

VARIOUS

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*Birds and Nature, Vol. VIII, No. 4, November 1900 / Illustrated by Color
Photography:*

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SONNET – NOVEMBER

Yet one smile more, departing, distant sun,
One mellow smile through the soft vapory air,
Ere, o'er the frozen earth, the loud winds run,
Or snows are sifted o'er the meadow bare.
One smile on the brown hills and naked trees
And the dark rocks whose summer wreaths are cast,
And the blue Gention flower, that, in the breeze,
Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last.
Yet a few sunny days, in which the bee
Shall murmur by the hedge that skirts the way,
The cricket chirp upon the russet lea,
And man delight to linger in thy ray.
Yet one rich smile, and we will try to bear
The piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air.

– *William Cullen Bryant.*

Oh, Autumn! Why so soon
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad;
Thy gentle wind and thy fair sunny noon,
And leave thee wild and sad!

Ah! 'twere a lot too blessed
Forever in thy colored shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft southwest
To rove and dream for aye.

– *William Cullen Bryant.*

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SOME FACTS ABOUT THE WESTERN WILLET

(*Symphemia semipalmata inornata*.)

The Western Willet is one of the largest of the Limicolae or Shore Birds. The body is about the size of a common pigeon, the long neck, legs and extent of wings making it appear much larger. The feet are only about one-half webbed and only when great danger makes it necessary will it go into the water beyond its depth. The bill is straight and in summer the color of the bird is gray above, with many small but rather distinct black marks. On the sides and breast these marks are arrow-shaped. In the plumage of winter and of the young these markings are absent.

I am inclined to believe that this species has a more extended range than any other of the order. It has become quite abundant of late years in the Calumet Region in Northern Indiana, near Chicago. Mr. E. W. Nelson, in the Natural History Survey of Illinois, says, that in the seventies this species was a rare summer resident on the wet prairies of Northwestern Illinois, although I can find no authentic record of the taking of the nest and eggs. Captain Charles Bendire found it abundant and resident in Southeastern Oregon when he procured several sets of its eggs. It

is said to breed from the coast of Texas to Manitoba. Straggling flocks of from five to fifty may be found along the shores of our larger fresh water lakes, particularly Lake Michigan, during the fall migration, which takes place from about the fifteenth of August to the last of September.

This bird might well be called the clown of the Limicolae. I have often been amused by the antics of a flock of Willets on the shore of Lake Michigan. They would droop their necks and wings in an absurd fashion, taking short runs and jumps as the waves rolled in upon them. I have never seen a bird which at times could be so wary and hard to approach, and again, if a number are shot from a flock, the remaining birds will seem to lose their senses, and I have frequently walked within a few feet of the survivors before they would take flight. This trait is noticeable among a large number of shore birds and the terns, but more especially so with the Willet.

On the plains bordering the Brazos river, near the Gulf coast of Texas, during the months of April and May, I have found the Willet proper (*Symphemia semipalmata*), a smaller and darker form, breeding in abundance. The Willets usually select for a nesting site a thick tussock of salt marsh grass on the borders of a small pond, where they can command a good view of the vicinity. In the center of this they hollow out a space of about six or eight inches in diameter, and simply line it with the grass they have matted down. In this nest are laid four pyriform eggs of a greenish white, or a light olive brown ground color, marked with

large, irregular blotches or brownish black and faint purple; the eggs are immense for the size of the bird, being about two inches in length by one and one-half in width.

The illustration faithfully portrays three birds taken at Miller's, Indiana, on the beach of Lake Michigan. The color of the legs, which are obscured by the shadow of the body, is a pale, slaty blue.

Though the Willets are restless and noisy birds, they are much less so, and, indeed, quite unconscious of their surroundings when nesting. Regarding their habits at this time, Dr. Coues has told us that if they "become thoroughly alarmed by too open approach, particularly if the setting bird be driven from her nest, there is a great outcry, violent protest and tumult where there was quietude. Other pairs, nesting near by, join their cries till the confusion becomes general. But now, again, their actions are not those they would show at other times; for, instead of flying off with the instinct of self-preservation, to put distance between them and danger, they are held by some fascination to the spot, and hover around, wheeling about, flying in circles a little ways, to return again, with unremitting clamor. They may be only too easily destroyed under such circumstances, provided the ornithologist can lay aside his scruples and steel himself against sympathy."

It is to be hoped that all the States, frequented by the Willets, will enact proper legislation which will amply protect these interesting waders.

Frank M. Woodruff.

Autumn once more begins to teach;
Sere leaves their annual sermon preach;
And with the southward-slipping sun
Another stage of life is done.
The day is of a paler hue,
The night is of a darker blue,
Just as it was a year ago;
For time runs fast, but grace is slow!

Thou comest, autumn, to unlade
Thy wealthy freight of summer shade,
Still sorrowful as in past years,
Yet mild and sunny in thy tears,
Ripening and hardening all thy growth
Of solid wood, yet nothing loth
To waste upon the frolic breeze
Thy leaves, like flights of golden bees.

– *Frederick William Faber.*

CRUEL TREATMENT OF BIRDS DEMANDED BY DAME FASHION

All of my readers probably know in a general way that Dame Fashion is responsible for the destruction of the lives of many birds, but they may not know to what extent this is true.

Why do we say that any cruel treatment of the birds is chargeable to fashion? It can hardly be necessary to remind ourselves that there is in almost every boy's nature a touch of the savage instincts which find expression in the desire to kill something. Traces of this instinct do not entirely disappear with the development into manhood, but show themselves there in the love of hunting and fishing. Let these remnants of savagery be appealed to by the promise of gain and they are immediately fanned into flame in the natures of those persons who are naturally more strongly drawn to this primitive occupation of men. In short, place before the professional hunter an easy means of profiting by his skill as a hunter, and in far too many instances he will smother any humane instincts which he may have for the sake of the gain. It is the demands of fashion for plumes and feathers for hat trimmings which place before these hunters the temptation to kill. Have we not a right, therefore, to place the blame at the door of Fashion?

But what are the practices which we call cruel? In the first

place it is cruelty to cause the destruction of life without good and sufficient reason. Unnecessary sacrifice of life is cruelty. Certainly no one will say that it is necessary to trim hats with feathers. Fashion decrees that feathers must be worn, and presto! feathers are worn. In the second place, it is cruel to kill birds who are feeding young ones in the nest, leaving them to starvation. Yet this is just what has happened and does happen every year. Plume hunters are no respecters of times and seasons. With them there are no closed seasons. The birds which they are after gather in large rookeries during the nesting season and are therefore much easier to capture then than at other times.

Most of the herons and similar plume-bearing birds are hunted and killed for the plumes alone, or, at most, for a very small part of the whole plumage. The part wanted is taken and the rest left to waste, while the bird's body is never used for anything. If nothing worse, it is an unpardonable waste. In Florida alone whole rookeries of herons and ibises numbering hundreds and even thousands of individuals have been wholly destroyed. Now the insatiable plume hunter, in his effort to supply the demands of a no less insatiable fashion, is pursuing the unfortunate birds into the fastnesses of Mexico and South America. There is but one way to stop this work of extermination, and that is to take away the demand. This remedy lies wholly in the hands of women. Unless they are willing to take a firm stand against the use of feathers for purposes of ornament the birds are doomed. This may seem like a strong statement, but a little reflection will prove

it true. When the birds which are now hunted for plumes and feathers are gone, there will be a modification of the demand to include birds of different plumage, just as the aigrette is giving place to the quill. After the quill and the long-pointed wing will come the shorter wing, and after that the plumage of the small birds, and the cycle of destruction will be complete.

Some one may ask why it is that the birds are so foolish as to allow the hunter to kill hundreds in a single day from one rookery. Why don't they leave the region when the shooting begins? The plume hunter has learned cunning. He no longer uses a shot gun, but a small caliber rifle or a wholly noiseless air gun. The rifle makes no more noise than the snapping of a twig, and will therefore not frighten the birds. By remaining concealed the hunter may kill every bird that is within range. Since each bird is worth from twenty-five cents to five dollars, according to the kind, a single day's work (or slaughter) is profitable. The temptation is certainly great, and becomes almost irresistible to him who loves hunting for its own sake.

The most cruel part of the whole business I have already stated, but it will bear repeating. It is the killing of the breeding birds before the young are able to care for themselves. There is abundant evidence that the breeding time is the favorite time for hunting among plume hunters, because then the old birds are more easy to kill, and because then the plumage is the most perfect, for then the wedding garments are put on.

It should not be an impossible task to stop this whole cruel

business. But laws will not do it without a wholesome public sentiment behind it. Women are notably foremost in all good works, and many of them are doing nobly in this work, but it is painfully evident that many are not. Let us make "a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together," and then we shall drag this growing evil back and down forever.

Lynds Jones.

THE FALL MIGRATIONS

A rush of wings through the darkening night,
A sweep through the air in the distant height.

Far off we hear them, cry answering cry:
'Tis the voice of the birds as they southward fly.

From sea to sea, as if marking the time,
Comes the beat of wings from the long, dark line.

O strong, steady wing, with your rhythmic beat,
Flying from cold to the summertime heat;

O, keen, glancing eye, that can see so far,
Do you guide your flight by the northern star?

The birds from the North are crossing the moon,
And the southland knows they are coming soon.

With gladness and freedom and music gone,
Another migration is passing on.

No long, dark lines o'er the face of the moon;
No dip of wings in the southern lagoon.

No sweet, low titter, no welcoming song;
These are birds of silence that sweep along.

Lifeless and stiff, with the death mark on it,
This "Fall Migration" on hat and bonnet.

And the crowd goes by, with so few to care
For this march of death of the "fowls of the air."

– Mary Drummond, in the Chicago Times-Herald.

THE WAYS OF SOME BANTAMS

Last summer, when I was out in the country, I made the acquaintance of a kind-hearted little bantam rooster, who was as funny as he was kind-hearted.

An old speckled hen, who looked as if she might be a good mother, but wasn't, had brought up a family of chickens to that stage where their legs had grown long and their down all turned to pin-feathers.

Very ugly they were; there was no doubt of it. Perhaps this queer mother thought so. At any rate, she turned the poor things adrift and pecked them cruelly whenever they came near her.

Little "Banty" saw this unkind behavior. He was small, but his heart was big, and he set Madam Speckle an example which ought to have made her hide her head in the darkest corner of the hen-house for shame.

He adopted those chickens!

Each one of them was about half the size of "Banty," and to see that loving little father-bird standing on tiptoe with his wings spread, trying in vain to cover all eight of his adopted children, was a pathetic as well as a ludicrous sight.

They loved him and believed in him fully. They followed him all day long, and seemed to see nothing amusing when he choked down a crow to cluck over the food he found for them, and at night they quarreled over the privilege of being nearest to him.

I think bantams perhaps are more interesting than other fowls. When I was a little girl father brought three of them home. Dandy and his two little wives were all pure white and very small.

We had other fowls, the aristocratic Spanish kind, each as large as two or three of Dandy, and the Spanish rooster hinted very strongly that Dandy's presence in that barnyard could be dispensed with. But Dandy was a brave little fighter, and he soon settled it once for all with Grandee as to what the rights of the former and his family were.

In a month or so one of the little hens was missing. After a long time we found her, and in such a queer, cozy place! Upon the foundations of the old red farmhouse where we lived, rested great squared beams. An end of one of these beams had decayed, out of sight, under the clapboards on the south side of the house, until there was a large, soft-lined hollow. Here the little hen had stolen her nest, and when we found her she was just ready to lead off twenty-one tiny white fluff-balls of chickens, every egg having hatched.

Dandy's bravery saved his little life one day, and made him forever famous in the annals of our pets. On this most eventful day of his life, a shadow flitted over the barnyard, and a wail went up from us children as a chicken-hawk swooped down upon our beloved Dandy and carried him off before our indignant and tearful eyes.

Up they went! But in a moment or two we saw that the thief was having trouble, as somehow Dandy had managed to turn in

those wicked talons, and the little fellow was using his sharp beak and spurs with all his might.

The battle was brief, and then Dandy dropped at our feet. He was bleeding and had lost the sight of one of his eyes, but otherwise he was little hurt. All the rest of his days Dandy carried himself proudly, as one who has been tried as a hero and not found wanting.

May H. Prentice.

THE BUFFLE-HEAD

(*Charitonetta albeola*.)

This small and wonderfully beautiful duck is a native of North America, wintering in the latitude of Cuba and Mexico and breeding from Maine to Montana and northward. It is said that a favorite place for its nesting is along the banks of the Yukon river, and other streams of the boreal regions, yet it is reported that the young have been captured in the Adirondack mountains. Though classed with the "sea ducks" (Fuligulinae) it is one of the most common of our fresh-water forms, and, like many other animals, as well as vegetable forms, of wide distribution, it is the recipient of numerous popular names, nearly all of them being more or less suggestive of its characteristics or habits. In the North it is frequently called the Butter-ball, the Butter-box, the Butter duck, the Spirit duck and the Dipper. In the South some of the same names are heard, but perhaps more often the Marionette, the Scotch dipper, or duck, the Scotch teal and the Wool-head. However, no more appropriate name could be selected than that of Buffle-head, having reference to the showy, ruffled or puffed plumage of the head. The technical name, *albeola*, meaning whitish, was given this species by Linnaeus in 1758, on account

of the pure white on the side of the head.

The adult males vary but little. The plumage of the head is puffy and, with that of the upper half of the neck, is a "rich silky, metallic green, violet purple and greenish bronze, the last prevailing on the lower part of the neck, the green on the anterior part of the head, the purple on the cheeks and crown." A beautiful pure white patch extends from the eyes, meeting on the top of the head. The lower portion of the neck and nearly all the feathers of the under side of the body, as well as the wing coverts, are also showy white. The lining of the wings is dark, and the upper side of the body is black.

The head of the female is less puffy and of a brownish or dark gray color. The white head patch is not so prominent or pure and the plumage of the under side of the body is more or less tinged with gray. In both sexes the iris is dark brown, the bill bluish or lead color, and the legs and feet pinkish.

There are few birds that are more expert in diving or swimming, while on land, owing to their larger feet and shorter legs, they are more awkward and waddle more than many of the ordinary ducks. Their graceful attitude while floating on the water, moving apparently without any motion of the body and scarcely causing a ripple on even a placid surface, has given them the name Spirit duck.

The Buffle-head, like nearly all the sea ducks, feeds on mollusks and other animal-forms found in the water. As a result, their flesh is usually coarse and quite too rank for use as a

food. The canvas-back is a notable exception, for during the winter months it feeds on the wild celery (*Vallisneria*) of the Middle Atlantic coast, and thus its flesh receives the flavor so appreciated by those who relish game food.

AN HOUR WITH AN ANT

If you want to know how to accomplish a hard task, come with me and watch a little ant for an hour.

She was a small, black ant, and, seeing a brown worm eight times as large as herself, she was seized with the ambition to take it home in triumph.

Now will you tell me how she knew that she could have no power over the worm while he was on his ten feet, that stuck to the sidewalk like glue? Before she attempted anything, she fastened her mandibles into his side and turned him over on his back just as you see Bridget turn the mattress. Then running to his head she again fastened her mandibles and dragged him for a couple of inches. While pausing to get her breath, the worm took the opportunity to get on his feet once more. The ant did not seem to notice the change in position till she tried again to drag the body. As soon as she felt it sticking, around she ran to the side, over went the worm in a trice, and once more the two started on their journey. Now they were close to a crack in the broad sidewalk, and I, thinking to help the little worker, in whom by this time I was quite interested, lifted the worm across the crack.

Did you ever try to help some one and find too late you had done exactly the wrong thing? Then you know how I felt when that little ant began rushing around as if she were crazy, and when she got hold of the worm again, began to drag it back across the

very crack I had lifted it over. Can you guess why? She was taking a bee-line to her house, and I had changed the direction. But how was she to get that big body across a crack that could swallow them both? That was what I waited anxiously to see. Soon the worm felt himself going down, down into a dark abyss, and of course caught hold of the side to save himself, and when he once felt he had a hold on life how he did hold on! The ant was not to be daunted; balancing herself on the edge, and holding on by her feet, she reached down her mandibles and dragged him by main force straight up the perpendicular wall to the top; nor did she stop till he was carried far enough from the edge not to get down again.

In this way three cracks were safely crossed, and it was plain to see the worm was losing heart, although every time the ant paused for breath he would get over on his feet and have to be tossed back again.

And now a new difficulty arose. The worm had been dragged about eighteen inches over the boards. Fourteen inches more would bring them to the ant's house, or, rather, hill. But the way was now off from the sidewalk, and no sooner did the worm feel the stubble under him than he gathered all his strength, turned over on his feet, and held on to every spear of grass for dear life.

Indeed, it was his last chance, and I felt tempted to snatch him from the certain death awaiting him, but curiosity to see how this new obstacle would be overcome induced me to wait. The ant now felt justified in calling for assistance, and soon a dozen ants

had come to help. Only five could work to advantage, so the rest, for ants never like to do the "heavy looking on," left to find other employment.

The first thing to be done was to get the worm on his back, and this proved no easy task. He could fasten his feet just as fast as the ants could unfasten them. At last two ants went to one end and two to the other. Each one of the four seized a foot in her strong mandibles and held it out as far as possible, while the fifth one turned the captive. It was the funniest sight! It was easy now to drag him two or three inches, but breath had to be taken, and again the worm fastened. In vain they tugged and pulled. He had evidently learned their tactics and knew how to defend himself. Suddenly his body moved along an inch and a half, as if by magic. Was it magic? Not at all. One little ant had run up on an overhanging blade of grass, and, reaching down, holding on by the wonderful feet spoken of before, and grabbed the poor creature in the middle, raised it right up from the ground, and keeping hold, ran along overhead till the end of the spear of grass was reached.

This was the last struggle of any importance. The worm gave up discouraged; it was only now a question of time till they had dragged him through the stubble up to the door of the house in the hill, and I saw only a faint quiver as of dread as his body passed through the mysterious opening. I could not help wondering if the ant who started the capture received all the praise she deserved, or if the other four took the glory to

themselves.

At any rate, no one could take away her own satisfaction in overcoming and winning in the struggle.

Harriet Woodbridge.

SONG

Day is dying! Float, O song,
Down the westward river,
Requiem chanting to the Day —
Day, the mighty Giver.

Pierced by shafts of Time he bleeds,
Melted rubies sending
Through the river and the sky,
Earth and heaven blending;

All the long-drawn earthly banks
Up to cloud-land lifting:
Slow between them drifts the swan,
'Twixt two heavens drifting.

Wings half open, like a flow'r,
Inly deeper flushing,
Neck and breast as Virgin's pure —
Virgin proudly blushing.

Day is dying! Float, O swan,
Down the ruby river;
Follow, song, in requiem
To the mighty Giver.

– *George Eliot, in the Spanish Gypsy.*

THE AMERICAN EARED GREBE

(*Colymbus nigricollis californicus.*)

The American Eared Grebe belongs to the order of Diving Birds (Podicipedes) and the family of Grebes (Podicipidae). The order also includes the loons and auks, having in all about thirty-six species that frequent North America. Closely related to the loons, the Grebes differ from them in having the head incompletely feathered near the nostrils, which are not lobed. The feet also are not completely webbed, as are those of the loons.

Owing to the inadequately developed wings, the Grebes are poorly provided with means for protracted flight. Locomotion on land is equally difficult, due to their short legs and the fact that they are inserted far back on the body, necessitating a partially erect position in walking. However, they are expert swimmers and divers and will, when alarmed, sink quietly back into the water, swimming long distances with only the bill above the surface of the water. The popular name "Hell-diver," by which these birds are frequently known, has reference to the rapidity with which they dive.

The apparent lack of a tail and the ruffs, frequently composed

of variously colored feathers, give the grebes a peculiarly characteristic appearance. The plumage of the breeding season differs greatly from that of the adult in winter and that of the young.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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