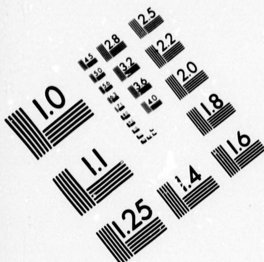
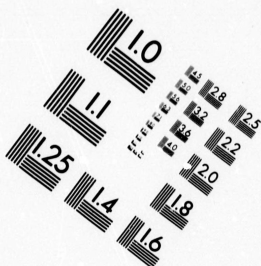

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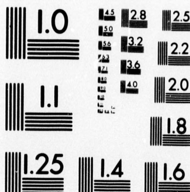
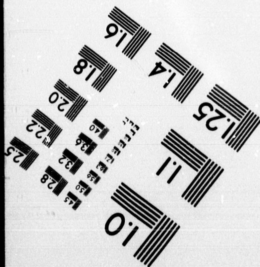
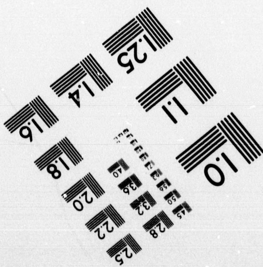

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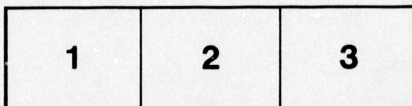
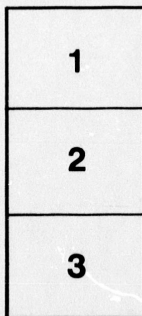
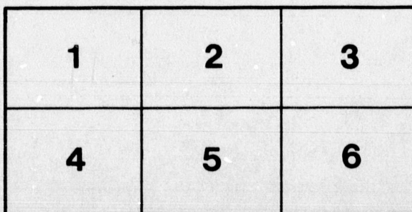


BARN SWALLOW.

# SOME CANADIAN BIRDS.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT

OF

SOME OF THE COMMON BIRDS OF EASTERN CANADA.

BY

MONTAGUE CHAMBERLAIN.

*FIRST SERIES*—

BIRDS OF FIELD AND GROVE.

TORONTO:
THE COPP, CLARK COMPANY, LIMITED.
1895.

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand eight hundred and ninety-five, by The Copp, Clark Company, Limited, Toronto, Ontario, in the Office of the Minister of Agriculture.

TO

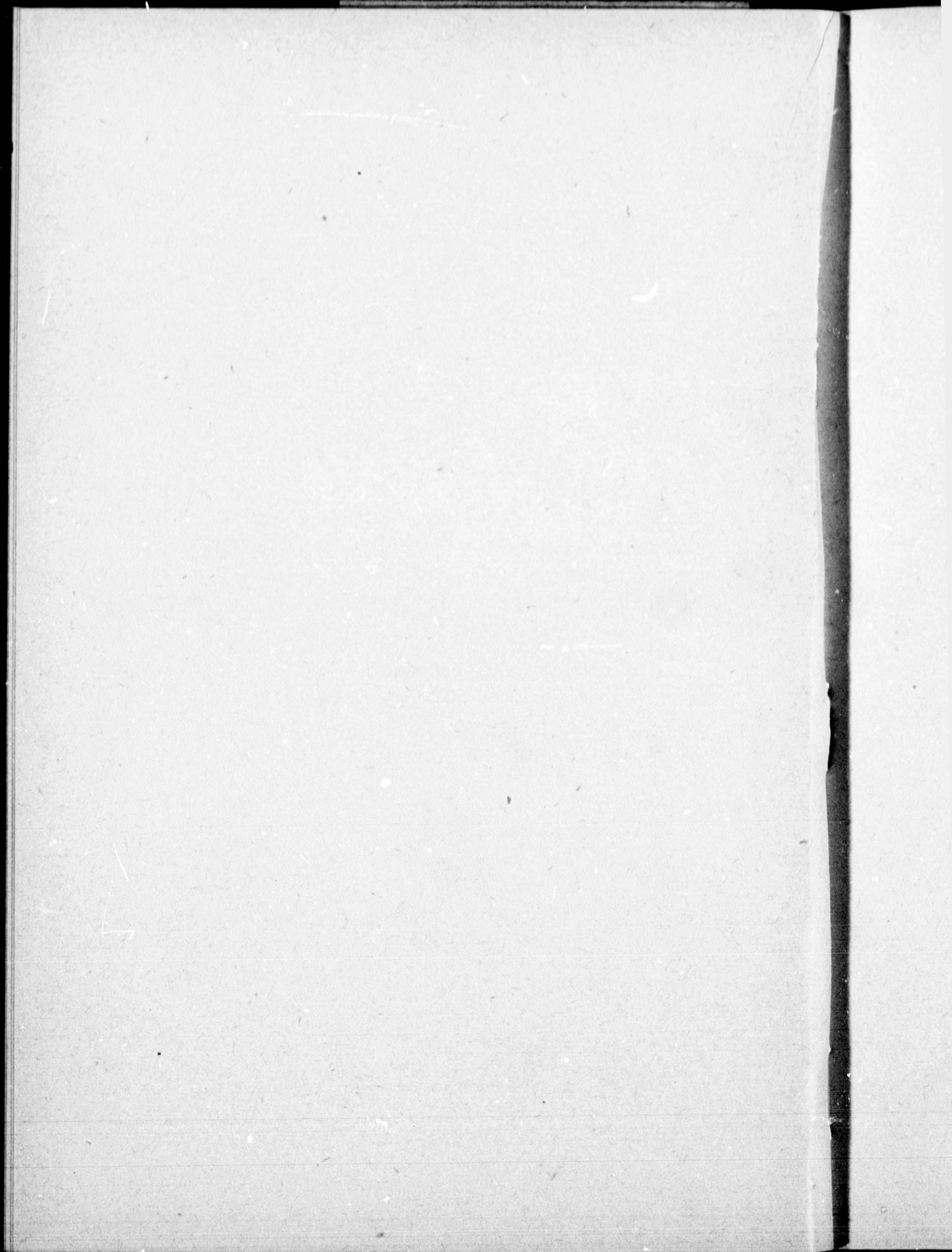
**My Young Friends.**

*ARTHUR SCOTT GILMAN.*

*RICHARD HENRY DANA.*

*THOMAS DICKERSON BERGEN.*

*GEORGE ABBOT MORISON.*



# PREFACE.

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So many good and useful books about birds have been written and published, that the author of a new book should present an explanation for its appearance.

My explanation is that no book has been issued that entirely suits the purpose for which the present volume is intended—a book that can be sold at a low price, and that will give accurate information about the habits and distribution of Canadian birds, as well as descriptions of their plumage, and give this information in untechnical terms. In other words, there is a demand for a small, cheap book, treating of our birds in a popular style. This demand comes from the general public, but comes especially from Teachers who ask for a book that can be used as a supplementary Reader, to assist them in interesting their pupils in birds and familiarizing them with the species most frequently met with in country rambles.

I have attempted to meet this demand, but feel constrained to warn readers against expecting too much from a work that is cramped by such limitations. The space is too small to contain even a short history of all the birds found in the Dominion, for there are too many, over 550 species. The birds of one Province alone are too numerous for a book of this size. Mr. McIlwraith, in his "Birds of Ontario," enumerates 317 species, and about 300 species have been found in New Brunswick. These figures include, of course, the very rare birds, and those that are merely "accidental stragglers," but with these left out the number is still too large for a small book.

The limitation and the number of species compelled me to select a few from the many, and while the selection has been made somewhat at random, the species mentioned will fairly represent the various phases of the bird-life of the localities to which the present volume is limited—the fields and groves of the Eastern Provinces. Among the species that have been omitted are many that are well known in all the provinces, such as the chipping sparrow, goldfinch, purple finch, cedar waxwing, cuckoo, phœbe, grackle, kingfisher and the woodpeckers. I should have preferred to have added these and others, and was deterred solely by the desire to make a small book that could be sold at a small price, and thus be available to a large number of readers who might be prevented from purchasing a more expensive work. I have consoled myself for the omission by the promise that if the present volume commends itself to the public and is accorded an appreciative welcome another volume shall be prepared at once, for the omitted species will fill a book about the size of the present volume.

Some species mentioned here are not equally common in all the provinces, but I have intended these books to represent the avian fauna of the provinces as a whole; and while it may be said in a general way that the same species of birds occur in all suitable localities throughout the settled portion of this eastern division of the Dominion, from the Atlantic shore to the eastern border of the prairies—that the birds found in Nova Scotia occur also in Ontario—the statement requires some explanation.

The difference in the conditions of climate and of environment in the southern peninsula of Ontario to those which obtain in the more northern districts of the country—the difference between latitude 43° and latitude 48°, or thereabouts, is so great that many of the birds find a suitable breeding place in portions only of the area lying between these parallels. For this reason some species

that spend the summer in the more southern groves are found nowhere else, while others spend the summer at the north, and are seen in Southern Ontario during the migrations only ; others again are distributed over the entire area, and a few—the fox sparrow, for example—occur in numbers in the Maritime Provinces, but are very rare in Ontario, even during the migrations.

No attempt has been made to arrange in systematic order the species mentioned, and those who desire to study classification and other technical branches of ornithology must be referred to the numerous good books already published.

The illustrations, with a few exceptions. are from drawings made by my friend, Ernest E. Thompson, of Toronto.

M. C.

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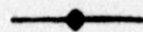
# SOME CANADIAN BIRDS.



## THE SWALLOWS.

Swallows are not frequenters of either the fields or the groves, though strangers to neither, but they are typical birds—birds of the air. "It is little more than a drift of the air brought into form by plumes," writes John Ruskin of a typical bird. And again, "The air is in all its quills, it breathes through its whole frame and flesh, and glows with air in flying like a blown flame ; it rests upon the air, subdues it, surpasses it ; is the air, conscious of itself, conquering itself, ruling itself." We find that vivid bit of description in "Athena." Surely Mr. Ruskin must have had a swallow in mind when he wrote it.

In almost every country swallows of some species help, in their own bountiful way, to make the summer's gladness, and thus these birds have become familiar friends to widely separated races. For whether a man be Frank or Persian, Norseman or Turk, he understands the language of the birds and is moved by the glad thoughts they put into their songs.

Six representatives of this family visit Eastern Canada every summer, but of the six, four only can be correctly classed among the "common" birds, for the purple martin, though widely distributed, is nowhere abundant, and the rough-winged swallow has not been found elsewhere than at London, where that keen observer, Mr. William E. Saunders, was fortunate enough to discover a few examples. The other four occur in numbers in all the Provinces, though restricted somewhat to localities. They are gregarious, and build their nests in colonies or "republics," as these have been termed ; and while the birds may be seen at some distance from head-quarters, there is a limit to these wanderings—swift and strong

as a swallow's flight is—and over many a garden and grove lying between two colonies swallows may rarely appear.

The names of our four species were suggested by the places they select for nesting sites. The bank swallow bores a gallery in a sand bank, and at the end of the excavation makes a chamber where it places the few sprigs of dry grass which form a cushion for eggs and young. The tree swallow hunts for a cavity in a tree in which to deposit its eggs. The cliff or eave swallow fastens its gourd-shaped home under the eave of a house, or where no such hospitable shelter is to be found, selects a high cliff; while the barn swallow chooses a beam or rafter under the roof for its nesting site—when a barn is within reach.

There was a time — and at a comparatively recent date in swallow chronology—when barns were not to be found in this country, and these birds were forced to accept such nesting sites as the wilderness afforded. Some barn swallows have not yet discovered the barns, and are even now putting their nests in caverns and in any nooks or crevices they may happen upon. In the prairie country nests of this species have been found on the ground under some slight shelter, and at least one observer has discovered their nests on the face of a stream's bank.

(Birds are conservative as a rule, and follow precedents rather closely, but when occasion demands they can be "progressive," and show themselves quite apt at taking up new notions and meeting new conditions.)

These barn swallows use mud—common-place, street-puddle mud —to construct their nests, and in the spring-time may be seen clustering around the mud-puddles in the road-ways gathering their material. They usually bind the pellets of mud with dried grass. In this use of grass as a binding the barn swallow differs from the eave swallow, for the mud walls of the nests under the eaves contain no grass or other fibrous material, the pellets being held together by adhesion or by saliva.

The eggs of the barn swallow are white, spotted with several shades of brown and purple, while the eggs laid by the tree swallow and the bank swallow are unspotted, and are of a dull chalk-like white, differing in this particular from the clear white eggs of the

purple martin, which are smooth and glossy, resembling highly polished ivory.

The barn swallow is the most beautiful of our four. The back is covered with soft smooth plumes of deep lustrous steel blue, glowing with irridescent hues, and wings and tail are black with a greenish gloss. The breast bears a rich warm chestnut shield, and a band of this same warm tint crosses the forehead. The neck is partially encircled with steel blue. A distinguishing characteristic of this species is the elongated tail feathers, and while these are not so long in the young birds as in the adults, they are long enough at all ages to make the tail appear deeply "forked." The young vary also from the adult in wearing much duller colors, the upper parts of very young birds being brownish black, and the under parts brownish white.

The eave swallow in general coloration resembles the barn swallow, though the latter's forked tail makes that species easily distinguishable. The colors of the tree swallow are metallic green on the upper parts, and pure white beneath. It was called the white-bellied swallow formerly. The upper parts of the bank swallow are of a grayish brown color, and a collar of the same hue encircles the neck ; the under parts are white.

The purple martin is the largest of the swallow tribe that is seen in this country, and is further distinguished by the lustrous blue-black color of its entire plumage, the females and young being somewhat streaked on the underparts.

On the wing our swallows appear so similar that they cannot be distinguished readily, though the large size of the purple martin enables us to select him from the others, and the forked tail of the barn swallow and the white breast of the tree swallow help us in picking out these species.

Swallows rarely alight excepting at their nests. One exception to this rule occurs when they gather on the telegraph wires. At the time the young birds are taking their lessons in flying, numbers of the birds may be seen resting on the wires, and again when the clans are gathering for the journey southward. Owing to the little use they make of their legs and feet these parts are not developed. The legs are extremely short and the feet are weak. The bill is

short, broad and flat, and narrows rapidly to the tip. The gape is wide and long, the mouth extending to beneath the eyes.

The flight of the swallows combines great speed with rare grace and skill. Few, if any, of the winged host can surpass them, and few can even rival them. I have tested their speed with my homing pigeons, and have been chagrined by the failure of my pets to win the contest. Nor is the swallows' speed more remarkable than is the skill by which they secure their insect prey. At full flight they follow the dartings of the mites, turning and doubling with graceful ease. The whole family are fond of bathing, and plunge into the water while on the wing, rising immediately into the air and shaking the drops from their plumes as they speed on.

Do swallows hibernate? is a question that has been asked so frequently and has provoked so much controversy, that no biographical sketch of these birds would be complete without some reference to the matter. Swallows may hibernate. There is nothing in their physiology which renders a torpid state impossible. But though several of the old observers stated explicitly that they had seen swallows in a torpid state from which they revived—some asserting that the swallows were dug out of the mud at the bottom of a pond—no modern observer has happened upon such a phenomenon. And not only have no hibernated swallows been discovered, but investigators have failed to find any reason for their hibernating, while many reasons have been advanced to warrant the assumption that a state of torpidity is not necessary for these birds. They can get on very well without it, and such a condition would be unnatural and inconsistent with their observed habits. True, their food supply is cut off by the chilling air of early autumn that drives the swarms of winged insects to their winter burrows; but the swallows are strong of wing, and with little fatigue are enabled to journey southward far enough to get free from the cold wind and into a land of plenty. With equal ease they return to their northern homes when the summer's warmth revives the summer's life.

Their going and coming is somewhat mysterious. What prompts them to go is a question we can answer, for no one now doubts but that the scarcity of food is the prime cause for the fall migration —the temperature having but little influence upon such hot-blooded

and warmly clad creatures. But other questions are not so satisfactorily answered. What induces the swallows to return to the north in the spring? How do they know the direction of their path through the trackless air? and how are they guided on their long journeys? These are unsolved problems yet, and it is little wonder that a more superstitious age magnified the mystery, and found these winged sprites fit subjects for augury. But as students have observed bird life more closely, they have learned that there is no more of mystery in the movements of the swallows than of other migrating species. The unsolved problems of bird migration are admitted, but the mystery of the thing has been specially attached to the swallows, because these birds being constantly in the air are more frequently seen than are the birds of the bush, and their coming and going more evident.

In the autumn the swallows gather in large flocks—flocks numbered by thousands—preparatory to migrating. They generally rendezvous at some favorite roosting place—a grove or barn. I saw a flock several thousand strong enter a deserted house by means of the chimney, and settle themselves for the night on the floor of the rooms. After several days of restless activity, and much excitement during their mid-air meetings, the throng vanished, no one knew whither. Their return is usually unannounced, especially in the more northern districts of their distribution. Sometimes an advanced detachment heralds the approach of the main column, but more often we awake some clear fresh morning in the spring-time, to find the swallows at their old haunts, and moving about in the same familiar, much-at-home fashion, as if the winter storm had lasted but a night.

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## CHIMNEY SWIFT.

This bird so closely resembles a swallow in general form and in habits that it is called "chimney swallow" the whole country over, but the systematists tell us that it differs from a swallow very materially in anatomical structure, and they have classified it in a much lower order, placing it in the same group with the night hawk and hummingbird—a motley group.

Though a familiar object in the summer twilight, few of our people have handled the bird or know the color of its plumage. In the hand the dull, indefinite hue becomes a sooty brown tinged with green. The wings are long and extremely acute; the tail is short and is armed at the extremity with strong sharp points which assist the bird in clinging to the sides of the chimney or cavern or hollow tree in which it has placed its nest, for these birds are not invariably chimney dwellers. The origin of this species dates back to a time when chimneys were not available, and in many localities the birds still retain the primitive notion regarding a proper nesting site. Wherever placed the nest does not vary much from the general plan. An almost flat shelf of strong twigs is fastened to the side of the chimney or cave by the adhesive saliva which the builders eject upon the twigs, and on this shelf, without any cushion, the hen lays four or five eggs of unspotted white.

When the young are ready for their first flight they are taken to the chimney top and encouraged to test their pinions, and an interesting scene this is to witness. The solicitude of the parents and their coaxing ways; the timid hesitation of the young birds, and their evident desire to emulate their seniors; the final plunge into mid air, and the first few awkward efforts to master the wing stroke, make this one of the episodes of bird-life which bring these children of the air very close to the heart of their human brethren. I know of no greater test of faith than that first trial of the wings. A babe's first steps prove his courage; but it is a small matter to take those few steps between mother and nurse when strong hands are near—a small matter in comparison with that leap into the care of untried pinions when the ground lies hard and cruel some fifty feet below. (I borrow the thought though at the moment I forget the author).

I do not agree with Nuttall in his description of the flight of these birds. It differs from the flight of the swallow in being more continuously rapid, and in the almost incessant vibrations of the wing. The birds are not seen at the mid-day period, excepting on the dullest of gray days, but during the early hours of the morning and in the evening twilight they are very active in pursuit of their insect prey. They rarely alight excepting at their nests and while gathering material for nest-building.

The voice of the chimney swift is not as musical as the swallows', and their twittering song, though cheerful, displays little variation, is nothing more indeed than rapidly repeated *tsips*. The species is generally distributed in summer throughout this eastern country north to the fiftieth parallel, but they leave us in September for their winter resorts in the tropics.

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## NIGHT HAWK.

This is one of those unfortunate birds that have been misnamed by the popular voice, because the average man is a superficial observer and bases his decisions upon too slight evidence. The night hawk is in no way a bird of the night. It is as strictly diurnal as the robin, for example ; indeed of the two I think the robin makes quite as much use of the sunless hours, for while the so-called hawk may extend his period of activity further into the evening, the robin is on the wing earlier in the morning.

The night hawk preys upon small winged insects, and as these remain under cover during mid-day the birds are inclined to follow the example, though it is not an uncommon sight to see night hawks in the air amid the glare of the brighest noontime. Yet they do not fly in the sunlight as frequently as do their fellow fly-hunters—the swallows. Both species take to their wings at times out of pure sport—for the exhiliration of flying—but the swallows have the larger supply of nervous energy and fly with less exhaustion, so indulge in sportive flight with greater frequency than do the night hawks. When the sun declines westward and the winged mites come out for an airing, then the night hawks are most active ; but when the twilight deepens and the shadows of night fall upon the land the night hawks fold their wings and take their rest like other decent folk.

And so it turns out after all that our night hawk is no lover of the dark hours like those prowling ruffians, the owls, or the ghowlish bats or those cadaverous students—the "grinds"—and other questionable characters who work at night and sleep in the day, but is a well behaved, sensible bird, living up to the good

old-fashioned sentiment that night is the time for rest. Exceptions there are to most good rules, and desirous as I am of clearing a maligned bird from charges of bad habits, candor compels me to admit that I have heard the cry of this bird from mid-air at midnight. But the moon was full, the sky was clear, and the air balmy; the night was much too fine to waste it all in slumber. I could not blame the bird; I envied him.

The semi-nocturnal or crepuscular habit is common to a large number of American birds. They are not about during the middle of the day, as is the habit with the majority of the European species. This is one of the reasons why English people think that there are but few birds in Canada; for English birds are always active, always to be seen and heard. Driving through the country districts of Canada you hear no continuous chorus of bird voices such as greets the ear from the fields and hedgerows of merry England. "Have we not fewer song-birds than are found in England?" is frequently asked. Quite the contrary, must be replied. Canada can fairly boast of more species of song-birds and of more beautiful bird songs than can be heard in England. But our grandest carillon, the chief chorus of our sylvan voices is heard in the morning only—the very early morning—at dawn, though a few of our songsters reserve their sweetest strains for that quiet hour when daylight dies.

The night hawk is much inclined to fly high in the air, so high at times as to be almost out of sight, yet we can follow the bird's flight by the harsh grating note it continually utters, a note which has the power of penetrating a remarkable distance through the air. The effect, is sometimes ventriloquial, the sound appearing near at hand when the bird is far away in the sky. The bird mounts upward by spiral evolutions, and at intervals closes its wings and plunges head first toward the earth. After descending some sixty feet or more it wheels upward, and the ascent to the upper air is again made. Just as the bird makes this aerial curve or wheel, a hollow booming sound is heard—a phenomenon that has formed the topic for much speculation. How the sound is made, by the mouth or the wings or in some other way, has not yet been determined.

On the ground, at a little distance, the night hawk looks like a bit of brownish granite, though in the hand the color which predominates

is black—a dull, greenish tinted black—and this is mottled with gray and brown. A marked diagnostic character of the species is the patches of white on the wings and on the tail which are displayed in flight. The legs are extremely short, and the bill is little more than a tiny knob. The gape is wide, the mouth reaching back beyond the eyes. In general appearance this species resembles the whip-poor-will, but the latter lacks the white wing patches and its coloration is much lighter, more grey than brownish black.

The night hawk does not build a nest nor seek any shelter for its eggs, laying them in the open and trusting to their inconspicuousness for protection. Nor is the bird at all particular as to the location of its nestless nest. On one occasion, when crossing the ridge of a hill that raised its wind-swept crest far above the surrounding land, I was stopped by a flutter at my feet. The grand view which the situation commanded had so absorbed my attention that I had failed to notice that directly in my pathway a devoted mother was sheltering her best loved. The parent had not stirred until my foot was almost upon her, not a full yard away. Even then she made no effort for her own safety, but strove to entice me away from her eggs by simulating a broken wing, and the ruse was so skilfully executed that for a moment I was baffled. There sure enough on the bare rock, lay the elliptical beauties for which the mother's heart in her bird-breast was beating painfully. It was not easy detecting the eggs, they were so much like the granite upon which they lay—like two weather worn pebbles. The ground color on inspection proved a slaty gray, or dull whitish, and the irregular markings which covered the surface were of varying tints of brown and lilac. I have seen these eggs also on the gravel roof of a city warehouse, in the centre of bustling activity.

Night hawks are abundant throughout the country during the summer months, but leave us in September for the tropical zone.

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## WOOD THRUSH.

If a bird's home is the country in which it was born, and where it builds its nest and rears its young,—and surely that is the place best entitled to be called the home of a bird,—these Eastern Pro-

vinces can fairly claim to be the home of five species of that group of the thrush family to which systematists have given the sub-generic title of *hylocichla*, but which are better known by their English names—wood thrush, Wilson's thrush or veery, gray-cheeked thrush, olive-backed thrush, and hermit thrush. Four of these build their nests in some of the settled portions of the country, but the fifth—the gray-cheeked—is made of sturdier stuff, and revels in the bracing air and deep forests that lie northward of the Laurentian hills. We catch a glimpse of these northern breeding birds as the flocks go scurrying across the country on the way to and from their winter resorts in the far away south; and it is but a glimpse we get, for as a matter of fact they are rarely seen at all, and only a few Canadian observers have had the good fortune to learn how these birds look in the field. I cannot therefore place the gray-cheeked thrush among those species which for the present purpose I have decided to class as "common," though the other four can fairly claim recognition.

These thrushes are not equally distributed over all the Provinces, though with one exception they are more or less abundant almost everywhere. The wood thrush is the exception, for it occurs regularly in Ontario only, and Mr. McIlwraith, who is good authority, tells us that the bird is rarely found far from the southern border. We learn from other observers that it has been taken in Bruce county and near Peterborough, and it is said to be fairly common in parts of the Ottawa valley. A few examples have been seen and heard in the Eastern townships of Quebec, but the song has not been heard in the Maritime Provinces nor in Maine, though in Massachusetts the wood thrush is quite common.

Our four thrushes appear so much alike in form and color, and their habits and songs are so similar, that the average native thinks them one species, which he dubs "swamp robin." Robin, from their robinish ways and mellow notes, and of the swamp because their songs often come from bushes that flank the damp meadows, or from some cool dingle through which a stream purls its way. The native aforesaid should not be harshly judged for his mistake, as the birds at a distance are not easily distinguished, though a close inspection reveals marked differences.

The thrushes are ranked among the most noble of the avian

aristocracy—the family is given precedence over all others in modern classification—and this exalted position seems singularly appropriate, for in appearance as well as in manner they are unmistakably patricians. Their forms are models of elegance; their costumes are rich but inconspicuous, and their bearing under trying ordeals is calm, dignified, and courageous. While modest and retiring they are not shy, and though brave are never quarrelsome. They have no vulgar ways, and under all conditions display a well bred air and graceful manner.

A mistaken idea prevails that these birds are peculiarly solitary in their habits, and that they have a stronger preference for seclusion than other species. On the contrary their recluse habits are not peculiarly marked; their isolation and seclusion is not more pronounced than that of numerous other woodland birds. It is true that these thrushes are not gregarious, but comparatively few birds are. It is true also that during the nesting season—the season in which our birds are most conspicuous—the thrushes are not found in flocks as a rule; but it is equally true that they are not especially addicted to hermit-like habits. They have an immense expanse of country to wander over, and nowhere are they so abundant as to force their presence upon the notice of a superficial observer. The thrushes, like many other birds, lack demonstrative sociability, but I have on more than one occasion met with a dozen of them in as many minutes, during a stroll in their haunts. They enjoy the privacy and the shelter of the quiet groves, and share that feeling with many of the feathered throng. Not that they penetrate into the deeper forests—few of our songsters go there—but they find food in plenty, a grateful shade, and agreeable surroundings amid the dells and timber patches adjacent to the settlements, so they select these places for a nesting site, and spend in such secluded spots most of the summer days. To sum up the matter:—When it is said that our thrushes prefer the retirement of the groves and dingles to the glare of the open field or the bustle of the roadside, the entire story of their recluse habits has been told.

Of our four species the wood thrush is the most frequently encountered in a semi-open country, and is not a stranger to the parks and orchards. Many a time it builds its nest on a dry hill side, while it rarely haunts the alder swamps or the damp glens

in which the veery loves to hide. The present bird is more confiding, also, than others of the group, and comes closer to the houses. A pair of wood thrushes have been known to build their nest in the centre of a village.

All our thrushes have voices of rich sweet tones, and liquid, flute-like quality, and three of the group sing melodies that have made them famous. No one of the three has the compass of voice nor the volume that is so conspicuous in the performances of the catbird and the thrasher ; but the songs the thrushes sing are of a higher grade as musical compositions than are the songs of their stronger-voiced rivals. Of the three the veery has the most metallic tone —suggestive of a silver horn rather than a flute—and its song is the most brilliant. The hermit's voice excels in richness, and the song of the hermit surpasses his cousins' in spiritual quality. The voice of the wood thrush partakes of the quality of both, though it is not quite so silvery as the veery's nor so mellow as the hermit's. But the song the wood thrush sings has a beauty that is all its own, and it never fails to delight a lover of sweet bird music. We do not always hear the bird at his best, for he frequently sings a part only of his full song—sings in a broken faltering way as if trying his voice—"tuning up," as some one has written. His full song is an exquisite melody, and though not so spiritual as the hermit's it is sweet and placid, and when it comes to the ear during the early spring days, the days when nature is awakening, it carries in its tones a sense of refreshment, of buoyant hopefulness and of serene content. But like other birds' songs this sweet psalm of the wood thrush must be heard to be appreciated —it cannot be described.

The thrushes are seen on the ground quite as often as on a perch, for their food during most of the year consists of grubs, beetles, ground worms, and other insects that gather under the fallen leaves ; but when wild fruits are ripe the thrush changes his diet to more dainty fare.

When at a distance these birds appear to be much alike—brown backed birds with spotted breasts—but in the hand they prove to differ considerably in coloration.

The wood thrush bears on his upper parts the tribal hue, a dull russet brown, but his crown wears a rich rufous tint, and the neck and

back are tawny, while the wings and tail have a decided tinge of olive. The under parts are of a dull silver white, shading into cream color on the breast, which is thickly marked with clearly defined round spots of olive brown. These breast spots are more conspicuous on the wood thrush than on the others of the group, and make the bird distinguishable at considerable distance. Its size, too, helps to separate it from its congeners, for it is the largest of the thrushes, measuring about eight inches from tip of tail to end of beak. When perched, it looks almost as large as a robin, but on examination proves somewhat smaller.

Early in May these birds make their appearance in Southern Ontario, and soon after commence house building, The nest is placed on a low branch of a small tree, sometimes on a low bush, and is of the type built by the family, a rough structure of dried grass, leaves and twigs, cemented with mud and lined with grass and fine roots. The eggs, three or four in number, are of a beautiful greenish-blue color, "robin's egg blue."

Before the September days are finished, the wood thrushes have silently stolen away from their summer homes and begun their long journey southward, to their winter quarters in the tropical regions of Cuba and Guatemala.

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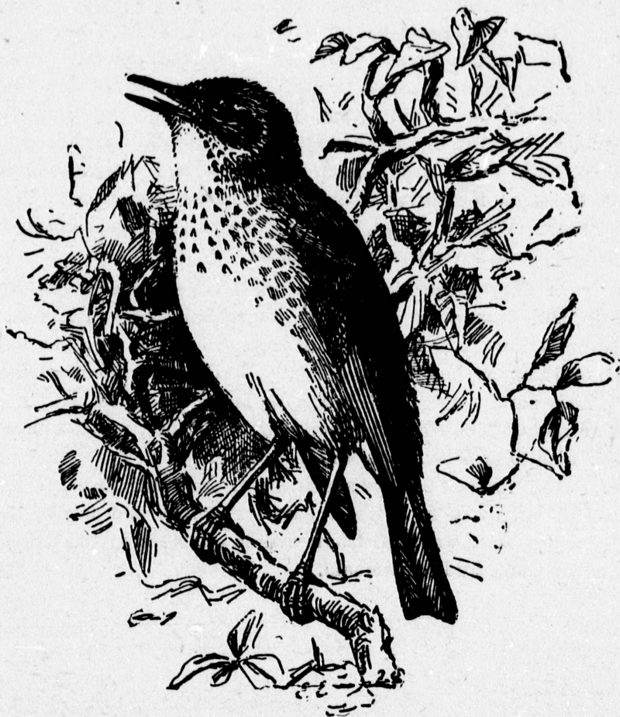

WILSON'S THRUSH.

This bird is also known as "tawny thrush" and "veery." It was named "Wilson's thrush" in honor of that illustrious Scotchman who is called the Father of American Ornithology, and the bird gained the sobriquet of "tawny" through wearing a rufous-tinted jacket, while the name of "veery" was suggested by the bird's song, which bears a resemblance to the words *veery veery veery*. Nuttall heard in this song *vehu 'v'rehu 'v'rehu 'v'rehu* and again *ve villillel villill villill*. I take sides with Nuttall against the "veery" version, though I do not think that the song is well represented by any of these phrases. I doubt if either of them will convey a correct idea

of the melody to any person who has not heard the bird sing it. As a rule the attempts that have been made to represent the woodland songs by words have been failures, though in a few efforts we have been somewhat successful. In the whistle of the titmouse we get a slight—a very slight—resemblance to *chick-a-dee-dee-dee*, and the singer of "old Tom Peabody" has been recognized by his song. It is true also that many an observer by using these artifices has assisted his memory to recall an unfamiliar melody, but he cannot convey it to another through these mediums. It is as conveyances that these phrases and syllables are failures, and the nature of the things to be conveyed makes success impossible. These melodies are too subtle and elusive to be wrapped in a phrase and passed on to one's neighbor. You can no more put a bird's song into words than you can put the wild whistle of the wind, or the whispered reveries of a purling stream.

Another question of common debate is the comparative merits of bird songs, and these must remain in dispute until some genius arranges a standard by which the excellence of these songs shall be judged. In the meantime people will differ in their judgments of our songsters, each man being influenced probably in favor of the birds with whose performance he is most familiar, or with which he has had most favorable associations. It is not surprising, therefore, to find many writers praising the wood thrush as the best singer of our thrushes, while others give precedence to the hermit, and I know one ardent bird lover who thinks the veery sings much the finest song.

The voice of the veery is exceeding clear and sweet. It is of liquid quality yet with a metallic timbre, a tiny silver horn of high pitch, resembling nothing else so much as it does the sound produced by whistling into an empty gun barrel. You may hear the voice during the warmer parts of the day more frequently than you hear that of other thrushes, for the singer haunts the most thickly shaded ravines, or damp dells into which the sunshine rarely enters. In these retreats there is little difference between mid-day and morning, so when hidden there the veery sings on while the birds who have spent the morning in the sunshine take their mid-day rest. It is probable that the veery's fondness for this retirement is largely responsible for the current notion that all these

thrushes are given to recluse ways; for of our four the veery is the most hermit-like, and to him the name of "swamp robin" is the most truly applicable. Yet even his love for the deep shades and dark valleys has been exaggerated. These birds are not always found in such places, indeed, I think their presence there is largely a matter of individual inclination or is determined by other conditions of environment. I have found several nests in open pastures and on hill-sides, in just such places as the robins build.

Of our four brown thrushes, Wilson's has the widest distribution. It is almost abundant in summer throughout Ontario and Quebec, and is fairly common in the Maritime Provinces, though in the more northern sections of its habitat it occurs in favored localities only. It has been found on Anticosti and Newfoundland and is abundant in Manitoba.

The present species is usually described as the smallest of our thrushes, but when measured, the hermit, the olive-backed and Wilson's prove to be much the same size, about seven inches long. Still the veery does seem rather smaller than the others, though this may arise from a slimness of figure, caused by the contour feathers lying close to the body, not loose and fluffy. The plumage of this bird differs in shades only from that of its congeners. On the upper parts the russet, which is the general ground color, has a decided tinge of rufous. On the belly the color is silver white, but the breast is cream-colored with a slight tinge of pink, and upon this are pale russet spots of arrow-head shape, arranged in geometric lines, the points upward. The chin is unspotted, but is bordered by a line of small arrow-head markings. The immaculate chin is a characteristic feature of this group of birds, though it is less pronounced in the other species than in the veery.

The nest is a typical thrush nest—a roughly constructed affair of leaves and grass. It is usually placed on the ground or upon a cushion of leaves, though nests have been found upon the branches of a low bush. Sometimes it is hidden in a clump of grass, or near the base of a tree, but often it has little protection, the bird apparently depending upon its own neutral tints for escape from observation.

The eggs, three or four in number, are of the typical thrush color, greenish blue, but are of a rather paler tint than the eggs of other species and are unspotted.

The veery spends the summer only in this country, arriving in Southern Ontario early in May and reaching the more northern sections somewhat later. In the autumn it has started on its journey southward before the end of September.

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## HERMIT THRUSH.

This species does not summer so far to the southward as does the veery, but goes somewhat farther north. It is a migrant only in the vicinity of London and Hamilton and thereabouts, but elsewhere all over the country, up to the region of the fiftieth parallel, the bird is more or less common, and examples have been taken even farther northward. It is a lover of the woodlands and its favorite home is a grove on the flank of a moist meadow, but it never haunts the shaded dells that are the delight of the veery. The hermit, however, has many habits that are veery-like. It places its nest on the ground, hidden among the grass or the underbrush, and builds it of the same coarse material—leaves, strips of bark, bits of weed stalks and coarse grass, and puts these together with the same patrician-like disregard to outward display. The eggs also are of the same pale greenish-blue tint and are unspotted. But the song of the hermit is all its own ; there is no other song like it. True, this bird shares with others of its kin that quality of voice which separate these singers from all others of the woodland choir, a voice that combines in its rich clear tones the mellow flute and the silver horn. But the theme of the hermit's song is like none other, and is to my ear the finest bit of bird-music heard in this country. It is indeed "a serene hymn-like melody," as John Burroughs writes. It bears no trace of passion nor of mere exultant joy, but is child-like in its purity and simplicity, and hymn-like in its placid rhythm—just such a strain as the Holy Innocents might sing.

But few writers have done justice to this songster because, I think, few have heard the complete song. Many of them tell us that the song is short and ends abruptly with its highest loudest note, while the few know that the song is not so short as has been stated, "four

or five bars of triplets," but is quite long for a bird's song, ten to twelve bars; and instead of ending with loud notes the final is rendered in the merest whisper. The song begins with low soft notes and gradually increases in volume and pitch, and then rather abruptly changes to the softer tones again, and gradually fades into silence. It is little wonder that the entire song has been seldom heard, for the listener must be very close to catch all its notes, and as the singer resents intrusion while at his devotions, detection in the effort to steal upon him often ends in failure to hear his song.

To hear the hermit at his best you must creep unseen into the grove which is at once his home and his sanctuary, where you will find him hidden amid the foliage, and close to where his mate is sitting upon the nest, for he sings for her ear and not for yours. It may be mere fancy, but I have a preference for his evening song. I think the morning song is rendered with a trifle more brilliancy of expression, but the twilight hour brings to the hermit his deepest inspiration, and it is then he sings his tenderest, sweetest notes.

I kept a male in captivity for nearly two years, and though he refused to be thoroughly tamed, he grew somewhat friendly and seemed pleased when I entered the room, providing I kept at a proper distance. He sang all through the winter months—would sing to me when I whistled—but the song was a sad parody on that which he sang to his mate when he was free.

Just why such terms as "hermit," "anchorite," and "recluse" have been applied to this thrush is not clear, for the bird is no recluse, not more so than any woodland species, nor indeed so much as many others. He prefers the groves to the gardens, but I have counted some thirty within an area of about a hundred yards square, and I remember being awakened early one morning by a chorus that must have numbered a hundred voices.

The colors of the hermit are of the typical *hylocichla* hues. The head, back and wings are an olive-tinted russet, and the tail is of rufous tint. The breast is silver-white, spotted with arrow-head marks of an olive tint. The autumn plumage is slightly different; after the moult the olive tints are wanting, and the upper parts become a dull russet brown. The breast at that season is of cream color, though the markings are not changed. I have compared

autumnal specimens of hermits and veerys that were very much alike in general plumage.

The young birds of the first plumage are striped with pale russet, and their breasts are heavily marked with olivaceous spots, the same tint occurring in broken bars on their bellies and sides.

The length of the hermit is about seven inches.

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## OLIVE-BACKED THRUSH.

A superficial observer might consider that the biography of any of this group of thrushes—the *hylocichlæ*—could be made to serve for all, and in a general way this opinion would be correct ; but a more careful study discloses in each species characteristics of habits, and plumage, which are peculiar. The present bird is as fond of shade as is the veery, but prefers a drier location, and has a stronger preference than either of its congeners for the deeper forests ; it appears less often near the settlements during the breeding season. Again, the olive-backed shows a greater tendency to remain on the branches of the trees and shrubbery. In the nesting season these birds are seldom observed on the ground, but Mr. McIlwraith says that while migrating through Southern Ontario they are more frequently seen on the ground than on the trees. It is probable that at that season, May 10th to 25th, the supply of insects on the trees is less abundant, so they are forced to hunt on the ground. Also the olive-backed is rather more shy than the others, and more disturbed by intrusion. I have known a pair to abandon a nest in which two eggs had been laid, because the nesting site had been discovered. The nest is placed on the low branch of a tree, and is more compactly built than the hermit's or veery's, which are placed on the ground. The three or four eggs usually forming a set are greenish blue, spotted with brown, similar to those of the gray-cheeked.

The voices of all the group have much the same sweet tone and liquid quality, and the melodies the birds sing are somewhat similar ; but when the hermit, veery and olive-backed are heard singing side by side, as I have heard them in New Brunswick, the differences in the quality of their voices and the themes of their

songs can be determined very readily. Of the three the olive-backed has the best voice—the richest and most flute-like—but his song is inferior. It is shorter and lacks variety, and is of more limited compass than that of either of his congeners, and while lacking the spirit of the veery's, is less hymn-like than the hermit's.

Besides their songs most birds have distinctive call notes and cries of alarm, which vary so much that an expert can distinguish the species to which a bird belongs by any note it may utter. The alarm note of the olive-backed thrush, which is heard most frequently when the nest is in danger, sounds something like *quit*, spoken abruptly though in liquid tone. The bird also utters at times a feeble *cheep* and a metallic *chick*.

The colors of this thrush are olive-tinted russet on the upper parts, silver-white on the belly, and a creamy tint, spotted with olive on the breast. In the autumn the olive-tint of the upper parts is less distinct and the under parts are tinged with buff.

These birds are not common in Ontario and Quebec, appearing only in small companies, and occurring in Ontario during the migrations only. In the Maritime Provinces they are fairly common as summer residents. The area of their distribution extends from Great Slave Lake to the tropics.

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## MEADOW LARK.

The simple though sweet and plaintive lay of this songster is familiar to the dwellers in the southern peninsula of Ontario, but nowhere else in Canada is the bird plentiful excepting in the vicinity of Montreal. In the Maritime Provinces the meadow lark is a stranger.

The song is one of the simplest of bird efforts and thus appears in strong contrast with the song of a near relative that is found on the Manitoba plains—a bird that is credited with one of the grandest and most inspiring songs of which America can boast. The western bird mounts in the air and sings while on the wing in true lark habit, but our bird seems to have lost the habit of singing in the air, or never to have gained the

habit, for it is seldom seen at more than a few yards above the turf and is most generally upon it. Occasionally an enterprising fellow, seeking an extended view, mounts to a tree top, but the eastern meadow lark is strictly a bird of the meadow and rarely perches elsewhere than on a low rock or on a hummock in the swell and dip of the field. Even when flushed from its hiding place in the grass our bird does not rise high in the air, but skims the surface with an apparently laborious effort, and quickly drops again amid the green blades.

American naturalists, following the system of nomenclature and classification prepared by the committee of the American Ornithologists' Union, use *sturnella magna* as the name for our eastern bird and distinguish the western form by *sturnella magna neglecta.* The "American school" of ornithologists are believers in a trinomial system of nomenclature and use the third name to separate the forms they consider to be sub-species or "varieties," slight variations from the original species, the bird that chanced to be first described and named. They do not pretend to determine whether true *sturnella magna* or the variety *neglecta* was the original stock, but *magna* being named first retains precedence.

What the naturalists intend to emphasize by these trinomials may be stated thus: Species, they say, originated, were evolved, through the influence of environment,—of climate, food, and surroundings,—the differing conditions in different geographical areas producing differentiations of form and color and habit. Sub-species are the intermediate forms, or geographical varieties which have not yet become sufficiently differentiated to warrant their being ranked as species.

Under this rule the rank of each bird or other animal, in any system of classification, is largely a matter of judgment on the part of the author of the system. Differences of opinion occur among naturalists as among other people, and so we find in the books various systems, some of them representing the individual opinion of the writer, while others have been approved by the majority of an organized association. There are naturalists who consider that it is a mistake to distinguish mere varieties by a distinctive name, and these writers hold to the opinion that when a bird differs from

the original form to such a degree as to demand a distinctive name, it should be given rank as a species, that geographical varieties should not be thus separated. And thus it has come about that while the American Ornithologists' Union have adopted one system, the British society has set its seal of approval upon an entirely different one, in which a binomial nomenclature is strictly followed.

But to return to our meadow lark. These birds are summer visitors in Canada, reaching the country in the very early spring-time, while the meadows are yet brown and patches of snow are hidden amid the dells and dingles, and staying through the days when asters bloom and golden rod is queen, and till later days, when the hillsides are aglow with color and the odor of falling leaves is in the air. Not until the October moon has driven away the summer's softness and the summer's beauty do these songsters of the meadow retreat from this northern land and fly off to their winter resorts amid the rice fields of Alabama.

Mr. McIlwraith, in his valuable work on the birds of Ontario, tells us that he finds a meadow lark occasionally wintering near his Hamilton home, but these occasions are rare, though a little further to the southward the occurrence of these birds during the winter months is quite frequent.

The nest of our bird is not easily found, it is hidden so skilfully under a tuft of long grass, and is so covered above as to be entirely concealed. The structure is neatly and compactly built of grass and lined with fine blades of the same material. In this is laid the four (sometimes six) almost round eggs, which have a ground of bluish white, marked by many spots of reddish brown and lilac. These lilac tints on the eggs of birds are not made by a different pigment from that which supplies the brown spots. The pigment is the same, but that which produces the lilac tint was deposited on the shell before completion, and the pigment was covered by a layer of the calcareous matter of which the shell is formed. Scratch the brown spots with your penknife and they will disappear, indeed some of these spots may be washed off, but if you scratch the lilac spots you will find that color becomes darker as you remove the surface.

The size of a meadow lark is almost that of the robin, though the latter is of more slender and more graceful form. The general

coloration of the lark's back and wings is grayish brown with a yellow tinge, and barred with black, while the breast and belly are of bright yellow. The mature bird bears on its breast a crescent of rich deep black, which is lacking in the young. Some of the tail feathers are white and these are conspicuous when a flushed bird flies from the observer.

The song of this species is simple as a curve, but the tone is sweet and the melody carries a strain that is so wild and plaintive it arrests attention when a more elaborate theme would escape notice. The birds sing at all hours of the day during the mating and breeding season, and later in the year, even in the winter, Nuttall tells us, the song may be heard at intervals.

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## BROWN THRASHER.

This bird was given its uncouth name on account of its uncouth habit of jerking its tail about in most ungraceful mode. As a singer it has been classed among the best performers, though in voice only can it be considered as superior to many species that are given a lower rank. The voice is full and rich, and of wide compass; but the theme of the song, if such a jumble of sounds is entitled to that designation, is as wildly vagrant as the whistle of the wind. Indeed the wind often produces more rhythmic melody.

I enjoy hearing the fellow sing, his voice is so fine and he has such love for it, and is so fond of hearing the tones roll out. At almost any time of day, whenever the desire to be heard happens to attack him, he mounts to a prominent perch, the topmost tip of a tall tree suits him well, and settled there, he throws back his head, droops his tail and thus posed flings to the air a torrent of loud and sweet though incoherent notes. He sings as if fascinated by the beauty and power of the tones, and acts as if he was in a trance, as if under the spell of a magician's conjuration. After a lengthy repetition the bird abruptly stops, and then as if ashamed of his presumption, his vanity surfeited, he hides amid the underbrush. And thus it comes about that the bird is not well known, for when singing he is usually too far off to be distinguished,

and when not singing spends most of his time in the thickets, often on the ground scratching among the dead leaves.

The love of parade which this bird displays at times is characteristic of the entire family to which it belongs—a family which embraces the catbird and mockingbird. By voice as well as by habits the thrasher proves his affinity to this group, though he lacks the power of mimicry which distinguishes his more artistic cousins.

The body of the thrasher is of much the same size as a robin's, but the thrasher's bill being the longer and its tail much longer, the bird, though measuring only eleven inches from tip to tip, appears somewhat larger than a robin. It is readily distinguished from other species by its curved bill, long tail and rich rufous color. The under parts are whitish, tinged with rufous, and marked on the sides with spots of brown. On the wings are two bars of white, edged with brown.

The nest has been found in various situations. Generally it is on the branch of a low shrub in a dense copse; often it is placed on the ground, while an occasional pair select for a nesting site a branch that swings many feet above the heads of men. The nest itself is a loosely constructed affair of much bulk. It is formed exteriorly of dried grass, twigs, roots, weeds and such like material, and is lined with fine grass; sometimes the lining is made of horse-hair or feathers. The female usually lays four eggs, but sets of three have satisfied some few mothers, while as many as six eggs have been discovered in other nests. The ground color of the eggs is whitish with a tinge of green or of buff, and they are profusely marked with minute spots of reddish brown. The nest is built about the middle of May, and by the time the young are hatched their home is securely hidden by the foliage, but the parents do not trust to this protection alone and are ever watchful for the safety of the brood. One or the other is sure to be on guard, and the approach of any intruder—man, cat, or snake—is marked at considerable distance. If the enemy be a cat, it is attacked with such fury that puss usually retreats, while curious youths of the nest-hunting persuasion are enticed away by divers artifices.

These birds are not plentiful in any part of Canada, and are only met with in parts of Ontario and near Montreal, being most

abundant in Southern Ontario. Mr. McIlwraith reports that they reach Hamilton about the 10th of May, and that during September they start for their winter quarters in the Southern States. They migrate early because the cold nights cut off their food which consists largely of grubs and earthworms. They have been charged with perpetrating misdemeanors in the farmers' corn-field, and are known to partake at times of the small garden fruits. Insects being their staple diet, they are not found here after the frost visits us, and one example only has been found in our latitude in the winter months. The honor of discovering this bird belongs to my young friend, Arthur Gilman, an enthusiastic bird lover, who first saw the thrasher one December day in 1894, while walking in the suburbs of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The bird remained in the same grove all winter, and Gilman and his friends continually visited the grove and provided the bird with food. The thrasher soon learned to recognize his friends and manifested great interest in their movements when they visited him, and though he remained shy and wary, as soon as his caterers moved away from the tree under which the food was laid, he at once hastened to the feast, having always a good appetite. One of his wings appeared to be injured, and this is supposed to have been the cause of his remaining north after his fellows had migrated.

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## CATBIRD.

We all know the catbird, for his discordant cry, so grotesquely similar to pussy's *me-ow*, and his wild, sweet song and humorous mimicry, are familiar sounds in every garden and grove between the Atlantic shore and the Rockies. For accuracy's sake I should modify that statement somewhat, for the bird is much more frequently met with in Ontario than elsewhere, while in many localities in the Maritime Provinces catbirds are not at all common.

As a rule this bird prefers the shrubbery to the taller trees for a general resort, though, like the mocking-bird and the thrasher—cousins in some degree—the catbird has a fondness for a tree-top when the spirit of song is upon him. He is fond of the society of

man, too, and induces his mate to select for their home some cosy corner in a garden or orchard, or in the underbrush on the margin of a grove.

But, while the parents seem to enjoy the presence of man near their home, they say "hands off" in most emphatic tones when any bold bad boy comes too near their precious nest. Such a rating as that boy receives ; such downright, earnest scolding, is not often matched. There is no other such termagant among the whole feathered race as an enraged catbird.

The male has a fashion of singing to himself, soft and low, but very sweetly, when down amid the shrubbery, as if rehearsing for a public performance. When the desire to display his vocal power comes upon him, and it comes quite often between early morning and late evening, he mounts to a high position. At such times he dearly loves an audience, and if you will whistle to him and show by your attention an appreciation of his music, he will give you of his very best, and give it in almost unlimited quantities. He is a bit too proud of his talent for mimicry, and is apt to tire a listener by his efforts to produce quaint and humorous effects. For while these display the wide compass and rich quality of his voice, and at the same time give him a grand opportunity to show his wonderful talent for technical execution, they are not so pleasing for frequent repetition as is his own natural song. No one will dispute his right to high rank in our sylvan choir, though it is probable that few will yield to him the first place. To my ear he sings a better song than the thrasher, though the latter's voice is the finer of the two.

The catbirds are not among the first arrivals in the spring, yet they are not loiterers, for they reach this country before May-day, and the most enterprising couples have built their nests and deposited the sets of eggs, four or five in each, before May has ended.

The nest is a bulky affair, ill-made and inartistic—a huge handful of twigs, leaves and bark-strips, with such stray bits of string as may happen in the way of the builders, loosely arranged in a saucer-like form. It is usually placed on a bush or small tree, a few feet from the ground.

The eggs are of a rich bluish-green color and unspotted, measuring about an inch in length and nearly three-quarters of an inch in breadth.

The plumage of the catbird is exceedingly plain,—dull dark slate, paler below, a patch of black on the crown like a skull-cap and a patch of chestnut on the under-tail coverts complete the costume.

The food of this species is insects in general and beetles in particular, though in the autumn the small fruits seem to suit their palates well, cherries being especially sought after. When the cherries are gathered the catbirds start southward, many wandering as far as Panama before settling down for the winter.

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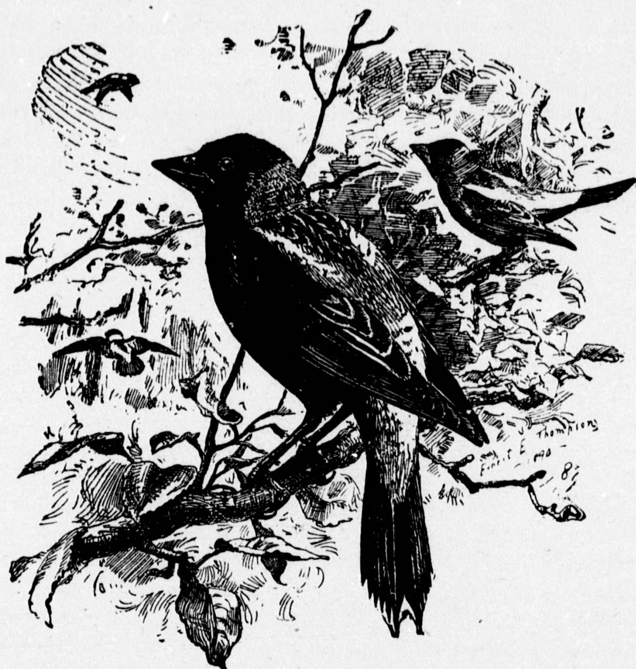

BOBOLINK.

Robert of Lincoln is not a stranger in any of the more settled districts of Canada. His motley dress, his rollicking ways and his fantastic song make him peculiarly conspicuous, so that wherever he appears he becomes well known and as well loved. He is the jester of the field, a wildly hilarious jester, and quite as much given to antics and to merriment as are his fellows of the stage and the ring.

During the nuptial season the bird rarely appears quite sober but full to the very brim with irrepressible joy. Full to the brim? His joy does not stop at the brim but flows over, filling the air and making the very sunshine more cheerful. How infectious it is too,

this wild thing's gay humor. How it sets one's heart in tune with the bird's unbridled glee to watch his antics and listen to his song, that quaint tinkling carol, that roundelay of rippling laughter, that chanted mirth, the merriest music of the field.

But if Robert does dress in motley array and acts (sometimes) like a fool, he is not always quite so much of a fool as he looks; not always so flippant and silly as his frolic and his garb suggest. His treatment of his mate and their young preclude censure and deserve praise, for it is of the best, and proves Robert to be possessed of a fine character, as bird character goes.

I admit that his courtship is a very funny performance, as funny in its way as many of the grotesque extravagances of the comic stage. But you cannot watch the bird closely without discovering that Robert knows what he is about ; that there is much method in his buffoonery, and while merry because he cannot help being merry, much of his hilarity is produced for the diversion of that little bird in quiet brown, with simple, unobtrusive manners, that Robert of Lincoln is doing his level best to win for a mate.

Perhaps the use I have made of the word courtship may not be approved by all my readers. It is a fact, none the less, that as a rule the feathered belles are wooed and won very much as maidens are, and of the two the coquettes of the field, if less artful, are even more tantalizing than their sisters of the ballroom.

The female bobolink is extremely coy, and meets the advances of her wooer with such cold indifference and appearance of irritation as to suggest positive scorn. But Robert of Lincoln is as courageous and persistent as the most exacting coquette could desire, and he patiently submits to the snubbing and continues to press his suit with a brave determination that is worthy of more appreciative recognition. Indeed he affects such playful disregard for her scorn that a witness of this odd wooing is apt to charge Robert with a lack of spirit, a charge to which the bird's usual flippancy lends credence.

But Robert is very much in earnest, and he knows all about these coy damsels, and having made up his mind to win for a mate that particular brown belle, win her he will. She turns her back upon him—he hops to the front ; she flies off—he follows ; she pecks at

him—he dodges the blow with a fantastic gesture ; she continues on her way without noticing his effort to interest her—he at once hovers above her head and sings his merriest song. Sometimes another wooer seeks to attract her, but woe unto such intruder if he lacks valor or strength, for Bob can fight upon occasion as well as sing. The victim of this persistent wooing tries in vain to get rid of the fellow, but he will be neither snubbed off nor driven off, and declines obstinately to accept a refusal. Just how he manages to win her consent at last none but the bobolinks know—but win her he surely does.

These preliminaries arranged, the pair go off together in search of a nesting site, and they seem very happy as they fly about amid the buttercups and daisies. The place they usually select for their nest is in the midst of a moist meadow, sometimes on a marsh, and often near a running stream. A tuft of long grass hides the cosy home from prying eyes. The nest itself is a simple affair, made entirely of dried grass and rather loosely built. In this the hen lays four or five eggs—sometimes six are found—of very irregular color, marking and form. The ground color is white, with green or buff tint, and the markings are lilac and brown. Some eggs are so profusely covered with surface spots that the ground color is quite hidden.

Housekeeping started, the female takes the burden of sitting upon the eggs—that protracted confinement which must be an excessively trying ordeal for such a restless creature as a bird, and especially for one with the nervous organization of the singing bird. But her hilarious lord proves himself the best of helpmates. He is very attentive to the plain, brown belle he wooed and won, whose maternal instinct leads her to cover her precious beauties with such rare devotion. He never neglects her. He keeps watchful guard upon the home, and no enemy approaches it unchallenged ; he brings her food ; all day long he sings to cheer her, and when she goes for an airing takes her place on the nest.

I once saw a male bobolink protecting his sitting mate from the rain. The grass around the nest had been beaten down, exposing the hen to a fierce storm, and on the side of the nest, placid and unperturbed, taking the stress of the storm in chivalrous fashion, stood rollicking Robert of Lincoln, his wing tenderly spread over the

devoted mother. Both birds might have found comfortable shelter in a spruce grove not twenty yards away.

After the young are hatched Robert's manners become changed. Gradually he lays aside his antics and his hilarity and busies himself with procuring food for the young, and later, in teaching them to fly. Possibly the weighty care of a family may be the cause of this gay fellow becoming so quiet in his manner, but it is more probable that the exhausting moult which comes at that season is responsible for the change. By the time the young are well on the wing Robert of Lincoln has dropped the jester's capers and the jester's motley, and appears in a suit of buffish brown, more or less streaked with black, both parents and young at this season wearing similar costumes.

About the middle of August the bobolinks gather in large flocks, and early in September they move southward to the southern rice fields, where they obtain their southern name of rice birds. At that season they become very fat and large numbers are killed for the market. As midwinter approaches the flocks move farther southward.

In the spring the males, having assumed their nuptial plumage of rich black, marked with buff and ashy white, journey northward together, several days in advance of the flocks of females, and the sexes do not mingle until they have settled in their summer homes. I have seen separated flocks of males in New Brunswick as late as the Queen's birthday, May 24th.

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## COWBIRD.

This species is peculiar in doing what no other American bird does—it throws upon others the labor of hatching and rearing its young. With most of our birds the rule obtains for the male to select a female whom he induces to mate with him, and the pair keep together during the year and are uniformly constant. Some few species of more sedentary habits mate for a lifetime. In most instances both the male and the female share in all the domestic duties—in nest building, hatching the eggs, and caring for

the young—the male often exhibiting a tender care of his mate and brood. It is true of a few species that the male does not keep to a single mate, but divides his attention equally among a flock of females, leaving to them the entire care of nest and young.

The cowbird alone possesses nothing like conjugal affection. The male neither selects a mate nor undertakes the organization of a harem, but males and females live in small flocks in the loosest kind of communism. Also they have little parental instinct, and therefore build no nest ; for a bird's nest is built for its young. They differ from most quadrupeds in this. The beaver rears its home for its own shelter ; the bear and the fox make dens for their own comfort ; the squirrel stocks his moss-lined snuggery for his own tooth ; a bird builds solely for its brood.

Eliot Coues writes :—" It is interesting to observe the female cowbird ready to lay. She becomes disquieted ; she betrays unwonted excitement, and ceases her busy search for food with her companions. At length she separates from the flock and sallies forth to reconnoitre, anxiously indeed, for her case is urgent, and she has no home. How obtrusive is the sad analogy ! She flies to some thicket, or hedgerow, or other common resort for birds, where, something teaches her—perhaps experience—nests will be found. Stealthily and in perfect silence she flits along, peering furtively, alternately elated or dejected, into the depths of the foliage. She espies a nest, but the owner's head peeps over the brim, and she must pass on. Now, however, comes her chance ; there is the very nest she wishes, and no one at home. She disappears for a few minutes and it is almost another bird that comes out of the bush. Her business done, and trouble over, she chuckles herself gratulations, rustles her plumage to adjust it trimly, and flies back to her associates. They know what has happened, but are discreet enough to say nothing—charity is no less often wise than kind."

The nest selected by the cowbird for the depository of her egg is usually that of a smaller bird—the redstart, summer warbler, and red-eyed warbler, all smaller birds, being most frequently imposed upon. The owners of the nest are much disturbed when the ominous egg is discovered and will often abandon their home in preference to accepting the task thus thrust upon them. Sometimes,

however, especially if the two or three eggs have been laid, the parents accept the task and the young parasite, when hatched, is carefully tended. Not infrequently the birds thus imposed upon will get rid of the obnoxious egg by building a second story to their nest, leaving the cowbird's egg to addle in the basement. I saw a summer warbler's nest on which two of such storeys had been built with a cowbird's egg in each of the lower apartments.

It is not known how many eggs the cowbird lays for a "set," but it is probable that four or five is the complement. In size the egg is about that of the bobolink's—much larger than those of many of the foster parents. The ground color is dull white, sometimes tinged with green or buff, and decorated with irregular markings, in considerable profusion, of various shades of brown. These eggs are hatched more quickly as a rule than the species they are imposed upon, so that the young cowbirds usually appear before their nest mates. The latter are not infrequently pushed out of the nest by the parasite, who thus obtains more room as well as more attention from the parents, and more food.

The plumage of the male cowbird is iridescent black ; the head and neck purplish brown. The female wears a costume of nearly uniform dusky brown of a grayish hue, the under parts being slightly paler than the back and wings. The wing-shafts being of a slightly darker tint, the plumage appears somewhat streaky. The bill and feet are black. The male measures about eight inches from tip to tip, and the female is smaller.

The cowbird occurs throughout the settled portions of Eastern Canada, though it is not common in the Maritime Provinces, and is seen in Southern Ontario during the spring and fall migrations only. In classification this species is closely allied to the bobolink and the redwinged blackbird, all these being members of the marsh blackbird group of the *icteridæ*, under which family name is gathered the blackbirds, orioles, meadowlarks, and grackles. But though so nearly related to some of our songsters the present species cannot be credited with adding to the music of the fields, for its guttural *kluck 'tsee*, which it drawls in most affected fashion, does not deserve to be dignified by the term song.

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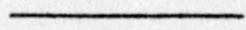
## RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD.

This species is exceedingly abundant, and breeds throughout the country north to about the fiftieth parallel. Yet while so abundant and so widely distributed the bird is not as well known as these facts might suggest, because of its habit of gathering in numbers at some favorite nesting ground to the exclusion of adjacent places apparently as suitable. So while locally abundant it may be seen never or seldom in many districts. The favored haunts of the red-wings during the summer months are the marshes and swampy meadows where the herbage is rank and cat-tails flourish. Here the birds gather when nesting time arrives. In the more southern localities the nests are begun early in May, though the birds usually enter the country much earlier—the males preceding the females. After the broods become independent of parental care, the red-wings gather in immense flocks and scour the country. I have seen such flocks on the Grand Lake meadows, in New Brunswick, when they appeared like clouds and must have numbered thousands. Soon after these flocks are formed—in September or October, according to latitude—the birds move southward and gradually migrate to their winter resorts, which extend from the Southern States to Costa Rica. A few examples have been found in New England during the winter months—notably in the marshes near Cambridge.

The nests of this species that I have seen have been tied between several stalks of rushes or fastened to a low alder, but nests have been placed amid a tussock of rank grass, and on a branch as high as twenty feet from the ground. The exterior of the nest is formed of long leaves of sedge-grass and other similar coarse but flexibie material, clumsily interlaced with roots and twigs. The whole is cemented with fibrous peat and when dry the structure is firm, and strong, but bulky and inartistic. The inside of this roughly formed cup is lined with fine grass rather neatly arranged, and upon this the female deposits her beautiful eggs—three to five in number. The ground color of the eggs varies from bluish white to greenish blue, and is fantastically marked with dark brown and a few spots or lines of dull lilac.

The plumage of the male is uniform lustrous black, relieved with a shoulder patch of rich scarlet or vermilion, bordered by a narrow line of buff. The female is blackish brown above, and of a pale dusky tint beneath, the whole streaked with brown of several shades. The young birds resemble the female.

The song of the red-wing—or what the bird furnishes for its quota of song—is a variety of harsh grating notes, though when heard at a distance the combined chatter of a flock is rather effective. The principal notes of the male, which he delivers most frequently in the mating season, has been written *conk-a-ree* and *kong-quer-ree* sometimes they sound more like *bob-a-tee*. They have numerous other notes and calls, a prolonged *'tshāy* being the most melodious, and an alarm note like *kive-ah*. The birds are at all times restless and noisy.



BLUE JAY.

This conspicuous and noisy fellow has been seen too often to require a lengthy story; but the fact may not be well known that these birds are found throughout this eastern country—among the orchards of balmy South Ontario as well as in the spruce and pine forests north of the Laurentian hills. They spend the entire year with us, though during the cold weather they seek the shelter of the denser woodlands.

Wherever he goes, the jay makes for himself an unsavory reputation—pilfering and general bad manners being his dominant characteristics. He will steal anything from corn to birds' eggs,—or even young birds—and will rob the orchard and berry patch in spite of all care. His noise and bad temper are proverbial, but it's his way, poor thing, and he would not be our blue jay if he did not indulge to excess in both diversions. He has been called

coward, sneak, and ruffian, but I think these terms somewhat severe. The jay does not know how wicked he is, so we should bear with him and indulge him in his foibles, even if he does take a few berries and is a bit cantankerous now and then. I fear we will excuse him for even worse faults, for somehow we like the fellow. His pronounced individuality and Bohemian ways make him interesting, and we would not change him if we could.

The nest of this species is usually placed in a coniferous tree, some twenty feet from the ground, and is made of loosely arranged twigs and roots. The eggs, four or five in number, are of a pale olive or buffish tint, and spotted with yellowish brown.

The plumage of the blue jay is very beautiful. The general color is bright purplish blue, which is paler beneath and shades to white on the throat. The wings and tail are of brighter blue, and are barred with black and trimmed with white. The head is adorned with a conspicuous crest.

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## HUMMINGBIRD.

America is the home of the hummingbirds, for nowhere else do we find these beautiful creatures—the most beautiful and the daintiest of the avian race. There are over four hundred species in all, and the centre of their abundance is in the tropical portions of the southern half of the continent, fourteen species only occurring within the border of the United States. Of this northern detachment, but one—the ruby-throated—penetrates as far as Canada. Our one representative of this unique family is, however, well-known throughout this eastern country, for its breeding area extends from Florida and the Rio Grande to the Laurentian hills and the country bordering on the Saskatchewan.

Mr. McIlwraith tells us that the ruby-throats enter Ontario about the middle of May, and I have met the van of their scouting parties away up in Northern New Brunswick before the end of that same month.

These tiny mites are happy only amid the summer sunshine and the flowers, so when the summer leaves us, off go the ruby-throats

to a warmer clime.. Sometimes a stray fellow, separated from the flock, and tempted, perhaps, by the bright tints the first frosts have painted, lingers on into September days, but he does not stay long ; the north wind's chilling breath disturbs him, and the flowers are dead.

It is not the colors only of the flowers or their perfume that wins for them the attention of these winged beauties. The nectar which the birds draw from the flower's breast, and the minute insects which gather within the flower's dainty cup, form the staple food of the hummingbirds. We are indebted to the late Frank Bolles for an addition to our knowledge of these birds' feeding habits. Bolles discovered that they drink the sap which runs from the holes bored by the yellow-billed woodpecker—"the sapsucker." The hummers draw such food into their mouths by means of their tubular tongues, which serve as a suction pipe. Generally, when in quest of food, our bird darts from flower to flower with such swift motion that the eye follows his progress with great difficulty ; the wings vibrating so rapidly as to be indistinct and to produce the humming sound from which the family derive their name. If the flower is very large, the bird may perch on the brim, and thrust his head deep into its glowing corolla, but generally he hovers above a blossom or poises at its side, and assuming a vertical position, keeps his body steadily in place by moving the wings backwards and forwards, his tail being thrust forward at the same time.

When he invades the garden, this diminutive but plucky fellow seems indifferent to the presence of mankind, and does not hesitate to gather tribute from the very bush the gardener is pruning, or to sip the sweets from the bouquet my lady is cutting for her table. I remember well the astonishment and delight with which a party of young ladies watched such a performance one bright September morning amid the New Hampshire hills. One of the party had been picking nasturtiums, and came on the veranda holding in her hand a large bunch of the brilliant blossoms. While she stood chatting with her friends a hummingbird darted among them, and without displaying any signs of timidity or embarrassment, hovered over the flowers in the young lady's hand, and calmly probed them with his long bill. Each time he thrust his head at a flower he uttered a short ejaculatory squeak, but whether it expressed satis-

faction or disappointment we could not determine. After testing several flowers the bird flew to others that grew near by, and then back again to the maiden's bouquet, repeating these excursions several times. I did not wonder that the hummingbird had no fear of the maiden, for with her beautiful face and sweet smile she looked the bright blossom that she was, but that he bore undisturbed the presence of so many persons spoke well for his courage, or the young lady's influence. The ruby-throat probably knew what he was about, for these birds have keen eyes and a good sense of the proprieties. If you think them indifferent, butterfly nonentities, just try to steal upon a nest some day. You will find that the parents permit of no intrusion, but are keenly alert, and fiercely attack all comers, be the intruder man, snake, sparrow, or sphinx moth. The hummingbirds have a deadly hatred of these moths, and often kill them by a thrust of the closed bill. I once witnessed a fight between a snake and three of these tiny birds, and so rapid were their movements and so fierce and incessant their assaults, that the snake was forced to retreat.

The nests these birds construct is a wonderful and beautiful specimen of avian architecture. It is made of plant down and silk from divers seed-pods and other similar material, which is firmly felted and moulded into a tiny bowl of graceful form. After this bowl has been securely fastened to the branch upon which it rests—often an apple tree bough—the male bird frescoes the outside with scraps of gray lichen torn from the tree, and thus makes the nest inconspicuous by wearing a close resemblance to a knot. The inside of the nest is made soft by the ends of the felted threads, and on this dainty cushion the female lays her dainty eggs, two minute vessels of chalky white, though wearing a roseate tint when fresh. After some ten or twelve days of weary waiting the chicks appear, and frail, helpless chicks they are, so frail that many of them are killed by cold and rain in some seasons. Nuttall mentions one such memorable year. But the parents care for them with tenderness and zeal, and the young usually thrive and grow rapidly. They are fed by regurgitation, the parents putting their bills far down the youngsters' throats, and ejecting partially digested food.

I have credited both parents with caring for the young, but Mr. Bradford Torrey has brought a serious charge against the male, and

supported that charge by strong testimony. Does the male ruby-throat desert his mate when the nest is built? is a question yet awaiting final determination, and every boy and girl in Canada may help to solve the problem. And it is just such unsolved problems that make the study of bird-life peculiarly fascinating.

The plumage of the male ruby-throat is rich and elegant. On his back the plumes are of dark metallic green, the wings and tail varying from this, being bronzy, of a violet tint. Each feather on the throat is tipped with a rich metallic lustre, which sparkles like a gem and changes under the sunlight from brownish black to bright crimson. The color of the under parts is white. The females and immature males lack the red color on the throat, and their tails are barred with black and tipped with white.

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## BLUEBIRD.

Though a hardy bird, and migrating far into the high latitudes of the west, the bluebird is not common on the Atlantic coast farther north than the valley of the Penobscot. Boardman had found a few pairs near St. Stephen, and Batchelder reported the species "frequently seen" at Grand Falls; but elsewhere in New Brunswick, and indeed in the entire Maritime Provinces, the bluebird was almost unknown until 1882. On the Queen's birthday of that year I found a pair at Westfield, near St. John, and during the following four years these birds were often seen in the eastern parts of New Brunswick, even as far eastward as the Gulf of St. Lawrence shore, at New Castle, where Philip Cox discovered a flock of six in 1885. In Southern Ontario, and about Montreal, these birds have been quite common, though McIlwraith reports that at Hamilton the house sparrows have taken possession of the boxes in which the bluebirds formerly built, and the latter have gone away.

The house sparrow does not always come out the victor from contests with the bluebird, for I have witnessed a combat in which a troop of the "tramps," as the sparrows have been labelled, were not only driven from the houses, but were so severely worsted in

the affray that they were content to keep at a distance thereafter. But the "ruffian in feathers" has met with more success in other forays, and has driven away from us many of our most familiar and entertaining birds. A colony of eave swallows that for years gathered around the "Old Stone Church" in St. John was completely broken up by the sparrows, and many warblers have been driven from garden hedges that they once enlivened.

Our bluebirds are a hardy lot and seem quite indifferent to the weather, for though some of them wander as far as the Mexican table lands for winter quarters, many remain much further north, and a few spend the colder months in the Middle States. They begin their northward migration in the very early spring, and enter Ontario and Massachusetts in March—sometimes during February. Coming to us while the air yet holds the chill of winter's frost, when patches of snow lie in the hollows, and brown grass and withered stalks add their suggestions of desolation to the dreary landscape, these early bluebirds become at once a promise and a fulfilment. Their presence tells us that the dreary days are nearly past, while in their songs, so tender and so sweet, we catch the very essence of the spring.

Bluebirds spend the entire summer with us, and not until Indian summer has given place to the dull, dark, lonely days of November do they cease to cheer us.

The male bluebird, like the male of most species of birds, wears the brightest plumage. His back and wings are of a rich azure blue, somewhat paler on the cheeks; the throat, breast and sides are of a reddish brown or chestnut tint, while the remainder of the under parts are bluish white. Both bill and feet are black, and the tips of the wing-quills are blackish. The female wears a blue-tinged mantle, but the color is not so rich and bright as her mate's, and is more or less mixed with grayish-brown. The white tint of her under parts extends farther towards the chestnut on the throat, which is of a paler hue than that worn by the male. Many examples of both sexes are seen in dull and imperfect plumage, and these vary from the above description.

The bluebirds seek a substantial covering for their nests because they do not care to spend much time in building. The female has

little of the artistic spirit noticeable in many birds, and her mate is so much occupied in making himself agreeable to his handsome spouse—in caressing her and singing to her, and keeping off suspected rivals, for he is extremely jealous, with all his serene, self-sustained and self-satisfied manner—that he counts elaborate nest building a bore ; so between them they are quite satisfied when they have gathered together some bits of dried grass and feathers—sufficient to make a cushion for the eggs. This cushion is laid in a deserted woodpecker's nest or other excavation, or in a bird box ; bluebirds never excavate for themselves, and will accept any crevice that is well sheltered if a deep hole cannot be secured.

The eggs are of a pale blue tint, sometimes so pale as to appear almost white. In size they are somewhat smaller than a robin's.

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BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

This bird was named in honor of Lord Baltimore, whose racing colors—orange and black—the male oriole wears. The black color is worn on the head, back, wings, and middle tail feathers; the remainder of the plumage is orange, with a thin stripe of white on the end of the tail, and a bar of the same color on the wing. The female is of smaller size and much paler tints. The orange in her plumage is dull, and the black is sometimes replaced by a grayish tint or dark olive. The young birds resemble the female.

All the orioles are noted for their architectural ability, and my lord of Baltimore adds to this distinguished characteristic his brilliant costume and rich, rolling song. Little wonder, then, that the bird is the pride of the whole country-side wherein he hangs his famous nest. And a remarkable structure that nest is—remarkable when we consider that these little creatures construct it with no other implements than claws and bill. It is formed like a pouch, some six to eight inches deep and slightly narrowed at the top, and is fastened to the slender twigs near the end of a bough, where it swings with every movement of the air. The materials used are such fibrous substances as blades of dried grass, roots, strips of bark and stray bits of yarn or twine ; anything in short that is sufficiently pliable to weave, for the oriole's nest is a woven fabric.

That these birds have an appreciation of color and a color sense was demonstrated by a lady residing in Brookline, one of Boston's beautiful suburbs. My friend noticed an oriole carrying off a piece of blue yarn which had fallen beneath her window, so she threw out other pieces of the yarn, and these were taken also. The blue yarn giving out, the lady added pieces of red and yellow, and within a few days had the satisfaction of knowing that she had supplied the birds with a large quantity of nest-building material, every bit of the yarn having been carried away. Interested in learning just how this had been used, she hunted through the adjoining grove, guided by the orioles, who were constantly moving about and as constantly singing, and was soon rewarded by finding a nest in which the blue yarn was very conspicuous. But no other color was to be seen. What had become of the red and the yellow ? A further search led to the discovery of a bunch of red far up on a neighboring tree, which on examination proved to be the home of another pair of orioles. The yellow escaped detection, but when the leaves had fallen it was seen dangling from the bough of a stately elm by the roadside.

The orioles are able to make their weaving so firm and to fasten the nest so securely to its supporting twigs that it stands well the storm and stress of the weather. Even after the parents and young desert it, when the rude winds toss the branch on which it hangs and the autumn gales beat away the sheltering leaves, still the nest swings and often survives the entire winter.

After the hammock part of the nest has been completed, my lady of Baltimore arranges at the bottom a soft cushion of plant down or hair, and on this deposits her eggs, the number varying from four to six. These eggs are long and narrow, measuring about an inch in length and something over a half inch in breadth, and are of a dull white tint, irregularly blotched and streaked, and dotted with several shades of brown.

The Baltimore oriole usually selects for a nesting site a grove near a farm house, though a tree in a village street or in a city appears to suit him equally well. For several years I have seen orioles' nests in the yard of Harvard University, at Cambridge, and one pair built in an isolated tree that stood no more than fifty feet from the dormitory in which I lodged. In the hottest weather the old and young retire from the open districts and are not seen in the parks or gardens until late in August, when they return and again make the groves resound with their rich, rolling notes. The song of the "golden robin," as the bird is called by the people, is attractive in its way, but the attraction centres chiefly on its clear, strong, rolling tones, for the melody lacks variation ; is, in fact, a rather monotonous though cheery whistle, much too simple to entitle it to high rank among our woodland melodies.

The food of these birds is almost entirely insectivorous—soft caterpillars, small beetles and flies—though they are said to vary their diet with small fruit in season, and the market gardeners accuse them of being much too fond of young peas.

The first oriole I saw was tending its young in a nest that swung above a throng of brave men and maidens fair in that famous resort for such folk—the beautiful public garden of Halifax. But these birds are not common in Nova Scotia, nor in any of the Maritime Provinces, though a few pairs breed every year in the Annapolis Valley and amid the settled districts of the Upper St. John, between Fredericton and Grand Falls. We must go to Montreal or to Ottawa, or through Southern Ontario, before we can be certain of hearing the song.

With the chilling nights of late September the orioles move southward to find a more congenial winter resort.

## SCARLET TANAGER.

This is another of the beautiful birds of the world that Canadians may claim as compatriots, for the brilliant tanager, whose ancestors in some far distant time escaped from the thraldom of the tropics, where such gorgeous creatures naturally belong, is now found in numbers in Southern Ontario, and occurs regularly, though sparingly, as far north as the forty-seventh parallel. The male tanager is a gleaming beauty. His body is covered with plumes of bright, rich scarlet, while wings and tail are deep black. The female wears plainer tints—the scarlet being replaced by dull olive and the black by a dusky hue. The young are very like the female, and in the autumn the male appears in a costume of the same colors.

I kept one in a cage for a couple of years, and at his first moult he lost the scarlet plumes he wore when captured, and never regained them. In place of scarlet, he dressed in plain, dusky olive, and his manners were as dull and uninteresting as his costume.

This waif from the tropics is tropic-like in having an inferior song. Tropical birds, as a rule, attractive as they are in brilliant colored plumage, are not singers, just as tropical plants, with all their wealth of color, have no perfume.

The nest of this tanager is a loosely arranged affair, made of such coarse stuff as twigs, shreds of bark and roots. It is placed on a horizontal branch, often in an orchard, and some twenty feet or so from the ground. The eggs, usually four, are of a dull bluish, ground color, and thickly marked, chiefly round the larger end, with brown and lilac. The bird is about the same size as an oriole, somewhat smaller than a robin, and like both oriole and robin indulges in a mixed diet, though of the three the tanager is the most inclined to the early fruits.

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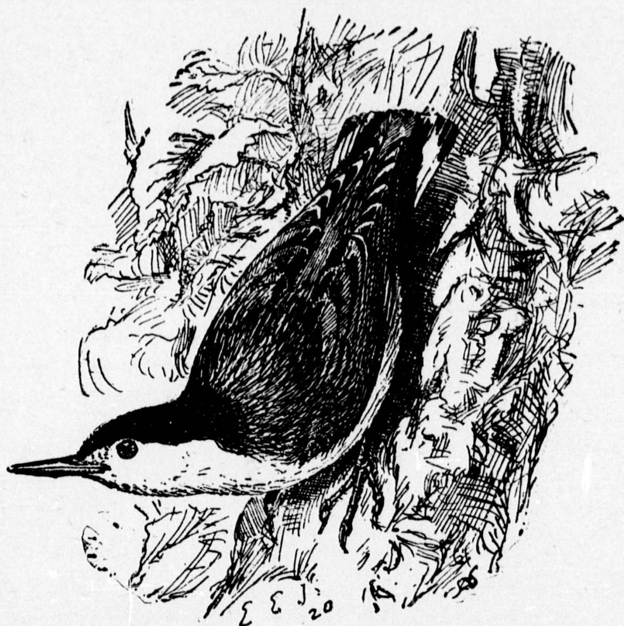

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH.

Two of these odd characters are more or less common in Canada—the present species and its red-breasted congener. Something like a sparrow in form—a sparrow with a square cut tail and lanceolate bill—the nuthatch unites some of the habits of a wood-pecker with tricks he must have learned from the chickadees.

The nuthatches do not bore into a tree, but hunt for insects and larvæ in the crannies of the bark—chipping off a piece when needed—and when on these hunting excursions are indifferent whether their heads or their tails are uppermost. They are not quite so playful nor so merry as the chickadees, but they are equally active and agile, and when hungry—and who ever saw a wild bird when he was not hungry—they are ready for any gymnastic feat that a search for a dinner may demand. The little fellow pictured here has been

climbing down a tree head first, and has stopped on the way to see who is coming.

When nesting time arrives these birds search for a hole in a decayed tree—a deserted wood-pecker's nest or any similar cavity suits them well—wherein to establish a home. To this apartment the pair carry dry leaves, grass, feathers and hair, which they neatly arrange on the bottom of the excavation, and in this cosy and comfortable chamber madam deposits her set of eggs, and then patiently warms them into life. The eggs—usually five, but eight and ten have been found—are about the size of a chipping sparrow's, and are of a delicate roseate tint, spotted all over the surface with several shades of brown and lilac.

While the female is sitting her mate attends her with devoted zeal, carrying her food and guarding her from dangerous intrusion.

After the young are on the wing the family roam through the adjacent woodlands and into the village streets. They do not always limit their wanderings to the villages, for one November day I saw several of these feathered gymnasts in the yard at Harvard, while not a hundred paces from them a thousand men, in their noisy, college way, were doing honor to a team of football heroes.

The white-breasted nuthatch occurs throughout the Eastern Provinces, but while it is found in the more southern portions of Ontario during the winter months as well as in summer, it is seen elsewhere in summer only.

The plumage of the bird is decidedly attractive. The back is a bluish ash tint; the head and neck black; the wings black, blue, and white, and the tail black and white. The female differs from the male in wearing on her head and neck feathers of a dull ash or bluish tint, instead of deep black.

The bird has no song, but the call note is repeated with such frequency, especially in the breeding season, that it may pass in lieu of song. It is certain that the male uses this call often to cheer his sitting mate as well as to apprise her of his approach. It cannot be called a musical cry—it is something like a gutteral *hauk*—yet it is striking and not easily confused with other woodland sounds.

## THE CHICKADEES.

The chickadees cannot be classed among the typical birds of the groves, if the use of that term is limited to the trees of the parks and the pastures, for they are at home in the trees at large, and care but little where the trees grow. I have heard their *chick-a-dee-dee-dee* in the quiet park at Toronto, amid the hubbub of the Place D'Armé, in Montreal, and in the wilderness forests of New Brunswick, and everywhere it was the same cheery carol, and everywhere the singers were the same busy, active, merry Bohemians of the wing. The deep woodland is the original home of these feathered vagabonds, but their Bohemian spirit leads them to "wander with the wandering wind," and makes them content wherever grows a clump of trees that will yield them food and shelter.

The black-capped chickadee, which is the most common in Canada, is usually put down among the "resident" species, because it is found in the settled districts of these Eastern Provinces during the entire year ; but his cousin, the Hudsonian chickadee, occurs in the more southern portions in winter only. I have found the nest of the Hudsonian in New Brunswick,—near St. John, and on the Madawaska,—but the birds are much more numerous there in winter than during the warm weather.

To the casual observer the two species appear to have similar habits, and to sing similar songs, but a little experience will enable one to distinguish them with ready accuracy. Both feed on the insect mites and insect eggs to be found in the crannies of the bark, and both search for this food with the same careless, go-as-you-please indifference to decorous movement, and with a fine display of gymnastic skill.

The Hudsonian, as well as his cousin, makes a nest of felted fur or vegetable wool, and places the nest at the bottom of an excavation in a decayed stump. Both sing the same *chick-a-dee-dee-dee* and vary it to *t'se-dee-dee* and *chick-a-pu-pu-pu*, and add to their repertoire several abbreviations of these as well as single notes introduced, like exclamation points, into their merry babbling. (The black-capped alone sings the *phœ-be* note, I think). Yet just as the plumage of the Hudsonian is a little less fluffy—more stiff

and prim—than are the plumes of its black-capped cousin, so is the Hudsonian's nest built with more careful workmanship and fashioned with more grace, and the Hudsonian's voice sounds somewhat sharper and clearer, the notes being uttered with greater precision.

The color worn by our two species differs considerably. The black-capped is ashy gray above, with a crown of black and a patch of the same hue on the throat; the cheeks are patched with white. The under parts are of a dull, grayish white, the flanks being washed with a buffish tint. The upper parts of the Hudsonian are dull brown, which grows darker on the head. The throat bears a patch of brownish black, and the cheeks are white. The under parts are grayish white. Both species are about five and a half inches long from tip to tip.

The nest of the Hudsonian chickadee is a fine example of bird architecture. The birds make their own excavations, selecting a stump that is sufficiently decayed to make drilling possible with their tiny and weak bills. They usually enter from the top of the stump,—though I have seen a nest the entrance to which was on the side of the stump, as is the rule with the black-capped. The excavation, at the entrance, is about two inches in diameter, and this size is maintained for about six inches, when it is gradually widened to about three inches in diameter, and this width is continued to the bottom—about twelve or fifteen inches from the top of the stump. At the bottom of the cavity the birds place a cushion of dried moss, an inch or so in thickness, and upon this place a second cushion made of the inner fur of the common hare. Upon this latter is placed the cup-shaped nest, made also of the same fur compactly felted—so strongly put together that the nest will stand handling without losing its form. The walls of one nest I examined were two and a half inches high, and half an inch thick, and were formed on such graceful lines as to make the nest an object of real beauty. There was no other material used as a lining, but the interior had a soft, woolly surface not observable on the outside.

The female lays five to eight eggs, and as many as ten have been found in a nest of the Hudsonian, though just how so many are

covered by the tiny body is a mystery. The eggs of both species are creamy white, with a circle of reddish brown spots around the larger end.

With all his rollicking, Bohemian ways, the chickadee makes a model mate and a devoted parent; and though generally in a merry mood, inclined to be sociable with a sympathizing spirit, and friendly with all his neighbours, he can be fierce when the occasion demands, and displays considerable boldness and courage in defending his nest against intrusion. These birds are never shy, and appear quite indifferent to the presence of mankind, pausing sometimes in their scramble on a tree to gaze at an inquisitive intruder with a comical "who-are-you-looking-at?" air.

A visitor to the woods on a bright day in winter is apt to meet a troop of these restless fellows in company with brown creepers, nuthatches, and kinglets, a downy woodpecker often acting as rear guard—all gadding through the forest, with short flights from tree to tree, and chattering merrily as they fly.

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## WINTER WREN.

This bird derived its name from its habit of wintering in the Middle States, and thus received an appellation which sounds strangely to Canadian observers, who know this species as a summer visitor only. In Southern Ontario it is known chiefly as a spring and summer migrant, but north of the forty-fifth parallel it occurs as a summer resident throughout these Eastern Provinces. The wrens cannot be called abundant, yet I think that they are more common than is generally supposed. Their habit of hiding amid the brush and shrubbery, when in the more open pasture lands, and their more general habit of retreating to the deeper shades of the forest, keep them out of the way of the casual woodland wanderer, but even the bird-lovers, who know the haunts of these tiny songsters, rarely catch a glimpse of one, though a trained ear will often detect the bird's voice in the general chorus.

The retiring habits of the bird accounts for the little that is known of its nesting habits, comparatively few nests having

been discovered by naturalists. It is usually placed in the moss at the foot of a decayed stump or the side of a fallen tree, sometimes amid a pile of brush, or under the tangled *debris* of a swamp. Externally it is a ball of dry moss, compactly laid, the entrance being at the side. Within is a soft bed of feathers, or roots, or hair. Four to six eggs are laid, in size somewhat larger than a chickadee's, and of white color, marked near the large end with minute spots of reddish brown and purple.

The winter wren is among the smallest of Canadian birds, measuring barely four inches in its extreme length. The plumage of the bird is an unattractive reddish brown, though when in the hand it proves to be prettily marked with waved lines of a darker tint. The wings are dusky, with dark bars and pale spots. The tail is short and is usually carried in the air, at a right angle to the body.

These birds feed on small insects, which they hunt with ceaseless activity, and this activity keeps them always hungry, and so always on the go ; and such a going, such scampering about, such flitting, hither and yon, no other bird quite equals. I discovered one of these agile fellows running along a wind-fall and exulted over the opportunity to study him. He was not shy, and, indeed, seemed almost indifferent to my presence, but before I could cover him with my glass he had hidden amid the tangle of a brush heap. Out again in a moment, he paused to pick up a stray grub, but before I could wink twice he had whisked off to the boughs that swung in the air far overhead. While hunting for him there I heard his voice from another tree some thirty yards away, whither I followed. I was almost certain it was the same bird, for two are rarely met with in one grove—they are not sociable—so I was not surprised when, after following the voice from tree to tree, I found myself back to the wind-fall from which I had started, and on the prostrate trunk, as before, was the wren. He was busily searching for food as usual, but he stopped suddenly, threw back his head and without preface flung to the air his brilliant song—one of the very best of our sylvan melodies.

It is a typical wild-bird's song that comes from the wren's throstle, the song of a creature wild and free, and happy with the delight of living ; yet it is not suggestive of hilarious mirth, like the bobolink's merry lay, nor is there in its theme anything of the

seusuous joy that dominates the song of the fox sparrow. The wren's trilled roundelay tells of a deeper joy, an ecstacy that fills the heart so full it must free itself in song—the pent heart's safety-valve. The charm of the song lies partly in its spontaneity—its sudden outburst—but there is an added delight in its clear tones, which are strong and sweet, in its varied and rapid trills, and in the strain of wild plaintiveness that runs through the entire melody. You are fascinated by it, you never tire of its repetition, and each time you hear the bird sing your wonder increases how that tiny heart can hold so much of joy, and how that tiny throstle can express the joy with such beauty and such power. The wren's song is more nearly like that of the canary than like any other song that I have heard, but the canary suffers by the comparison. Yet how few of our people have listened to this native songster or even heard of its brilliant melody.

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## KINGBIRD.

This bird has been dubbed "tyrant flycatcher" by the bookmen—it is something of a bully at times—and in many localities is known as "bee martin," from its fondness for the busy honey-makers and its twittering martin-like cry. Kingbird became its name because of its flaming crown of reddish orange plumes, which are partly concealed. Apart from this crown, or crest, the bird's plumage rivals a quaker's garb in quiet color, though like the quakers the

kingbirds are made conspicuous by the very plainness of their costumes. Above they are a blackish ash, which becomes darker on the head and tail, the latter ending in a bar of white. Their color below is white, tinged on the breast with gray. The bill is depressed and wide at the base.

Their favorite nesting place is an orchard, or park, or open pasture, and the nest is saddled on a horizontal limb or in a fork made by two branches. It is a rather flimsy structure of loosely laid twigs and roots, though the interior is neatly lined with horse hair and feathers. The eggs, four or five in number, are rich creamy white, boldly streaked and spotted with brown and lilac.

The kingbird occurs in numbers all over these Eastern Provinces, reaching the southern border before the middle of May, and leaving the northern limit of its distribution about the first of September.

It is a true flycatcher—the type species of the whole flycatcher family—and its food consists largely of winged insects which are captured in the air. A familiar sight on a summer's day is a kingbird on a garden fence or wayside branch watching for the passing fly, upon which the bird darts with skilful flight, catching its prey upon the wing after the manner of a swallow, though with less grace. The fly secured, the bird wheels back to its perch to repeat the watching and the darting, each capture being tallied by a sharp snap of the bill.

The kingbird is charged with fierce pugnacity and with churlishly tyrannizing over weaker birds, but the charge is not well founded. He is brave and daring above all other birds, and is a fighter, through and through. But he fights only when there is something to fight for—a mate to be won, an insult to be avenged, or a home to be defended—and what brave fellow would not fight upon such occasions. He claims as his kingdom the grove wherein his queen-mate and he rear their fighting brood, and he takes under his protection all the smaller birds who dwell therein—the redstarts and the vireos in the next tree, the yellow warblers in the hedge-row, and the juncos who have hid their nest in the grass yonder. These are his friends and he elects himself their champion, making their quarrels his own, and shielding them with his valor. But he brooks no rivals; permits no interference in his domestic affairs; and

zealously guards his kingdom from all such malevolent intruders as egg-stealing jays and blood-thirsty hawks. Be the intruder ever so large or fierce the kingbird will attack him with a persistent courage that yields to no opposition, and with a skill that baffles all defence. These battles in mid-air are interesting as exhibitions of the art of flight, and often are quite ludicrous.

The kingbird is not so large as a robin, and his attack on a goshawk—that terror of the barn-yard—has in it all the elements of absurd audacity; while the futile efforts of the larger bird to defend himself from attack or to reach his exasperating assailant with either talon, beak, or wing, complete an amusing spectacle. A few instances are recorded of the king bird attacking others than his natural enemies, but I doubt if these occur with frequency. After the brood have gone from the parental care even old enemies seem to be forgiven, for the war-cry of the kingbird is heard no more during that season. This harsh, shrill cry is the kingbird's song—he has none other. His call note is less harsh.

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## WOOD PEWEE.

Nine species of the flycatcher family are regular summer visitors in all of these Eastern Provinces, though some of them are most abundant near our southern border, while others find more favorable conditions in the northern districts.

In habits they are quite similar, but the kingbird is the only one of our nine that is aggressively pugnacious, and that utters a harsh, twittering cry. The other species are more or less irritable, though they rarely make a serious attack upon other birds, and all have calls —songs we may term many of them—of two or three notes, varying in quality from the sharp-toned and abrupt *kil-lic* of the yellow-breasted flycatcher to the soft, sweet strain of the present species.

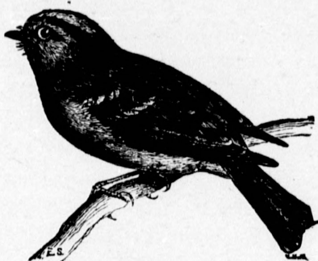
These birds are not classed with the *oscines*, the singing birds, the anatomy of their throats forbids that; but if the scientists put them elsewhere the people number them with the sylvan songsters, and with good cause, for their voices would be much missed from the woodland chorus. The song of the wood pewee—for

song it certainly is, and not simply a call—bears more genuine pathos in its three sweet notes than any other bird's song I know. Heard in the quiet of the groves—the pewee's favorite haunts—or heard in the orchard during the twilight hour, these notes fall on the ear like a wail of despair, telling of a sorrow that cannot be healed. Yet the bird seems happy, is an active, bustling little body, and quite as unconscious of the sad strain in its monody as a babe is of the mirth in its laughter, or the wind of its sigh. This song has been represented in the books by *pe-we-e* and *pe-ay-we* and other words, but it is too subtle a thing to be crystalized in a word, and its strain has a wild plaintiveness that neither human voice nor instrument can counterfeit.

You are more likely to find the nest of the pewee in the grove beyond the village, or near the farmer's house, than in the orchard, yet an apple tree is often selected, and I have watched a pair saddle their trim home on the branch of a maple not fifty yards from my window. The nest itself is peculiarly constructed, for while the walls are thick and firmly laid, the bottom is thin. The materials used are twigs and roots, and shreds of bark, and the walls are covered on the outside with lichens, like a hummingbird's. The inside is furnished with a cushion of dry moss, and upon this the female lays her three or four pretty eggs. The ground color of these is creamy white, and near the larger end is a wreath of brown and lilac spots.

The plumage of the wood pewee is olive brown above, somewhat darker on the head, wings and tail, and the under parts are whitish with a yellow tinge. The sides are washed with a pale olive tint and this extends across the breast; the wings bear two bars of yellowish white. The extreme length of the bird is about six inches.

Our bird feeds almost entirely upon winged insects which it captures in true flycatcher fashion—darting upon its prey while on the wing and closing the bill upon the mite with a sharp, audible snap.




## GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET.

Small as this bird is—about the size of your thumb—and delicately as it is formed, it has sufficient sturdiness and vitality to withstand the rigor of a Canadian winter.

My acquaintance with the kinglet dates from a certain February day when I met a dozen of them in a New Brunswick forest, and ever since I have had respect for the tiny creature's courage and endurance. A storm was raging—high winds and snow—and the temperature was too near zero for human comfort. After a hard tramp through the storm I had retreated to a thickly-wooded valley for rest and repairs when a coterie of chickadees and nuthatches came trooping by, merry as usual, their sweet and cheery strains in striking contrast with the fierce wind's dirge. While watching their antics, as they flitted from tree to tree and scampered over the trunks and branches, I became conscious of a strange note in the medley—a note that was new to me—a thin, wiry note, of piercing quality and high-pitched tone ; more like an insect's note than a bird's, yet sweet as the tinkle of a silver bell. It was not loud, but it was penetrating,and was readily traced amid the chorus, so I had little difficulty in placing its authorship—a bevy of daintily-costumed mites with plumes as neatly laid and forms as trim and graceful as any warbler's, who were following, in an unobtrusive way, the example of their hilarious companions in hunting for eatables among the bark crannies. They were quite as cheerful as the others and as sprightly, but had less suggestion of antics in their demeanor. They looked out of place—too exquisite and frail for a winter storm, too much like a dude in a squall. I thought they

must be cold—I was myself—though they did not act as if they wanted either pity or help. They kept on chattering and hunting in an absorbed way, quite undisturbed by the nipping air, or the whirling snow, or the howling wind that shook the tree tops a few yards above them. As the kinglets remained almost constantly on the upper branches, or amid the thick foliage of the small trees, I was obliged to bring one down for inspection, and in my hand it proved more beautiful than the distant view had suggested.

The plumes of the back are rich olive green, brighest on the rump; the wings and tail are of a dusky tint, the feathers edged with dull buff, and the wings bear two narrow bars of white. The under parts are dull white, tinged with buff, and a band of this buffish white crosses the forehead, spreads around the eyes, and across the cheeks. On the head the male wears a crown patch of orange red, bordered by rich yellow—a flaming crown—hence the name kinglet, and framing this patch of color are two bars of black. The female and immature male lack the red color on the crown. The extreme length of this bird is four inches.

Another kinglet—the ruby-crowned—occurs in these Eastern Provinces as a summer resident, migrating southward in the autumn. It is a trifle larger than its congener, but in plumage differs chiefly in having a crown patch of rich scarlet, which is concealed by the contour feathers.

The gold-crest builds an artistic nest and usually suspends it from small twigs near the end of a branch—sometimes the nest is saddled upon the twigs instead of being pendant. The material used for the exterior and the lining is of roots, shreds of bark, and feathers. Some nests are spherical in form—a ball of moss ornamented with lichens, and with the entrance at the side; and an occasional pair of these builders will arrange feathers on the inside of the nest so that the tips droop toward the centre and conceal the eggs. The site chosen for the nest is usually in damp, coniferous woods. About six eggs generally complete the set, but as many as ten have been seen in a nest. The ground color is of a rich, creamy tint—sometimes rather buffish, sometimes pure white, and the surface marks are dots of pale reddish brown and

lavender. These dots are gathered in a wreath near the larger end, or are spread over the entire surface.

Besides its high-pitched, twittering note—a wiry *'tsee 'tsee' tsee*—which is heard through the entire year, our bird gives utterance to several other calls and warbles, and has one song that is reserved for the nesting season—a love song. It is a dainty bit of melody, fitting a dainty lover, and is rendered in low, soft tones.

The golden-crowned kinglet is quite a common bird throughout this eastern section of the country, breeding from about latitude 45° to the lower fur countries. It is a winter resident only in Southern Ontario.

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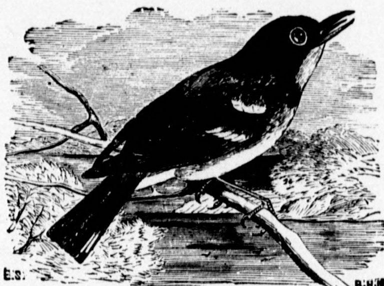

## PARULA WARBLER.

Some thirty species of the warbler family build their nests in these Eastern Provinces, and most of them come in such abundance that the family rival the sparrow tribe in numbers. One or the other, and sometimes many, of these warblers may be found in any city park or suburban garden, in country lane or grove or woodland —almost anywhere that trees grow or the shrubbery is dense. I have met them in quite deep forests, though they are more numerous near the settlements; but they are birds of the trees and not of the fields or moorlands. *Sylvia* is the genetic name of a group of old world forms, and wood warblers is the book name for the American species. Their partiality for the trees will explain why they are not more generally known. As a rule they place their nests on the branches and amid the denser foliage—a few species only build on the ground,—and as their food is the small insects and larvæ that are found on the bark and leaves, the birds are almost continually hidden from observation. Their size also helps them to escape notice, for they are small birds, smaller, most of them, than the average sparrow.

In appearance the warblers are among the most attractive of our birds. None of them are plainly costumed, while all have graceful forms, and some of the clan can be fairly classed among the great beauties of the avian race. The present species, the parula, will serve as a type of the group. The adult male is a daintily dressed fellow. His back and wings are of a light shade of blue which,

though appearing bright in tint when seen against the green leaves, proves on close inspection to have a rather dull hue. The blue of the back is relieved by a patch of yellow-tinged olive, and on the wings are two bars of white. White appears also in spots on the tail feathers, and the belly is white. The throat and breast are bright yellow, and upon the breast is a shield of orange brown. The female is similar in general appearance, but the blue of her plumes is not quite so bright, and the patch on the back and the shield on the breast are either obscure or entirely lacking in her costume. The young birds are more nearly like the females, but the blue of their upper parts is washed with green, and the yellow of their breasts is of a duller tint. The rule obtains in most species of this group that the male, female and young are unlike in their plumage, each displaying seasonal changes, and the student finds himself puzzled when attempting to identify them.

Most of the warblers build neat and compact nests, but few of them rival the parula in architectural skill. This nest is globular in form, with the entrance at the side, and is suspended from the end of a bough and generally about thirty feet from the ground. It is composed of threads of "beard moss" *(usnea)* interwoven with hair, and the wonder is how the tiny builders, with such material and the simple tools they can command, succeed in retaining the globular form and making the structure so firm and compact. Some nests have been found hidden amid a large bunch of the *usnea* growing on the trunk of an old tree.

The female usually lays four eggs, though as many as seven have been found in one nest, while a few nests have held but three. These eggs have a ground color of white, tinged with creamy buff, and are spotted with lilac and several shades of brown.

I have usually found the parula in open groves of deciduous trees—birch and poplar, and the like—on dry hill-sides bordering a stream, and the birds have been invariably amid the higher branches. But other observers have noted their appearance in orchards and gardens, and have watched them flit through the shrubbery.

As a family the warblers are not songsters of high degree, and their performances suggest anything in the way of singing but "warbling." The majority of their songs might be described as short and jerky—cheery whistles rather than songs—though most

of their voices are of sweet tone, and some few warblers, the water thrush and the ovenbird for example, sing beautiful melodies. Most of the clan sing sprightly ditties, that make up by their quaintness what they lack in theme. Many of these songs are so nearly similar and so delusive that no one but an expert can distinguish them. The parula's song is not one of the delusive sort, for it is unlike any other. It is a chromatic run of some twenty sibilant notes, trilled rapidly with a rising inflection, and ending with an abrupt staccato.

The opinion seems to be quite general that this species is rare in Canada, but I am inclined to differ from the majority in this instance. I think the unobtrusive habits of the bird, and its almost constant retirement amid the thick foliage of tall trees will account for part of its apparent scarcity, and the lack of familiarity with the bird's song further prevents its being noted by the average observer. That the species is common in some localities there is abundant testimony. In New Brunswick it is not rare. I have met with it in several districts, and Mr. Boardman writes me that it is common near the Maine border. Downes thought the bird rare in Nova Scotia, but Mr. J. Matthew Jones writes me he thinks it not uncommon in the interior of the province. Francis Bain thought it common on Prince Edward Island. Mr. John Neilson put it down as rare in his Quebec list, while Dunlop and Wintle reported it common near Montreal. From Ontario come divers reports. The field naturalists of the Ottawa Club think the bird rare in their districts, and the ornithologists of the Canadian Institute consider it a rare spring migrant near Toronto; Mr. McIlwraith reports that it is common in Ontario during the spring migration, but adds that there is no evidence of the bird's breeding in Ontario, while Mr. W. E. Saunders, of London, has expressed the opinion that it does breed in Western Ontario, and it is very probable that Mr. Saunder's opinion is correct. There is no good reason for doubting that the breeding area of this species extends from the region of the forty-fifth parallel northward.

I have put in these details to display at once our knowledge and our ignorance, and to emphasize this fact—there is a great deal still to be learned about the common birds of our country.

There is a deal to be learned about almost all our birds—not about their distribution only, but their habits as well—quite enough to keep a small army of observers employed for many years to come. And this work—this field-work—while of great value to science, and interesting to every one who has a love for nature, can be successfully accomplished by any intelligent person. He must, of course, be interested in the work, and have some powers of observation, but he need not possess exceptional ability nor be an expert ornithologist.

To illustrate this, I will cite an instance that comes to my mind as I write. The Cape May warbler was discovered in 1811 and figured by Wilson in his famous work on the birds of America. Wilson did not find another specimen, and neither Audubon nor Nuttall ever saw one in the flesh. Most American observers considered it very rare, down as late as 1883, though Mr. Boardman reported the bird common on the New Brunswick border of Maine. Almost nothing was known of its habits and no authentic account of its nest and eggs was published until 1885. In 1882 I met with a number of these warblers near Edmundston, in northern New Brunswick, and found them invariably in the top branches of tall evergreens growing on high land. As all the birds we saw were males we concluded that the females were sitting, and of course sitting in that neighbourhood, so we spent several hours, much energy, and all of our good temper in searching among the evergreens, but failed to discover a Cape May's nest. In June of 1884, my friend, James Banks, discovered a nest of this species on the edge of a much used road in one of St. John's suburban parks, and furnished the material for the first authentic account of the nest and eggs ever published. My friend and I had been hunting in the wrong place for the Cape May's nest. Banks learned that the male deserts the female after mating, and while he goes off on a spree with his comrades, the patient and loving mother builds the nest unaided, and alone cares for her brood. And Banks learned, further, that while the recreant males seek the high trees on the hill tops the females prefer the low trees and shrubbery of the valleys.

This is not the only good thing Banks has done for ornithology. He probably knows more about the nesting habits of birds, and has discovered more new facts regarding that phase of bird-life, than

any other Canadian. Yet he is not specially gifted, nor has he had special advantages. He is a blacksmith, and the only time he can devote to field-work is in the early mornings, in the evenings, and on the few holidays his employment permits. He had little early training, but nature provided him with a keen eye, a good ear, plenty of patience, and untiring energy. His one crowning advantage has been his love of nature ; but a love of nature can be cultivated, and what Banks has done, any person with average intelligence may accomplish.

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## YELLOW WARBLER.

Of all the warblers that spend the summer in Canada the yellow warbler is the most numerous and should be the best known, for it is distributed over the entire country and frequents all sorts of places. Amid the shrubbery of the garden, in the hedgerows of the park, or among the low bushes in the coppice ; along the dingle side or on the willow branches that fringe the creek ; in open pasture or in woodland, our bird is equally at home and equally happy.

In the books until lately this bird has been known as "summer warbler" and "summer yellow-bird," and in some districts the country people add to its synonymy the title of "wild canary." It resembles the canary in color only, and even the yellow of its plumes lack the canary's tint. The yellow warbler wears upon its breast plumes of a rich golden hue—nearer to crome than to canary yellow. The back is tinged with yellowish olive, and the sides are marked with orange stripes.

The bird is confiding and not shy, and being busy with its own affairs gives little heed to passers-by, thus affording fine opportunities for inspection and study. With an opera glass you can note all its movements, and be enabled to keep a detail journal of its doings.

During May the flocks begin to arrive, and before the first of June the pairs have finished their quaint and tender courtship, and are settling down to the most serious affair in bird life—the building of a home for the expected brood. There is much chattering and twittering, much cooing and demonstration of affection, and then off they go—he and she together—to select a site. Follow them, and if they do

not find in your garden a place that suits—they are quite fastidious—they will lead you to some retired barberry bush or, perhaps, across the field and down to the stream that winds its zig-zag way through the marsh. The marsh! Why the blackbirds are there, with harsh cry and fierce military look, and on the hillside, among the daisies the bobolinks keep up their incessant clink. Why choose such a noisy place? And there is danger here as well as noise, for a band of grackles have possession of that grove yonder, and their partiality for eggs is too well known to make them pleasant neighbors to such dainty, delicate, butterfly birds as yellow warblers. But, my friend, our birds are neither timid nor foolish, and they know a good site for a nest when they see it. They have chosen that low bunch of willows standing quite alone just at the bend of the stream, and if you examine the situation you will find it strong in strategetical features. The marsh on every side is free from bushes for full thirty yards, and if any piratical puss-cat attempted an attack under cover of the grass the sharp eyes of the warbler would detect the dip of the blades at every step. Then what an opening for safe retreat, and what opportunity for carrying in building material and food without being seen. The bank rises several feet above the water, and the birds can drop below the brink before leaving the screening branches and steal away under the protection of the escarpment. You may think this too clever—too shrewd—for a warbler's conception; but I spent the whole of one June morning, with a friend, on the marsh below Hampton, in an effort to identify a yellow warbler's nest fixed in precisely that position. We discovered the nest accidentally by opening the branches, but though the eggs were very warm no sign of a parent was in sight. We were eager to make certain of the parents' identity, for we had evil thoughts concerning that nest and its five dainty gems, but the birds eluded us time after time. We knew that they returned during our absences, because the eggs were kept warm, but how *did* the birds get back without our seeing or hearing them, for not one note came from that direction while we watched. At last a happy thought came to us. We crossed the stream, and from the opposite shore, with our glasses, traced one of these skilled tacticians as it skimmed the surface of the water close to the bank and disappeared under the branches of their chosen willow.

The nest of this species is made of vegetable fibres—weed stems, shreds of bark, dried grass and such—firmly woven or felted with softer substances like plant down, wool and hair. All these are arranged in neat and compact manner, and the cup-like shape is given graceful form. The nest is then lined with soft plant down and hair.

I am under the impression that the female does the most of this work. With many species—almost all the song-birds and numerous others—the female is the architect and builder, while the male helps to gather the material, and makes himself generally useful; but I am afraid that the head of this household is a delinquent—he shirks his duty. If the female works alone she must work industriously and well, for a nest has been known to be completed in two days. Three to five eggs form a set. The ground color of these is a dull white, tinged with green, and over this is sprinkled dots of brown and lilac, gathered chiefly about the larger end.

The song of this warbler is rather better than that of the majority of its congeners. The melody is short and simple—some half a dozen notes of about the same tone, but very sweet and tender, and delivered with considerable variation of its simple theme. The alarm note is a loud, plaintive chirp.

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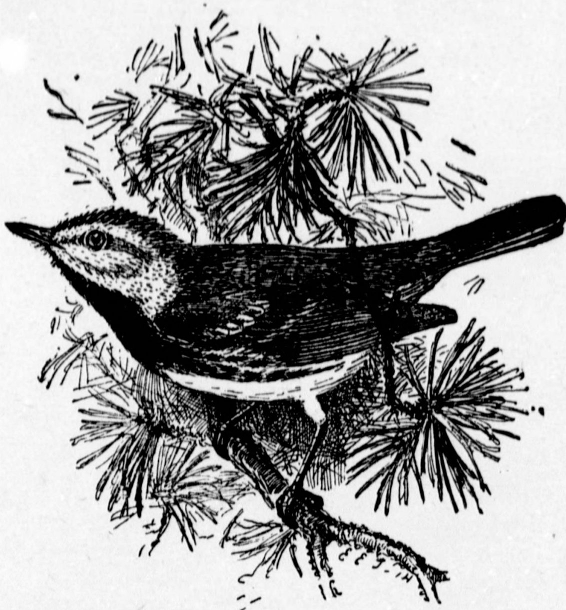

## BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER.

I always think of this bird as an old friend, for it was the first one of the warblers I saw in the flesh and the first I learned to recognize by its song. It was also the subject of my first lesson in field-work—the systematic study of the bird-life about my home. I had supposed that I knew a great deal about the birds, almost all there was to be learned, until one day I chanced upon what proved to be a black-throated green warbler. It was a revelation to me. Such colors, I thought, were seen only on tropical birds, and this feathered gem seemed quite at home, though its nest was built within sight of the Bay of Fundy.

I had determined to make an exact list of the birds nesting in the suburbs of St. John, and began my inspection in the early dawn of a June morning. As I approached the wooded hills that overlook

Lily Lake it seemed to me that hundreds of birds were singing—I had never heard so many before, my ears had been so deaf, so untrained—and I could detect, unpracticed as I was, considerable variety in their songs. When I entered the woods I did not see any birds, but piloted by their voices soon discovered them flitting among the thick foliage. Some were on the upper branches, while others were in the underbrush. They were small in size, so I at once settled in my mind that they were little gray birds—a term invented by the casual observer to cover the unknown species that flit about him in his rambles. But the problem I had assigned myself was the determination of just what species they were, and to learn the notes of each one. I was confused by the variety of these notes, but selected for my first subject a little bird that kept going from branch to branch of a spruce tree directly in front of me, and was singing very constantly. I listened for some time to become familiar with the notes of its song and was soon interested in the singing, it was so quaint and odd—so different from the familar songs of my friends the "swamp robin" and "old Tom Peabody," whose fine voices I could hear coming from the hill-side beyond. The new song was short, simple, and rather jerky, yet sweet and sprightly.

The bird was so happy and was adding so much to the morning's gladness that I shrank from killing it. Several times my gun was lowered to let the happy creature sing just one more song. But what else could I do but shoot, if I was to learn anything about these birds? There was not any collection of bird skins in St. John at that time, though the present generation of students cannot make that complaint, nor had I a friend who could teach me. Had I been studying for myself I might have managed very well with an opera glass—my glass has saved many a bird's life since then—but I needed the skins to help me in teaching others. The birds must be shot!

The crack of my gun was followed by the tumble of the dainty form, and there it lay motionless a few yards from my feet. I stooped to pick it up, but was so startled I held my breath, and paused to examine the beautiful thing. It did not seem possible that such a brilliantly plumaged bird could be common in the country and escape detection so long. It lay on its back,

displaying a jet black shield of velvet richness, covering throat and breast, and set in a frame of deep yellow—a perfect gem. On taking the bird in my hand I saw that the yellow extended to the sides of the head, and that towards the belly it faded to yellowish white. The upper parts were of bright olive, and the feathers lay smooth and firm over a graceful form. On the wings were two bars of white, and the same color was conspicuous on the outer tail feathers. The bird was of slender build, and less than five inches in extreme length. It was a male of the present species, and I afterwards learned that in autumn his throat loses the black shield, and bears plumes of rich yellow and black, and that the female and young wear similar costumes to that worn by the male in autumn.

These birds are very common, aye, abundant all over the Eastern Provinces, though Mr. McIlwraith has seen them near Hamilton in the spring and autumn only. Their favorite haunts are the pine trees that grow near the settlements—not in the deeper forests, but in the copse back of the buckwheat patch or in the pasture. They enter our southern border late in April or in early May, and gradually spread northward—small detachments being left by the way. During August and September they move southward, and wander as far as the West Indies and Central America before finally settling down for the winter months.

When pines are not at hand these warblers will build in the branch of any coniferous tree, though I have usually found the nest in a spruce or pine. It is often about thirty feet from the ground, and lodged in the crotch between two branches. The workmanship of the structure is good, resulting in a pretty nest, graceful in form, compact and firm. The materials used are bits of twigs, dried grass and shreds of bark for the exterior walls, and hair, feathers and plant down for lining. The eggs—three or four in number—are white, with a creamy buff tinge, and wreathed near the larger end with spots of brown and lilac.

You rarely see these birds on the ground—never, in fact, unless you chance to catch one bathing or foraging for nest-building stuff—for their food is the small insects that are found on the trees, and being domestic in their tastes, fond of their homes, and fond also of the shelter and privacy which the leaf-covered branches afford, they seldom roam. If you find one in a grove to-day you are almost

certain to find it in the same grove to-morrow, and very likely on the same tree. They sing with frequency, even through mid-day, when most birds are silent. Besides their song, they utter many other notes—a loud, clucking call, and many softer twitterings.

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## MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT.

The typical warbler is a bird of the high tree-tops, but grouped with this family are several species who do not frequent the trees, but prefer the dense thickets of the undergrowth. One group of this latter division are called ground warblers, from their habit of building their nests on the ground, or in the low shrubbery. Also, they are seen foraging amid the dead leaves quite as often as amid the branches. Of this group the most abundant and most widely distributed is the Maryland yellow-throat. Mr. McIlwraith thinks the bird is somewhat local in its selection of breeding places in Ontario, but while it may pass by many suitable nesting sites near Hamilton, the yellow-throat must be counted among the common birds of Ontario, when considering the Province as a whole. The bird is equally common over all this eastern country, building wherever a patch of brier or tangle, by swamp or brookside, gives it the coveted shelter.

While a retiring bird, it is not timid, and being extremely curious is attracted by a stranger near its haunts, and usually comes to the front to inspect the visitor. This habit and the bird's showy dress have combined to make the yellow-throat better known than are most of its congeners. As the bird faces an observer, in its customary staring fashion, its yellow-throat is very conspicuous. The yellow is of a rich tint, and covers the throat and breast, and extends, in a paler shade, over the whole under parts. On its face the bird wears a mask of deep black—crossing the forehead and covering the cheeks. The upper parts are of an olive-green tint, brightest on the rump.

Most birds' nests that are placed on the ground are constructed with less care—are less compact and firm—than those that have to bear exposure to the wind. The nest of the present species is no

exception, though it is not always placed upon the ground, but is sometimes placed in a low fork of a shrub. The general construction does not vary much, though in the detail there is some variation. When on the ground the nest is usually hidden in a tussock of grass or under cover of a dense bunch of shrubbery. The walls of the nest are composed exteriorly of strips of bark, bits of fern, dried grass, twigs and dead leaves, loosely and rather clumsily laid. Inside of this is a lining that appears like a second nest, made of fine grass—sometimes hair is added—neatly and compactly woven. Occasionally a nest is found that is partially roofed, and others are set upon a cushion of dried leaves. The eggs, four to six in number, are white or pale cream colored, marked round the larger end with spots of brown and lilac. Sometimes a few black spots and lines are seen.

Few birds are more affectionate than the yellow-throat. The female is modest and retiring, and as she lacks the curiosity so conspicuous in the male she seldom leaves the shelter of her favorite thicket, and is less frequently seen than her more brightly-plumed spouse. (The female wears much the same costume as the male, but the tints in her coloration are of a duller hue). But if you chance to discover a pair during the mating or nesting season, you will cease to wonder why the male is so tenderly devoted to his mate, for she herself is so tender and loving, and displays such winning manners. When the female is on the nest her mate is peculiarly attentive—carrying food to her, caressing her, singing for her diversion, and guarding her from disturbance. Serene and peaceful as he appears, under ordinary conditions, he becomes aroused if the nest is approached, and alternately scolds, and pleads with marked emphasis of displeasure and anxiety.

The Maryland yellow-throat does not rank high as a singer, though he does make a better attempt than most of the warbler fraternity, and it can be said of his song that it can be readily distinguished—most warbler songs being so similar they confuse any but the most expert observer. Mrs. Kate Tryon says this bird calls to her, "*Which is it? Which is it? Which is it? Which?*" with a strongly marked accent on each "*which*," and I think these words represent the song very well. One may often hear several variations

of this theme, and disconnected parts of it. Besides this song, the bird utters several calls and notes of alarm.

These yellow-throats are only summer residents in Canada. They arrive from the south during the early part of May, and before August has closed most of them have crossed our border, and are winging their way toward the Gulf States and the West Indies, where they winter.

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## REDSTART.

This active and brilliantly-plumaged bird might be described as a fly-catching warbler. Many of the family have the habit of catching flies in the air, and several species have the depressed bill, widened at the base, together with conspicuous rictal bristles, which are diagnostic characters of the true fly-catcher. But in no other warbler that occurs in Canada are fly-catcher habits and form so marked as in the redstart. The bird does not, however, depend wholly upon its winged prey for food, and may be seen foraging for insects among the branches of the shrubbery and small trees, or even on the ground.

The redstarts enter Canada about the middle of May, and are away again before the end of August; but in this time they spread all over these Eastern Provinces, building their nests in the parks and pastures, or in open groves of mixed woods near the settlements, some pairs even penetrating into the deeper forests. They show a preference for the smaller trees and shrubbery, and are never found on the top branches of high trees, as are so many of their congeners.

The nest is usually placed in the fork of a sapling, or saddled on a branch of a low bush, and is a gracefully-formed and compact structure. It is composed chiefly of vegetable fibres of various sorts, dried grass being conspicuous in most examples, and fine grass and hair is generally used in the lining. The four or five eggs that the hen lays are of a dull white ground color, marked with spots of brown and lilac, which are gathered most thickly round the larger end. This is the usual pattern of warbler eggs,

from which there is little variation, and this fact makes the correct identification of these eggs an impossibility, even to an expert. But every species of warbler builds a peculiar and distinct nest that is so different from any other nest that an observer requires but little experience to distinguish them.

The song of the redstart is a typical warbler's song—a short and jerky whistle of rather sweet tone, delivered with such sprightliness that it becomes attractive. The bird is fond of using its voice, and its cheery notes may be heard at all hours of the day.

The plumage of our bird is its main attraction, except to the few who take delight in watching the restless fellow's active movements as he darts through the shrubbery, his bright plumes flashing like a blown flame. The male's colors are lustrous black and orange red of a bright, rich tint. The black predominates, and the red appears in patches on the breast, wings and tail. The belly is white. In the plumage of the female the black is replaced by dull olive brown, and the patches in her plumage are of a dull yellowish tinge—a bronzy yellow. The young birds resemble the female.

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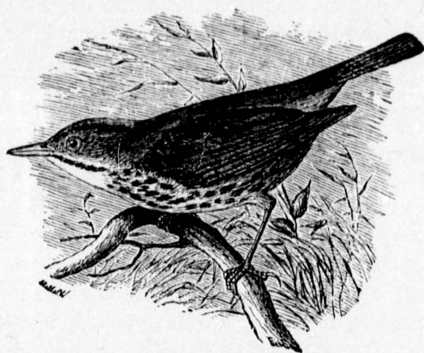

## OVEN BIRD.

The "golden-crowned thrush" of the older writers was named oven bird by the people because it shaped its nest like that old fashioned structure in which their mothers baked the Christmas pies. So the modern systematists, to relieve the bird of a name to which it was not entitled, have followed the example of the people, and have besides transferred the bird, in classification, from the thrush family to the warblers. If you place a specimen of this warbler beside any of the small thrushes you will forgive the early naturalists for their mistake—the two birds look so much alike. The oven bird is smaller—shorter and slimmer—than any of the thrushes, but in a general way it has the same form, and the same color and markings. The plumes of the upper parts are of olive-tinted russet, the crown bearing a patch of orange-brown (not golden) bordered by stripes of black. The under parts are silvery white, and marked with spots of olive.

These birds are very common all over the Eastern Provinces, arriving here early in May and remaining until September, when they journey southward, wintering in Southern Florida and the West Indies. Soon after their arrival in this country in the spring they commence nest building, and an extremely cosy home they manage to construct. It is made of vegetable fibres of various sorts —shreds of bark, weed stems, grass, and leaves—which are rather loosely interwoven. The typical nest is domed or roofed over, with

an entrance at the side, but sometimes the dome is replaced by a mere arch, and even the arch is not always complete. The lining is made of fine grass and hair neatly arranged, and on this the female lays four or five eggs—six sometimes—of a creamy white ground color and marked with spots of brown and lilac.

Some writers have stated that the favorite haunts of the oven birds are in moist woods, but I have found them most frequently on rather dry hill-sides. The birds are often on the ground and are seldom seen very far above it. They place their nests on the turf usually under cover of a bush, though sometimes it is hidden among the fragments of moss at the foot of a decayed stump, or at the side of a prostrate tree. It is always well screened, and its domed roof, which is made of materials from the surrounding *debris*, helps to protect it from the swarm of egg hunters of all sorts and conditions who infest the woods and carry terror to the hearts of bird-mothers.

When surprised on the nest the parents slip off with utmost quietness and steal away amid the rank grass and underbrush. If they find that their nest has been discovered or is in danger, they endeavor to draw the intruder's attention by feinging lameness or inability to fly. Their skill at this dissemblance, and the good judgment they use in enticing the enemy to follow them until the nest's safety is assured, when they suddenly disappear, are among the interesting incidents of bird-life which may be observed almost any June day.

Both parents are extremely solicitous for the welfare of their brood, and the male displays great fondness for and devotion to his mate. It is evidently for her ear alone and for her diversion that he sings his soft, sweet song—a song heard only in the twilight when the singer is hovering in the air above the nest. He is not silent at other times—quite the reverse,—but his everyday melody has a much more commonplace theme—is quite ordinary in fact. Several writers have put this song of the oven bird into syllables, but he who invented *teacher teacher teacher teacher teacher* to express these sounds seems to have caught the popular fancy, though to my ear the syllables *we-chee* or *che-tee* are quite as fit, and neither will convey a definite idea of the strain to a person who has not heard it. The bird's voice is strong and of sweet tone, and he saves his chant from being monotonous by delivering it in

varying intensity of volume—each couplet of notes being louder than the preceding couplet—and to vary it still further he lays an emphatic accent on the first note of each couplet, thus: *we'-chee* WE'-CHEE WE'-CHEE.

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## RED-EYED VIREO.

"The Preacher," this bird is called by the country folk. There are preachers and preachers, and many of them do miss the end of their sermons, and the red-eyed vireo seldom knows when his song is finished. He keeps on hour after hour, through the entire day, even through the mid-day glare when other birds are silent; though he makes a short day of it, I think, as I have never detected his voice in that joyous carillon with which the sylvan choir greets the day-break; nor is he heard in the grand chorus at their vesper service. But pass his way at any other time—pass near where his mate is patiently sitting and swinging in her hammock home—and you will be almost sure to hear his sweet voice in the tender, dreamy strain. Nor does he stop, as many birds do, when the days of waiting and watching are over, and the young brood demands his care. He gives them that care without stint, for he is a devoted parent, as he is also a devoted mate, but he keeps on singing just the same as before. If he gathers a dainty fly or blushing berry he hurries off to the nest, and his beak free from the burden, out pours the song—the dream in song, it might be termed, its theme is so incoherent and fragmentary, and the singer appears so unconscious of his singing. He is not always deep in wool-gathering, however, for let an intruder approach the nest and he will find "the preacher" very much awake. At such time another side of this unique fellow's character is turned to view, for as a fighter he is second only to the king bird. But the battle over, he takes up the strain again just where he dropped it and delivers it in precisely the same key without the least sign of either anger or exultation. Always it is the same calm, pensive, wool-gathering lay. As a melody the song cannot be given high rank, for it lacks theme and consists of broken and disconnected phrases of two or three, sometimes of four, and at rare intervals of five notes. A few

of these phrases are similar to some that the robin gives us, but most of them are heard only from a vireo's throstle. Nor is the song attractive to the casual woodland stroller, and indeed few of these ever notice the song, it is so unobtrusive as well as simple. To many bird-lovers the song is tiresome because of its incessant reiteration; but others never tire of it, and after listening to it again and again ask for more—and I confess I am one of these.

The habit of these birds of keeping almost constantly amid the dense foliage of the upper branches, where they find their insect food, has prevented the red-eye and all the vireo clan from being well known, while the quiet colors of their plumage has had a share in secreting their identity. The upper parts of the red-eye are olive green with a tinge of gray, which deepens to an ashy tint on the crown and to a dusky hue on wings and tail. The under parts are dull white, tinged with olive on the sides. The bill is compressed, and is curved and notched at the point like a shrike's.

This description, with some slight variations, will serve for all of the six species of vireo that are found in this country. I can do little more here than name them. Two of these, the warbling and the solitary or blue-headed vireo, are rather common and of wide distribution, while the range of the rarer yellow-throated is restricted to Southern Ontario and the groves near Montreal. Of the distribution in Canada of the Philadelphia vireo and the white-eyed, there is much to be learned. Very few examples of either have been seen here, but the Philadelphia has been taken in Northern New Brunswick and in Ontario, and the white-eyed, though taken in New Brunswick, is not mentioned in McIlwraith's Birds of Ontario.

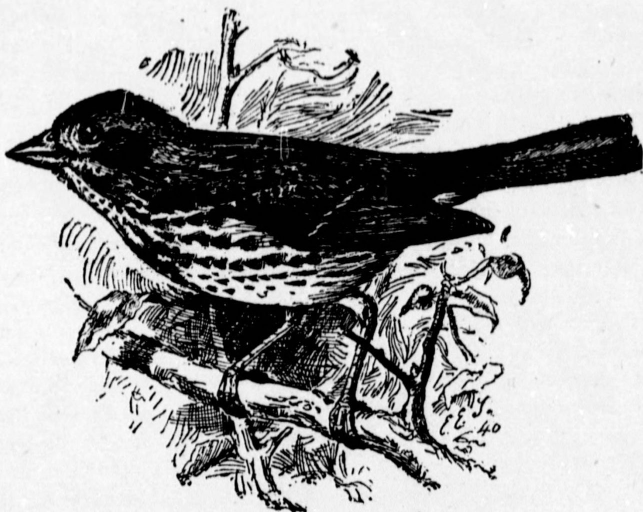
In habits, as in plumage, our vireos differ but little and their songs are much the same, though it must be said of the warbling and the solitary that they add to their typical vireo chant a melody peculiar to themselves. The warbling vireo sings an exquisite song, a little after the style of the purple finch, but much sweeter and more tender.

The nests also of these birds are quite similar. That of the red-eye will serve as a model of all. It is purse-shaped and pensile, suspended from the crotch of two small twigs to which it is

fastened by the entire upper rim, and it is so securely fastened and so firmly made that the winter storms make little impression upon it, one nest often serving a pair of birds for two seasons—the same pair of birds, for they return to the nesting site year after year. The materials used are vegetable fibres of any sort—anything weavable that happens in the way of the builders. The exterior is rather roughly finished, but the lining, which is usually of fine grass, is neatly laid. The nest is generally, though not invariably, placed in an upper or middle branch of a deciduous tree standing near the margin of a grove or in a village street. The eggs, three to five in number, are white, with a faint roseate blush and sparingly marked with spots of brown.

The vireos spend the summer with us, reaching our southern border early in May, and retiring southward as soon as their insect food is driven to close cover by frosty nights. They are slim and delicately formed birds, but little larger and no more robust than the average warbler, so do not appear fitted to stand a low temperature, though I once met with one in New Brunswick in midwinter. I have told elsewhere the story of this meeting, but I will venture to repeat it :—

One frosty morning, so frosty that I had to rub ears and nose to keep from freezing, I happened on a robin apparently overcome with the misery of his condition—cold, hungry and alone. I tried to whistle up his courage, but my efforts were in vain ; he was utterly wretched and past all recuperation. He could not be aroused, and was perched too high on a tree to be caught. While I was calculating on his chances of living down his woe—or living through it—I heard the voice of another bird, the unmistakable whistle of a red-eyed vireo. Robin heard it also, and at once all appearance of wretchedness left him. The vireo was none of his clan, nor even an old pal of his—the robins have no dealings with the vireos on summer days. They were merely companions in misery, but that sufficed to make them friends. Call after call rang out on the crisp air, and then they flew toward each other and finally settled upon the same branch, side by side as close as two birds can sit. The sun was just appearing from behind an eastern hill, and the birds turned their heads toward him as he rose, and burst into song.



FOX SPARROW.

This bird derives its name from the rich, rusty-red tint that is the prevailing color of its plumage. On the back there are streaks of an ashy tint, and the under parts are mostly white, though heavily streaked with the red, while on the wings are two bars of white, but the red is so conspicuous that, at a short distance, the bird appears to be entirely covered with that color.

Large flocks of these sparrows pass through the country during the migrations, yet few persons have seen them. The times of the year in which they migrate, and the quiet, and rather retiring habits of the birds, will account for this. They make the journeys just on the edges of the winter, entering our southern borders in March, passing northward to their breeding grounds in Labrador, and the Hudson Bay district, and visiting us again in October, on their way southward. In the autumn they keep within the deeper woods, and as they utter, at this time, no other sound than a metallic *cheep*, they escape notice.

Sometimes in the spring they come north too rapidly, and find the country so covered with snow that they are obliged to seek food about the settlements. Several times I have seen throngs of them in the parks and gardens of St. John, though they usually retired to the suburbs when the day's bustle began. If they are detained with us by storms, or by continued cold weather until the approach of their mating season, they favor us with a series of the most delightful bird concerts of the entire year. It is not too much to say of the fox sparrow that he is the best singer of all the sparrows that visit this country. His voice is strong, rich, and sweet, and the melody he sings is decidedly beautiful. It is something like the song of the purple finch, though much superior, and the voice of the fox sparrow is of finer quality. Of the two, the fox sparrow is the more finished artist. But both birds sing joyous carols, with strong suggestions of exultant vigor in their strains.

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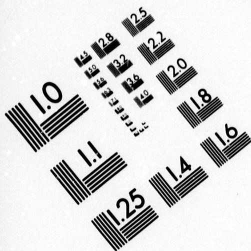
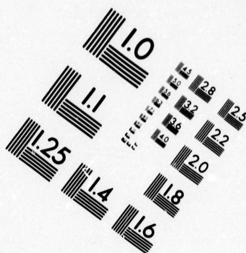
## WHITE-THROATED SPARROW.

This bird is almost universally known as the "Peabody bird," or "old-Tom-Peabody." Its song has been interpreted *old-Tom Peabody*, *Peabody*, *Peabody*, and *pea-pea-peabody-peabody-peabody;* hence the name—though I have heard it called the "Kennedy bird" in Massachusetts, and elsewhere.

Among our sparrows, this species ranks second to the fox sparrow in size and beauty of plumage—the adult male being handsomely marked. His general plumage is made up of stripes of reddish brown, black, and dull buff, but the sides of the head, and the breast are an ashy hue, while the head is made conspicuous by a central stripe of white, bordered by stripes of black, and below these, stripes of yellow. The throat is white, bordered by black stripes, and the wings have two white bars. The female is marked like the male, but her colors are of a duller tint.

These familiar and much-loved birds are abundant all over the country, breeding regularly everywhere, excepting in the more southern portions of Ontario. The flocks reach our borders about the middle of April, and gradually spread northward, some going



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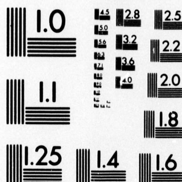

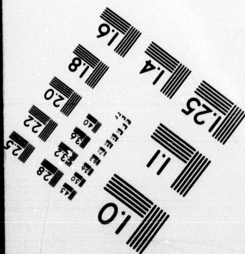
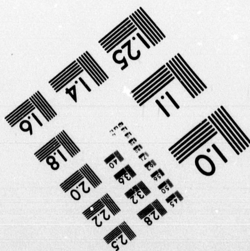

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as far as the lower fur countries. During September and October they return southward, but do not wander far, as numbers are found near Philadelphia, where they sing all winter. Their favorite haunts, while with us, are the open woodlands, pastures, and old meadows, though they may be found in groves that border cultivated fields, and in suburban hedges. The birds spend most of the time on the ground, searching amid the leaves and the dead grass for the seeds and the insects upon which they feed. The young are fed exclusively on insects. The nest is placed on the ground, and like most ground-built nests is a rather loosely constructed affair. It is hidden in a tuft of tall grass, or amid a bunch of moss, and is made of grass and weed-stems. The lining is usually of fine grass and roots, though occasionally hair and feathers are used. The four or five eggs that are found in these nests are of a pale robin's-egg blue ground color, thickly marked with several shades of reddish brown.

The male shares with his mate the weariness of incubation and the care of the young, and though not so demonstrative in his affection as some other birds, is not less devoted in his attentions. He is a fine songster, and is not chary of his music, for during the breeding season his voice may be heard at all hours of the day, and occasionally during the night. The voice is sweet and strong, and the melody, though simple, is cheery and effective. It is peculiarly effective when heard in the quiet hours of the night. Though by no means one of the great songs of our woodland, nor entitling the bird to high rank, even among our minor songsters, yet the summer would lose much of its charm if "old Tom Peabody" failed to return to us. His sweet, cheery notes are too dearly cherished to be missed without regret.

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## VESPER SPARROW.

This quiet-mannered, plainly-costumed and altogether unobtrusive bird is another of the minor songsters that is very dear to the heart of all bird-lovers. And who are not bird-lovers?

The older authors named the bird "grass finch," but a later generation dropped that for "bay-winged bunting." The people, however, chose to call the bird "ground sparrow," because it built

its nest *in* the ground as well as upon it, while others, of more poetic taste, knew it as the "vesper bird," because its song was most frequently heard in the evening. It was Wilson Flagg who changed this latter to "vesper sparrow," and by that name the bird is likely to be known hereafter.

The song of this bird is one of the simplest of our sylvan melodies, yet it does not suffer by comparison with more ambitious efforts. It is soft and sweet in tone, and exceedingly tender, and through the strain there runs a wild plaintiveness that chords well with its placid, hymn-like quality. It is to be heard in the evening chiefly, just after the grander chorus has ceased, but it harmonizes so perfectly with the beauty of the twilight hour and its restfulness that you may fail to notice that a bird's voice is in the air, adding its quota to the joy that stirs your heart.

The vesper sparrow is one of the "little gray birds" of the village school-boy, and in size and costume bears a close resemblance to the better known song sparrow. The feathers covering the bird's upper parts are streaked—dusky-brown centres, edged with a paler and somewhat buffish tint. The under parts are white, tinged with buff and heavily streaked with dusky brown. There are two white bars on the wings, and the outer tail-feathers are partly white. The white patches on the tail are very conspicuous as the bird flies from you.

These birds are found generally in the open pasture, or old meadows, for they are birds of the field rather than of the grove or the garden. When the farmer is ploughing they may be seen following the plough and gleaning the grubs turned up in the furrows. The nest is built in the open field, often without so much as a tuft of long grass to hide it, though usually fitted into an indentation in the soil. Like all ground nests, it is loosely laid and roughly modelled. It is made of grass and other vegetable fibres, strips of weed stalks, roots and such, and lined with fine grass and sometimes with hair, carelessly arranged. The eggs are grayish white, often with a green or pink tint, and thickly marked with several shades of brown.

This sparrow is one of the most abundant in Ontario and is quite common in the other provinces, arriving at our southern border just before May opens, and leaving us again in October.

SONG SPARROW.

These plainly dressed "little gray birds," wearing coats of mottled black, bay, and ash, and showing white fronts, spotted with brown, occur abundantly all over the Eastern Provinces as summer residents, while a few hardy fellows linger through the winter months. Their song is familiar to every lover of the beautiful things of nature, and though not one of the great songs of our fields is so sweet in tone and so tender that one must stop to listen to the singer even if the simple melody is repeated at every few steps of a country ramble, and at every hour of the day. Simple as this melody is, it is subject to many changes, and some of the best singers—for there are individual differences—have command of as many as seven different themes, or variations of the same theme.

They are social birds, and almost as much given to haunting the door-yard as are their kindred, the chipping sparrows. They are never found far from the houses when settlements are near, though I have heard their song while canoeing on wilderness waters ; and how delightful it was to ears that had heard no song for many days !

As a rule, the nest of this sparrow is hidden amid a tuft of grass or under a low bush in a field or open pasture. It is of the usual ground nest pattern—a loose arrangement of grass, twigs, and weed-stems, without any distinctive features. The hen lays a variable number of eggs, ranging from three to seven, though most frequently four or five complete the set. Their ground color is dull white, tinged with green, blue, or pink, and thickly marked with several shades of brown. Occasionally eggs are found without any markings.

The song sparrows are among the earliest of our spring migrants, usually arriving in New Brunswick in large flocks, and generally accompanied by similar flocks of robins and juncos. They appear there about the tenth of April, sometimes as early as the seventh, and occasionally delaying until the fifteenth, but more often arriving during the eighth, the ninth, tenth or eleventh. On several occasions I have searched through the suburbs of St. John for birds on the tenth of April and found not one in many miles of tramping, and next morning have heard at dawn a great chorus of cheery voices, proclaiming the arrival of robins, juncos, and song sparrows.

I mention this here because I have noticed that these birds do not arrive in the vicinity of Boston in the same manner—not in such large bodies. Stragglers and small squads give due notice of the approach there of the main body, which comes along in detached parts.

Mr. Philip Cox had the good fortune to witness the arrival of one of these vast flocks—"bird wave," he appropriately named it—which arrived at Newcastle, on the Mirimichi, in April, 1885. He wrote of it thus :—" I saw hundreds of robins, song sparrows and juncos mingled together in an unbroken column and passing noiselessly on. Some of the birds were only a few feet above the tops of the trees, while others were higher up, the column extending so far skyward that the topmost line could with difficulty be outlined amid the

falling snowflakes. The width of the column, from flank to flank, appeared to average about twenty-five yards. Outside of these flanks few birds were to be seen. . . . The bulk were massed in this narrow column and kept directly over the margin of the shore, apparently guided by the line of contrast between the whitened meadow and the dark waters of the river. They moved on in perfect silence, save for the flutter of the myriad wings—not a note was heard from them. Their flight was slow and suggested weariness. . . . For more than two hours I watched this bird-wave as it rolled along. . . . In about half an hour from the time when they were first observed some individuals showed a disposition to halt. . . . As the time passed the smaller birds displayed evidence of growing more and more weary. Increased numbers alighted, and these took longer rests, and made more energetic demands for a general halt. . . . Previous to this morning only an occasional early bird of these spring migrants had been observed, but now as I returned homeward I found every bush and fence swarming with birds."

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## JUNCO

This companion of the song sparrow—companion during the northward migration--is one of the sparrow's kindred, and displays little variation in habits from the general sparrow programme. He is quite as much at home in the barnyard or the garden as are any of the gray-coated clan, and is as contented as the bravest of them with a home in the forest. He is not one bit shy, though in no way bold, and will come for crumbs with all the friendly graciousness of the chipping sparrow.

Like all the rest of the finch tribe, junco prefers seeds for a general diet, and small fruits in their season, varying his *menu* on occasions with any tasty insect that may fall to his lot. The young are fed exclusively on flies and creeping things.

For a nesting site junco is satisfied with any bit of ground where he can find convenient shelter—for he does not like to have his domestic affairs laid bare to the public, and knows too well, alas,

how many prowlers are on the look out for such tempting tid-bits as unfledged sparrows. So you must look for his nest in some old meadow or grassy pasture land, possibly you may find it in an orchard amid the long grass, or in the city park, or even by the country roadside. You will find it well hidden in a tuft of grass or under cover of a mossy stump, and when found it will be but another edition of an old story, the same loosely constructed cup of vegetable fibres that all the sparrows build. Junco is somewhat more particular than others of his clan about the lining of his home, and generally supplies feathers for that purpose, though I have found hair and fur made use of when they were more convenient.

His song is so much like the trilled whistle of the chipping sparrow that you may not be able to distinguish them without some effort, but you will soon learn that they do differ.

In costume our bird is not at all sparrow-like. His upper parts and neck and breast are dark slate or blackish ash in color, and his belly is white. His bill and outer tail-feathers are white also. In winter the ash color becomes grayish, and sometimes bears a brownish tinge, and in this plumage the male is very like the female and young. You will recognize the bird by this description, and understand that an old friend is hidden under this new name. The bird that the modern authorities have re-named slate-colored junco is none other than the snowbird—the "black snow-bird," or "white-billed snowbird," as the bird is often called.

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## ROBIN.

"American robin" this species has been named, to distinguish it from robin of England. These two birds belong to different families, for while the old country robin is a warbler its American namesake is a member of the thrush family. "Migratory thrush" our friend has been named by some writers, and for scientific use he has been labelled *turdus migratorius* and *merula migratoria.*

Just why our robin was singled out as *the* migratory thrush is not clear, for of all the American thrushes the robin is the least inclined to excess in that particular habit. As a matter of fact the bird is

sedentary in many parts of the country—by which is meant that robins may be seen there at all times of the year. Every season a number of these birds spend the colder months in the Dominion, not in the more southern sections only, but as far north as central New Brunswick, where I have seen large flocks in mid-winter. These winter visitors were not the same robins who helped to make our June days merry, but other robins who had a relish for more bracing air and journeyed to higher latitude before settling down to their task of nest building. The frosty nights of the late autumn drove the insects into winter quarters and a flurry of snow covered up the small fruits, suggesting to the red-breasted fraternity that there might be a famine in that far north land, and forthwith they winged their way toward a more genial clime. By the time they reached our neighborbood they determined to rest and refresh themselves with mountain ash berries. It was thus they chanced to cross my path.

The robins have a decided partiality to small fruits in general, and these winter visitors sometimes continue to feed on the mountain ash berries until the warm sun of a soft March day sets them thinking once more of their Arctic home. During their visit they are seen about the open country and the gardens only when the air is balmy, for when Jack Frost is in evidence they keep under cover of the thick woods. They have more white color in their plumage—especially on the under parts—than the birds we see in summer, but otherwise seem little different from the robins of June. They are just as active and as merry, singing lustily and long, though they are less timid and suspicious, and therefore less watchful than the summer visitors.

Of course every Canadian knows the robin, for it is an abundant bird everywhere, and everywhere the same familiar friend. The bird requires no description therefore, the black crown, dull olive gray back and red breast have been seen in every field and in every garden, but perhaps only the boys who have found the pretty blue eggs, and watched the young chicks open their yellow mouths for the welcome bug, and later watched those same chicks while they learned to fly, know that the youngsters are thickly marked on their breasts with stripes of dull blackish color.

One habit of the robin is not well known—that of the males spending the nights during the breeding season in a grove, some distance, often, from the nesting site. Immense numbers of robins gather at these "roosts"—as many as ten thousand have been known to assemble in one grove near Boston—though through the entire day they are devoted to their mates and assist in the process of hatching the eggs and feeding the unfledged young.

In the more southern districts the spring migrants arrive in small, straggling parties, but in the Maritime Provinces the robins from the south come in large flocks—thousands strong, accompanied by song sparrows and juncos.

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## PINE GROSBEAK.

Every few winters, at intervals of four or five years, our newspapers contain inquiries regarding "strange-looking birds" that visit the gardens and parks in small flocks and feed on the berries of the mountain ash and seeds of various trees. Just why the people have not learned to recognize the pine grosbeaks seems strange, for they are large and handsome birds, somewhat stouter than a robin and as showily costumed, and as they visit us in winter only are peculiarly conspicuous. The adult male in full plumage is an exceptionally attractive fellow. At a little distance his entire plumage appears to be of a bright red tint, but a closer inspection reveals dusky streaks on his back and a dull grayish tint on his belly. The wings bear two white bars. Many of the males do not wear so much of the brighter tint, which varies in individuals from rich carmine to deep rosy-red, and their plumes are more or less washed with the gray and yellowish bronze which predominate in the costume of the females and younger males. The females wear no roseate hues, but are very handsomely

and richly attired. The tint of their bronzy plumes varies from deep crome and rusty orange to tawny olive, and the gray appears in several shades, while some individuals bear crowns and rumps of a decidedly tawny tint. The immature males cannot be distinguished from the females. All these varieties of plumage are usually found in a flock, though seldom are many of the highly-colored males seen together, and in a small company not one may appear.

These birds come to us every year—come with the snow flakes, for they are winter visitors only—but very often they keep under cover of the deeper forests and only the woodsmen see them. If the storms to the northward have been especially severe, or food is scarce, then the pine grosbeaks come with increased numbers, and roaming from place to place in quest of food swarm into the settlements and feast upon the rich red clusters the mountain ash carries for just such hungry maws. The staple diet of these birds is fruit in summer time, and fruit and seeds in winter.

The pine grosbeaks breed from the lower fur countries northward—Nelson reporting them in numbers along the Alaskan rivers. A few pairs, doubtless, summer farther southward every year, and I should expect to find them on almost any of the Laurentian hills. The only well-authenticated nest that has been taken was discovered by Mr. Philip Cox on the Restigouche River, in New Brunswick. One summer a few pairs were found by my friend Banks in a thick grove overlooking the Kennebecacis River, near St. John, but a prolonged search failed to reveal the desired nest. But while hunting for the nest Banks and I were enabled to see something more of the bird's habits than their erratic winter movements permit. In winter they are gentle and extremely confiding, never bickering about the coveted mouthful, nor displaying any awkward fear when passers-by stop to watch them. One winter's day I walked into the midst of a flock that were gathering the berries that had fallen on the crusted snow. They barely made room for me to pass, and one bold fellow hopped between my legs as I stood, picking as he went. The birds Banks and I met in June were just as tame and confiding, and just as gentle with one another as were the winter visitors.

I had the good fortune to hear the male's love song on those

same June days. It is an exquisitely sweet and tender strain, and is sung in such soft tones it must be intended for one ear alone, for it cannot be heard a dozen yards away. The bird does not sing thus because he lacks strength of voice, for his winter song is loud and vigorous—just such a breezy carol as you might expect from a stalwart fellow who loves the north wind and revels amid the snow.

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## WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.

Besides the song-birds that are resident in this country—chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, and in the more southern districts, other species—there are yet others that are seen here in the winter only. They spend the summer beyond the northern limit of the settled districts and come to our neighborhood as a winter resort, just as many of our summer birds resort to the West Indies. Large flocks of tree sparrows and red-poll linnets are seen when the ground is covered with snow, but at no other season. Dainty little things they are, seeming too frail to stand the wintry blasts, yet they are extremely lively and merry while with us. In the same winter months the shrike comes also, with his ghastly, butcher-like method of impaling his prey upon thorn spikes and branches. You may not know that for all his coarse ways and fierce character, this fighting fellow is an expert musician—fit to be classed with our great songsters. His voice is sweet and of considerable compass and his execution compares favorably with the best. Besides his own song, which is an exquisite melody, he is a mimic of such ability that in some parts of the country he is called mocking bird. Other birds come to us in the winter—but of them again, for I am wandering.

Of all our winter birds none are more interesting than the crossbills. There are two species—the common or American crossbill, a dull red bird, and the white-winged. The adult male of the latter is handsomely costumed. His general plumage is a roseate hue, clouded on the back with dull brown. The wings and tail are blackish, the wings bearing two bars of white. The under parts are dull white, streaked with brown. The female is dull olive, somewhat

paler beneath and shaded to buffish yellow on the rump. The immature male is like the female, but paler above and with a yellow tint on breast and belly. In habits our two species are similar, though the white-winged is more northerly in distribution, and while the American is more abundant in Ontario its congener is in the majority in the more Eastern Provinces.

Their crossed bills—both mandibles are curved at the points and cross or overlap—separate these birds from their fellow finches, but they have still another distinguishing characteristic, that of hatching their young during the winter—in February usually. The nesting site is a coniferous tree in the midst of a thick grove, generally in a deep forest. The nest is placed amid the thickest foilage and is made as warm as twigs, shreds of bark, moss, hair and feathers can make it. The walls are high and thick, and are made firm and compact, so that the frost is well excluded. The birds evidently realize that care is required to protect the eggs, for as soon as one leaves the nest the mate at once steps on. Three or four eggs are laid, of a pale blue ground color, marked near the larger end with streaks and spots of reddish brown and lilac. These birds are gregarious and a number of nests are generally found in a grove, with several on the same tree. As soon as the broods are able to fly the parents and young join in large flocks and proceed northward, where they spend the warmer months.

The song of the crossbill is a sweet, cheerily whistled strain, very similar in tone and theme to that of the thistle-bird—American goldfinch—and like the latter's song is delivered on the wing, the voices sinking and swelling in rhythm with the undulations of their flight. When heard from mid-air, on a clear winter's day, as a flock goes sailing by, the effect is delightful.

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## HORNED LARK.

Another hardy bird that winters in our climate and goes to Arctic regions for the summer is the handsomely dressed lark that is so partial to the seaside it was once known as the "shore lark." In recent years several varieties of this species have been discovered, many of them having no love whatever for the sea-air,—remaining inland the entire year,—hence the change of name.

In size the horned lark resembles the snow bunting, though somewhat larger, measuring over seven inches from tip to tip. The plumage is of several tints, the feathers on the back and wings being dull grayish-brown, with streaks of a darker hue. The middle tail-feathers are like the back, but the remainder are black, and the outer pair are patched with white. The nape, shoulders and rump appear as if washed with a pink-tinted cinnamon-brown. A black bar crosses the forehead and passing above the eyes terminates in the erectile horn-like tufts that give the bird its name. Another black bar passes from the base of the bill below the eyes. A yellow line runs through the eyes and the entire throat is yellow. The breast is of yellowish white with a central patch of black, and the remaining under parts are of dull white, shaded on the side with a brownish tinge. A smaller form with somewhat paler colors—the

prairie horned lark—is found in Ontario in summer and the eastern form is found there also, but in small numbers.

The horned larks arrive in New Brunswick early in October, when large flocks may be seen in the fields near the sea-shore and on the beaches. The flocks disappear toward mid-winter, but a few birds brave the snow and the cold winds. They are generally seen on the ground along which they run with ease and rapidity. They are rather shy and wary and endeavor to elude observation by hiding behind rocks and drift stuff.

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## SNOWFLAKE.

"Snow bunting" we called this bird when I was a boy, and I think that name better suited to a fellow of such sturdy character than this newly invented label. True, the snow in mass is suggestive of strength and vigor, but an individual crystal, separated from the mass, is so frail a thing a breath dissolves it. Now these winged snowflakes are far from frail. They are a hardy, vigorous lot, upon whom the biting breath of the north wind makes little impression. Yet a flock of buntings, as they dart and whirl through a storm, do appear like a cloud of crystal flakes driven before the wind.

They know—these birds—what many men and women have not learned, that all the good things of nature—all that is grand and beautiful of the out-of-door world—is not displayed under a clear sky; that you can find in the storm a glory all its own—can find it if your eyes be true and your heart in tune. But you must have been bred in the north to enjoy a snow-storm as the buntings do, to find with them exhilaration in the biting air, and delight in the swish and swirl of the drifting flakes. These birds seem to be at their happiest in a storm, and whenever one comes their way they join in its whirl and scurry just for the fun of its fierce revelry, birds and flakes mingling in the same wild dance.

When the spring-time comes with its soft, warm days, then off go the buntings to the far north—so far that the snow is always in sight, and there, tucked away in some cranny on a barren hill-side, they place the nest in which to rear their sturdy young. This nest is

made warm with moss and dry grass, and feathers, and the mother-bird sits close above her darlings till the young blood grows rich and strong, and feathers come to protect their midget bodies from the frosty air. Four or five young are usually in a brood, sometimes six, and they emerge bare and helpless from eggs that are exquisitely beautiful. A soft bluish white is the ground color, and on this, gathered about the larger end, are spots of reddish brown and lavender.

In size the bird is about half way between a house sparrow—the "tramp" I mean, that "ruffian in feathers"—and a robin. When on the wing the plumage appears to be white, chiefly, with some few splashes of a dark tint ; but when in the hand the dark color, which proves to be black, bordered by tawny brown, is found to cover a great part of the back, wings and tail. In summer much of the black is replaced by white.

The snow buntings visit all parts of Canada, though they do not, as a rule, enter the large towns. You may find them on the outskirts of the villages and about the barn-yards, but they seldom stray far from the woodlands. During their stay here they do not sing, and we hear little from them but a metallic *cheep*. which sounds rather merrily when uttered by a flock of the birds as they feed and chatter ; but Mr. Hagerup has written me that during the nesting season, in Greenland, they sing a sweet and beautiful song which he describes as "delivered in short stanzas."

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