate. This structure is represented on the other page by a sketch of a woodpecker's head. The tongue bones or "hyoid" bones are greatly lengthened, and pass over the top of the head, being fastened in the skull just above the right nostril. These long tendinous looking bones are accompanied by a narrow strip of muscle, by which they are moved. The tongue itself is furnished at the tip with a long horny appendage covered with barbs and sharply pointed, so that the bird is enabled to project this instrument to a considerable distance from the bill, transfix an insect, and draw it into its mouth. A further provision for capturing insects too small to be thus harpooned, or hooked out, is furnished by a viscid secretion poured upon the tongue from



tribe are so distinct that the naturalist assigns them a special sub-order, that of *Scansores*, or Climbing birds. The Cuckoos are members of the same family. The name, Woodpecker, indicates the well known habit common to those birds of picking among the decaying wood and bark of trees, in order to feed upon the insects found within. They also chip away the wood for the purpose of making the cavities or nests in which their eggs are deposited, and their young are reared. In order to enable them to perform these duties, their structure is very curiously modified. The feet are made extremely powerful,

certain glands within the mouth, and which causes the tiny insects to adhere to the weapon suddenly projected among them. The whole arrangement is very analogous to the tongue of the Ant-eater, which feeds in a similar manner. A glance at this structure is sufficient to show how totally unfitted is the whole apparatus for any such operation as that attributed to these birds of sucking the sap.

The limits of this article will only allow a very brief notice of one or two of our Canadian species. Professor Hinks enumerates eight that are known as natives of Canada,