VARIOUS

BIRDS, ILLUSTRATED BY COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY, VOL. 2, NO. 3

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Содержание

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BIRD SONG

How songs are made
Is a mystery,
Which studied for years
Still baffles me.

– R. H. Stoddard.

SOME birds are poets and sing all summer," says Thoreau. "They are the true singers. Any man can write verses in the love season. We are most interested in those birds that sing for the love of music, and not of their mates; who meditate their strains and amuse themselves with singing; the birds whose strains are of deeper sentiment."

Thoreau does not mention by name any of the poet-birds to which he alludes, but we think our selections for the present month include some of them. The most beautiful specimen of all,

which is as rich in color and "sun-sparkle" as the most polished gem to which he owes his name, the Ruby-throated Humming Bird, cannot sing at all, uttering only a shrill mouse-like squeak. The humming sound made by his wings is far more agreeable than his voice, for "when the mild gold stars flower out" it announces his presence. Then

> "A dim shape quivers about
> Some sweet rich heart of a rose."

He hovers over all the flowers that possess the peculiar sweetness that he loves – the blossoms of the honeysuckle, the red, the white, and the yellow roses, and the morning glory. The red clover is as sweet to him as to the honey bee, and a pair of them may often be seen hovering over the blossoms for a moment, and then disappearing with the quickness of a flash of light, soon to return to the same spot and repeat the performance. *Squeak, squeak!* is probably their call note.

Something of the poet is the Yellow Warbler, though his song is not quite as long as an epic. He repeats it a little too often, perhaps, but there is such a pervading cheerfulness about it that we will not quarrel with the author. *Sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweeter-sweeter!* is his frequent contribution to the volume of nature, and all the while he is darting about the trees, "carrying sun-glints on his back wherever he goes." His song is appropriate to every season, but it is in the spring, when we hear it first,

that it is doubly welcome to the ear. The grateful heart asks with Bourdillon:

> "What tidings hath the Warbler heard
> That bids him leave the lands of summer
> For woods and fields where April yields
> Bleak welcome to the blithe newcomer?"

The Mourning Dove may be called the poet of melancholy, for its song is, to us, without one element of cheerfulness. Hopeless despair is in every note, and, as the bird undoubtedly does have cheerful moods, as indicated by its actions, its song must be appreciated only by its mate. *Coo-o, coo-o!* suddenly thrown upon the air and resounding near and far is something hardly to be extolled, we should think, and yet the beautiful and graceful Dove possesses so many pretty ways that every one is attracted to it, and the tender affection of the mated pair is so manifest, and their constancy so conspicuous, that the name has become a symbol of domestic concord.

The Cuckoo must utter his note in order to be recognized, for few that are learned in bird lore can discriminate him save from his notes. He proclaims himself by calling forth his own name, so that it is impossible to make a mistake about him. Well, his note is an agreeable one and has made him famous. As he loses his song in the summer months, he is inclined to make good use of it when he finds it again. English boys are so skillful in imitating the Cuckoo's song, which they do to an exasperating extent, that the

bird himself may often wish for that of the Nightingale, which is inimitable.

But the Cuckoo's song, monotonous as it is, is decidedly to be preferred to that of the female House Wren, with its *Chit-chit-chit-chit*, when suspicious or in anger. The male, however, is a real poet, let us say – and sings a merry roulade, sudden, abruptly ended, and frequently repeated. He sings, apparently, for the love of music, and is as merry and gay when his mate is absent as when she is at his side, proving that his singing is not solely for her benefit.

So good an authority as Dr. Coues vouches for the exquisite vocalization of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Have you ever heard a wire vibrating? Such is the call note of the Ruby, thin and metallic. But his song has a fullness, a variety, and a melody, which, being often heard in the spring migration, make this feathered beauty additionally attractive. Many of the fine songsters are not brilliantly attired, but this fellow has a combination of attractions to commend him as worthy of the bird student's careful attention.

Of the Hermit Thrush, whose song is celebrated, we will say only, "Read everything you can find about him." He will not be discovered easily, for even Olive Thorne Miller, who is presumed to know all about birds, tells of her pursuit of the Hermit in northern New York, where it was said to be abundant, and finding, when she looked for him, that he had always "been there" and was gone. But one day in August she saw the bird

and heard the song and exclaimed: "This only was lacking – this crowns my summer."

The Song Sparrow can sing too, and the Phoebe, beloved of man, and the White-breasted Nuthatch, a little. They do not require the long-seeking of the Hermit Thrush, whose very name implies that he prefers to flock by himself, but can be seen in our parks throughout the season. But the Sparrow loves the companionship of man, and has often been a solace to him. It is stated by the biographer of Kant, the great metaphysician, that at the age of eighty he had become indifferent to much that was passing around him in which he had formerly taken great interest. The flowers showed their beautious hues to him in vain; his weary vision gave little heed to their loveliness; their perfume came unheeded to the sense which before had inhaled it with eagerness. The coming on of spring, which he had been accustomed to hail with delight, now gave him no joy save that it brought back a little Sparrow, which came annually and made its home in a tree that stood by his window. Year after year, as one generation went the way of all the earth, another would return to its birth-place to reward the tender care of their benefactor by singing to him their pleasant songs. And he longed for their return in the spring with "an eagerness and intensity of expectation."

How many provisions nature has for keeping us simple-hearted and child-like! The Song Sparrow is one of them.

– C. C. Marble.

THE YELLOW WARBLER

IN a recent article Angus Gaines describes so delightfully some of the characteristics of the Yellow Warbler, or Summer Yellow-bird, sometimes called the Wild Canary, that we are tempted to make use of part of it. "Back and forth across the garden the little yellow birds were flitting, dodging through currant and gooseberry bushes, hiding in the lilacs, swaying for an instant on swinging sprays of grape vines, and then flashing out across the garden beds like yellow sunbeams. They were lithe, slender, dainty little creatures, and were so quick in their movements that I could not recognize them at first, but when one of them hopped down before me, lifted a fallen leaf and dragged a cutworm from beneath it, and, turning his head, gave me a sidewise glance with his victim still struggling in his beak, I knew him. His gay coat was yellow without the black cap, wings, and tail which show in such marked contrast to the bright canary hue of that other yellow bird, the Gold-finch.

"Small and delicate as these birds are, they had been on a long journey to the southward to spend the winter, and now on the first of May, they had returned to their old home to find the land at its fairest – all blossoms, buds, balmy air, sunshine, and melody. As they flitted about in their restless way, they sang the soft, low, warbling trills, which gave them their name of Yellow Warbler."

Mrs. Wright says these beautiful birds come like whirling

leaves, half autumn yellow, half green of spring, the colors blending as in the outer petals of grass-grown daffodils. "Lovable, cheerful little spirits, darting about the trees, exclaiming at each morsel that they glean. Carrying sun glints on their backs wherever they go, they should make the gloomiest misanthrope feel the season's charm. They are so sociable and confiding, feeling as much at home in the trees by the house as in seclusion."

The Yellow-bird builds in bushes, and the nest is a wonderful example of bird architecture. Milkweed, lint and its strips of fine bark are glued to twigs, and form the exterior of the nest. Its inner lining is made of the silky down on dandelion-balls woven together with horse-hair. In this dainty nest are laid four or five creamy white eggs, speckled with lilac tints and red-browns. The unwelcome egg of the Cow-bird is often found in the Yellow-bird's nest, but this Warbler builds a floor over the egg, repeating the expedient, if the Cow-bird continues her mischief, until sometimes a third story is erected.

A pair of Summer Yellow-birds, we are told, had built their nest in a wild rose bush, and were rearing their family in a wilderness of fragrant blossoms whose tinted petals dropped upon the dainty nest, or settled upon the back of the brooding mother. The birds, however, did not stay "to have their pictures taken," but their nest may be seen among the roses.

The Yellow Warbler's song is *Sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweeter-sweeter*: seven times repeated.

THE HERMIT THRUSH

IN John Burroughs' "Birds and Poets" this master singer is described as the most melodious of our songsters, with the exception of the Wood Thrush, a bird whose strains, more than any other's, express harmony and serenity, and he complains that no merited poetic monument has yet been reared to it. But there can be no good reason for complaining of the absence of appreciative prose concerning the Hermit. One writer says: "How pleasantly his notes greet the ear amid the shrieking of the wind and the driving snow, or when in a calm and lucid interval of genial weather we hear him sing, if possible, more richly than before. His song reminds us of a coming season when the now dreary landscape will be clothed in a blooming garb befitting the vernal year – of the song of the Blackbird and Lark, and hosts of other tuneful throats which usher in that lovely season. Should you disturb him when singing he usually drops down and awaits your departure, though sometimes he merely retires to a neighboring tree and warbles as sweetly as before."

In "Birdcraft" Mrs. Wright tells us, better than any one else, the story of the Hermit. She says: "This spring, the first week in May, when standing at the window about six o'clock in the morning, I heard an unusual note, and listened, thinking it at first a Wood Thrush and then a Thrasher, but soon finding that it was neither of these I opened the window softly and looked

among the near by shrubs, with my glass. The wonderful melody ascended gradually in the scale as it progressed, now trilling, now legato, the most perfect, exalted, unrestrained, yet withal, finished bird song that I ever heard. At the first note I caught sight of the singer perching among the lower sprays of a dogwood tree. I could see him perfectly: it was the Hermit Thrush. In a moment he began again. I have never heard the Nightingale, but those who have say that it is the surroundings and its continuous night singing that make it even the equal of our Hermit; for, while the Nightingales sing in numbers in the moonlit groves, the Hermit tunes his lute sometimes in inaccessible solitudes, and there is something immaterial and immortal about the song."

The Hermit Thrush is comparatively common in the northeast, and in Pennsylvania it is, with the exception of the Robin, the commonest of the Thrushes. In the eastern, as in many of the middle states, it is only a migrant. It is usually regarded as a shy bird. It is a species of more general distribution than any of the small Thrushes, being found entirely across the continent and north to the Arctic regions. It is not quite the same bird, however, in all parts of its range, the Rocky Mountain region being occupied by a larger, grayer race, while on the Pacific coast a dwarf race takes its place. It is known in parts of New England as the "Ground Swamp Robin," and in other localities as "Swamp Angel."

True lovers of nature find a certain spiritual satisfaction in the song of this bird. "In the evening twilight of a June day," says

one of these, “when all nature seemed resting in quiet, the liquid, melting, lingering notes of the solitary bird would steal out upon the air and move us strangely. What was the feeling it awoke in our hearts? Was it sorrow or joy, fear or hope, memory or expectation? And while we listened, we thought the meaning of it all was coming; it was trembling on the air, and in an instant it would reach us. Then it faded, it was gone, and we could not even remember what it had been.”

THE HERMIT THRUSH

I am sorry, children, that I cannot give you a specimen of my song as an introduction to the short story of my life. One writer about my family says it is like this: "O spheral, spheral! O holy, holy! O clear away, clear away! O clear up, clear up!" as if I were talking to the weather. May be my notes do sound something like that, but I prefer you should hear me sing when I am alone in the woods, and other birds are silent. It is ever being said of me that I am as fine a singer as the English Nightingale. I wish I could hear this rival of mine, and while I have no doubt his voice is a sweet one, and I am not too vain of my own, I should like to "compare notes" with him. Why do not some of you children ask your parents to invite a few pairs of Nightingales to come and settle here? They would like our climate, and would, I am sure, be welcomed by all the birds with a warmth not accorded the English Sparrow, who has taken possession and, in spite of my love for secret hiding places, will not let even me alone.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.