

## THE STUDY OF BIRD-LIFE.

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IT is a healthy sign that the present generation of readers are taking more interest in books about out-of-door affairs than their fathers did, and it is especially gratifying to bird-lovers to note that their favorites are receiving a large share of attention. This increased interest is due in part to the fact that there are more interesting guide books published now than in former years. A number of facile writers have become interested in the rocks and the plants and the birds they see, and these writers are willing to tell the people why they find these things interesting.

But a deal of credit for the increased interest in nature is due to the school teachers who have, at considerable sacrifice and without pecuniary remuneration, given their pupils instruction in field work. For it is in field work—the study of bird-life for example—that the chief interest in nature centers; and we have come to consider in these later years that study of bird-life is much more important and of much more value to the student than any other department of ornithology. Also, it is now generally conceded that field work should precede and not follow “closet work,” as classification with its attendant subjects has been aptly termed.

In closet work we learn how to place each species in its proper genus, and to group the general in families and orders; also to arrange in proper sequence the families of an order and the genera of each family, determining which is entitled to the highest rank—is the most highly developed. To accomplish this it is necessary to study the theories of classification and to become familiar with the anatomy as well as the exterior forms of each species, and of the color and markings

of its plumage, all of which can be done through the examination of dead birds or dried skins and skeletons without the student ever having seen the subject of his study while it had life.

In field work the object is to study the habits of the birds—their life history—and of the two branches of the science this is, certainly, the more fascinating. The deepest interest attaches to everything that reveals the mind, however feebly it may be developed, which lies behind the feathers; for in studying its life we discover that a bird is something more than a mere flash of light, more than a mere incarnation of song. We realize then as we never realized before that, besides the beauty of their form, the brilliancy of their plumage and the charm of their sweet and tender melodies, these tiny creatures have a beautiful home-life which places them in a sphere quite above that of mere singers—a life in which the song is but an incident—a life in which the birds inherit duties that, as a rule, they perform so faithfully and so well that many a man might take a lesson from them with profit. And their home-life awakens a deeper interest than any other phase of the bird's history, because through the relation of the birds to each other, to their mates and to their young, they present their more personal qualities and exhibit the finest characteristics of their nature. Little wonder, then, that bird-life attracts more attention and awakens a keener interest than do mere dry-as-dust subjects.

Yet I must not be understood as decrying the study of classification. It is exceedingly interesting to those who have a taste for that kind of