

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND ALL NATURE,
VOL. V, NO. 3, MARCH
1899

Various

**Birds and All Nature,
Vol. V, No. 3, March 1899**

«Public Domain»

Various

Birds and All Nature, Vol. V, No. 3, March 1899 / Various —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

THE TUFTED TITMOUSE	5
EPITAPH ON THE HARE	7
A TRANSIENT BORDER	9
THE SQUIRREL'S USE OF HIS TAIL	12
THE NORTHERN PRAIRIE HARE	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	16

Various Birds and All Nature, Vol. V, No. 3, March 1899 Illustrated by Color Photography

THE TUFTED TITMOUSE

(*Parus bicolor*.)

LYNDS JONES

HOW vividly a first meeting with some interesting species rests in the memory of the bird-lover! It was at the evening twilight of October 14, 1886, that a strange whistle rang through that gem of woods near Grinnell, Iowa, which has witnessed the birth of more than one passion for bird study. Soon the busy gleaner came to inquire after the intruder on his chosen feeding grounds, evidently looking for a suitable resting-place for the night while taking his evening lunch. The voice, the actions, the appearance, all were new to me, and every movement was watched with breathless interest lest the next flight should take the bird away beyond recall. At last he settled in a green-briar tangle, carefully stowed himself away beneath a huge linden leaf, whistled once or twice, and was ready for the coming darkness.

Never before nor since have I seen the tufted tit in that Iowa grove, but he is one of the common resident birds at Oberlin, Ohio. Northern Ohio is about the northern limit of his range, which extends into northern New Jersey and southern Iowa, possibly the southern half of Iowa. He ranges west to the eastern border of the plains, occasionally found as far north as Minnesota and well into Michigan, and is found breeding even to the Gulf of Mexico southward. He appears to be resident wherever found, but no doubt a few venturesome individuals may wander farther north than the usual range.

One can hardly mistake the tufted tit for any other bird, for he is very noisy the most of the year, the exceptions being the coldest part of mid-winter and during the breeding season, for his songs or whistles are peculiar to him. True, his chick-a-dee-dee closely resembles the chickadee's song to the uninitiated, but the clearly whistled *pe-to, pe-to, pe-to*, or *ee-to, ee-to, ee-to*, or *pe-ter, pe-ter, pe-ter*, or *pe-ter, e-ter, e-ter* will at once discover him. It is well worth one's while to write out the many different variations that may be heard proceeding from one bird. Another favorite one, judging from the frequency of its use, is: *Pe-dl', pe-dl', pe-dl'*, or *te-dl', e-dl' e-dl'*, and occasionally this: *Chee-pa, chee-pa, chee-pa*. In short, he seems to have a song to suit every occasion.

Like the chickadee, he delights in scrambling about the trees in the most reckless fashion, hanging head down as handily as a nuthatch. His crest gives him a more stately air than any of his cousins, but his inquisitiveness is equal to all combined. One cannot enter the woods but he will be sought out by this active denizen and accompanied hither and thither with not so much as a "by your leave."

His habits seem to vary with locality, or possibly more exactly, with abundance. In this part of northern Ohio, where the species is not more than fairly common, the birds rarely enter the villages, and they nest almost exclusively in the woods. I am informed that farther south and west they are often seen in villages, and nest there in boxes provided, as well as in the woods.

The nest is placed within a box or hollow in a tree, a deserted woodpecker's hole being preferred, where leaves, strips of bark, feathers, hair, or almost any soft, warm materials are arranged carefully, the coarser material outward, the finer and warmer inside. The eggs range from five to eight in number, and are creamy white, rather coarsely and evenly marked with shades of rufous brown. They average about $.73 \times .54$ of an inch. It is said that the male bird never assists in building the nest, but sings to cheer his mate, thus revealing the whereabouts of the nest.

While the northern Ohio woods are incomplete without a company of these cheerful birds, I have looked in vain for them during the early summer months in some years. In winter they range the woods for food, penetrating to every portion of it, stowing themselves away in some warm hollow in a tree at night, but in the nesting season they are confined to the region of the nest, and so are not readily seen.

EPITAPH ON THE HARE

Here lies, whom hound did ne'er pursue,
Nor swifter greyhound follow,
Whose foot ne'er tainted morning dew,
Nor ear heard huntsman's halloo.

Old Tiney, surliest of his kind,
Who, nursed with tender care,
And to domestic bounds confined,
Was still a wild Jack hare.

Though duly from my hand he took
His pittance every night,
He did it with a jealous look,
And, when he could, would bite.

His diet was of wheaten bread,
And milk, and oats, and straw;
Thistles, or lettuces instead,
With sand to scour his maw.

On twigs of hawthorn he regaled,
On pippin's russet peel,
And, when his juicy salads failed,
Sliced carrot pleased him well.

A Turkey carpet was his lawn,
Whereon he loved to bound,
To skip and gambol like a fawn,
And swing his rump around.

His frisking was at evening hours,
For then he lost his fear,
But most before approaching showers
Or when a storm was near.

Eight years and five round rolling moons
He thus saw steal away,
Dozing out all his idle noons,
And every night at play.

I kept him for his humor's sake,
For he would oft beguile
My heart of thoughts that made it ache
And force me to a smile.

But now beneath his walnut shade
He finds his long last home,
And waits, in snug concealment laid,
Till gentler Puss shall come.

He, still more aged, feels the shocks
From which no care can save,
And, partner once of Tiney's box,
Must soon partake his grave.

– *Cowper*.

A TRANSIENT BOARDER

C. S. COOK

WHEN I came down stairs in the morning I found him in possession of the premises. I watched him for a few minutes with much interest. I had not before seen a California wren, and found him very different in appearance and conduct from the eastern wrens with which I was acquainted. "Wrensie" was very self-possessed, and did not appear to resent my intrusion at all. In fact, he seemed disposed to ignore my presence, a fact which led me to judge it best to adopt the same course toward him.

I must explain our situation a little by saying that, as the cottage in which I was living was in a very unfinished condition, the lower floor was not divided by any partitions, the kitchen in the L and the front room forming one large room.

The weather being warm, and the walls open, the flies were very numerous in the room, a fact evidently keenly appreciated by the little fellow, for, as I proceeded to sweep the whole house he did not allow his industry to be seriously interfered with. While I was busy in the attic he was not idle down stairs; while I was regulating the front room he was picking up things in the kitchen. When I approached him too closely he would quietly slip out of doors through one of the numerous openings about the floor, or perhaps go up into the attic which was very accessible to him. He rarely remained out of doors more than a few minutes at a time. A forenoon of house-cleaning would seem more favorable to an estrangement than to a rapprochement; yet while I was at dinner I felt something upon my foot. Looking under the table I saw Wrensie perched upon my shoe. While I watched him he jumped up on a fold of my trousers, apparently thinking it a better point of observation. He was not disturbed by my interest nor by my motions at the table. He never seemed to mind ordinary motions even when he was very near. With other birds I have considered entire quiet necessary under such circumstances.

I maintained my policy of manifesting no concern as to Wrensie's movements, merely abstaining from making any very sudden or rapid motions which would be likely to startle him. With this single exception I went about all work freely. While I would have been glad to cultivate his acquaintance, quickly, I thought it better not to try to do so. The universal method of winning favor in the eyes of such strangers is to feed them; but Wrensie would have nothing but live game, and no kitchen delicacy received a moment's attention. Fortunately, however, there was little need of studying to win his confidence, as but little encouragement was necessary. He was afraid of nothing; not from innocent ignorance by any means, but from complete self-confidence. He was not defiant, but intrepid. This confidence was not gained by observing that he was not molested, but had its source in the spirit of the bird, as shown by the fact that there was little difference in his demeanor during the six days he was with me.

The next day a mason came to the ranch to see about a proposed fireplace and chimney. As we stood talking over the matter, one on each side of a small table, my little boarder came and made a thorough search for game among the various articles on the table. While working in the kitchen I often found him at my feet, several times even between them as I stood at the stove or table. This was a position of such danger to him that I felt obliged to be very cautious in my movements. Occasionally he would perch on my shoulder or head, never staying very long but never betraying any distrust.

It was most entertaining to watch him in his pursuit of game. As a hunter he was full of resources, untiring in his efforts, insatiable in his appetite. When he saw a fly on the floor or table near him he would slowly and stealthily approach, his little black eyes snapping, his frontal feathers depressed so as to give him a vicious look, and often with his wings trembling with excitement as he

held them slightly loosened at his sides. When he judged himself near enough he would make a little run and try to snap up his victim. This method of stalking, though much used, was the least successful of his hunting expedients, a large majority of the flies escaping.

When in a favorable locality he would sometimes keep quiet for a time – that is, relatively quiet – as quiet as a small bird can be expected to remain, ready to seize any impudent flies that came within the reach of his bill, which would snap on them with a loud sound. He was most skillful at this, making the quickest motions conceivable. Although these snap shots were very successful, the flies rarely came past in sufficient numbers to satisfy him long, and he would soon set out to hunt up his game.

Then there was the full chase. It was not now a matter of a little dash on foot, but a full flight after a big blue-bottle fly which can dart through the air like a bullet. Back and forth they go with a great rush and much dodging. When caught, these big flies made a large mouthful for the victor. He would light on the floor and proceed to swallow his prey. This usually required several efforts. Watching him called to mind one's own experiences with big gelatine capsules. With the final and successful effort Wrensie's eyes would close with a distressed look as the fly went down his throat.

Flies were often to be found floating on the surface of the water in a large water pail. This fact did not long escape Wrensie's eye, and he made his round to this trap with much regularity. When the pail was well filled with water he could reach the flies with comparative ease; but when the water became low this became a most difficult matter. He did not fly down to get them, but would reach down while hanging to the edge of the pail. Often repeated trials were necessary. It was surprising to see to what a distance he could stretch himself in these efforts. Holding on to the edge always, he would swing himself down, stretch his neck to the utmost, and then, just as he was on the point of falling into the water, with a quick flutter of his wings he would raise himself to the top again, never relinquishing his hold on the rim. In this way he would pick up flies at the center of the pail when it was not half filled with water, which, in view of the small size of the bird, was an acrobatic feat.

Then there was the battue. When he approached a window thickly covered with flies a scene of the wildest excitement followed. Wrensie would dash into the melee, afoot or a-wing as it happened, his bill snapping faster than a repeating rifle. The slaughter would be continued until the remaining flies were dispersed, which soon came to pass.

Even the still hunt was not without interest. No setter ever worked the ground more faithfully. Every nook and corner of the house was examined for moths. Moreover, every article was scrutinized, and, when possible, he looked beneath and within. A pair of working gloves lay upon the floor. Wrensie unhesitatingly went in, disappearing entirely and remaining long enough to put his head into every finger – which he may, or may not have done. It interested me much to note that in such explorations his assurance was complete. In this kind of delving I was prepared to see some hesitation in my presence. It seemed to me that when I was standing by him it would be only reasonable caution on his part to remain where he could keep his eyes on me. But he never seemed to watch me; and gave me numerous opportunities to capture him, as he would disappear in a dish or in some hole, and remain for some time. He never hesitated in this, nor did he seem to scrutinize his surroundings before going out of sight.

Wrensie was not only persistent and thorough in his search for moths in dark corners, but determined as well. He would crowd himself into openings so narrow that he would have to back out after concluding the search. One day he undertook to pass between two cans on a shelf. He made a strong effort, but so narrow was the passage that he could not push his way in; his wings were too prominent. He backed away a few steps and looked at the crack a moment with his head cocked on one side. Then quickly stepping up to it, he stood on one leg, turned his body up edgewise, and squeezed through.

Perhaps as good an example as I can give of Wrensie's fearlessness is to describe his behavior one day when I had some work to do on the outside of a window. I stood on a staging just in front of

the window, and was engaged in driving nails in the window casing. This hammering made a great noise, shaking the loose sash sharply. Wrensie was busily engaged catching flies on the inside of the window, standing on the top of the lower sash; that is, at the middle of the window. All my motions, all the noise and the jar failed to frighten him away, although at times he looked at me pretty sharply.

While so courageous in most ways, still Wrensie had his ideas of caution. Upon my return to the house after a short absence he would usually leave the room abruptly, either going out of doors or up into the attic. Even if I came in very quietly, taking precautions not to disturb him, the result was the same. This conduct always seemed to me a curious fact, and an inconsistency which I could not explain.

Clever and interesting as he was, Wrensie had his shortcomings. His disposition was not that of the typical bird: "Sweetness and light" were not his. In his spirit was none of the exuberant joy of the great songsters, nor any of the bonhommie of happy-go-lucky sparrows. During the whole term of our acquaintance not a sound left his throat! In complete silence did he pursue his vocation. A perfect helpmate, but a faulty companion. A very practical sort of bird he was, full of activity, but without vivacity. Can it be that the spirit of our industrial age is so pervasive that even the birds are unable to escape its influence? It would seem that evolution has produced the utilitarian and "strictly business" type of character among them.

One day there was a noisy flutter of wings at the door, and the harsh cry of the butcher-bird was heard. On stepping out I saw feathers floating in the air. I concluded that I would see no more of my little companion and helper. The blue-bottle fly was avenged.

THE SQUIRREL'S USE OF HIS TAIL

BY JAMES NEWTON BASKETT, MEXICO, MO

OF COURSE every one who has had a pet squirrel has noticed what an important thing his tail seems to be to him. When he makes his toilet he usually ends by bringing the hairy brush around and apparently wiping his face with it, as though it were his towel. But I suspect that he is as much concerned, even here, about the care of his tail as about the cleanliness of his features, for Bunny's beauty, like that of some others, lies as much in his train as in his countenance. One use, therefore, of the squirrel's tail is to make him look pretty. I think, at least, no one can see him put it into such graceful curves along with his delightful postures without feeling that he is posing for esthetic effect.

Still, a little study of his ways may make us think that there is a more practical purpose even in this feature of his tail's use. We had a pet squirrel in the house recently – one of the western fox species or variety. He had become quite tame in his cage before he was released in my study. At intervals I had him brought in, and we usually romped together at least once a day.

At first everything was so new and strange to him that he was very shy and must go about investigating. I noticed that, as he approached anything which he feared might prove dangerous, he always projected his tail over his back far forward – sometimes feeling the object with the extreme hairs before touching it with his nose. He annoyed me greatly by tearing the wall paper from a certain angle. One day I threw a pamphlet so as to strike just above his nose while at his mischief. It frightened him badly, and he suspected that the scare had come out of the wall. But he could not resist the fascination of this sport, and it was interesting to watch him approach and try by all sorts of devices of his tail to see if the enemy were within.

If he were walking past or around anything that he feared he kept his tail stretched at full length on the side of his body that was next the object – sometimes he held it many inches from himself. If something moved suddenly in front of him as he ran, his tail shot over him away ahead of his nose, as if projected there by his sudden stop. But it was the natural instinct of thrusting his tail at anything threatening him too suddenly for flight. Much of his play at times was a kind of mock fright in which he seemed to imagine himself pursued by all kinds of enemies – even myself – and the most familiar objects becoming terrible. Then the use he made of his tail was most exaggerated, having in it perhaps some of the elements of terrifying the enemy, as seen in the swelled rails of cats, the bristles of hogs, dogs, etc.

One could not resist the impression that the tail was thrown out as a shield or a screen, but this did not always seem a satisfactory explanation, for it was certainly a very frail thing and very conspicuous. Besides, it would seem to furnish the enemy a good handle to catch hold of.

The theory has been advanced that this last is the very purpose of this use of the tail; and from my study of this pet I became convinced that he thrust out his tail when suddenly surprised in the hope that *it* might be taken and his body *left*. The skin on the tail of most rodents (of which the squirrel is one) slips easily from the bone, and leaves, to a grasping enemy, often a little bunch of "hide and hair." So Bunny offers this – feeling that he would rather leave his tail in jeopardy and go into life whole otherwise. The glass-snake (a lizard) in its efforts to escape, frequently *breaks off* a portion of its tail, which the pursuing enemy may stop to capture while the body wriggles into safety.

This, likewise, is doubtless one of the reasons why the squirrel insists upon the tail's being always curled up over his back while he is absorbed in eating. It is not always merely a beautiful pose. As he thus sits in the trees his greatest enemies are the various large birds of prey which may dart down on him from above. Now, this mass of tail that is above him is apt to mislead the aim

of the enemy, and, like the pioneer's cap thrust around the tree, is intended to draw the fire into a harmless medium.

There can be no doubt that a squirrel uses his tail to steer him in a leap, much as the tail steers the boy's common kite. Perhaps, also, it acts slightly as a balance, but in this respect its greatest use must lie in its "up and down" rudder effect – or rather parachute-like effect – as he makes those tremendous leaps from a tall treetop to the earth.

Here it comes well into play in lessening the shock of alighting, an emergency enabling him to escape some enemies – as a weasel or mink, perhaps – which may chase him around in the trees.

The arrangement of the long hairs, projecting out sidewise on the bone, is strikingly like that of the feathers on the tail of the very earliest reptile-like birds which had long bony tails, used doubtless as the squirrel's, since they were down-sailers rather than up-flutterers – if I may be allowed to so compound my words and ideas. Some other downward-leaping mammals have the hairs similarly arranged. Another rodent, the anomalure, which flies down, as a flying-squirrel, by thin membranes, has special horny scales on the under side of its tail either to assist in climbing or to resist slipping down when a tree trunk is grasped.

The squirrel's tail, therefore, is a factor of his safety, as well as a feature of his ornamentation.

Another use which he makes of it is that when he "lies down to pleasant dreams" it forms "the drapery of his couch" – a coverlid for his head and body.

THE NORTHERN PRAIRIE HARE

THIS is the most northern species of the group of hares (*Lepus campestris*), familiarly known in the United States as jack rabbits because of their large size and enormous ears. They are lively animals of astounding jumping powers. In America there is no such distinction between the term "hare" and "rabbit" as there is in Europe, where the large, long-eared, stout varieties, living in shallow "forms," are named hares, and the smaller and more slender kind, which digs a deep burrow, is the "rabbit." In this country the authorities say that no well-defined distinction exists. Of the so-called jack rabbits the northern prairie hare here depicted may be taken as the type. It is one of the largest species of hares, measuring about twenty inches in length, and it has long, strong, and vigorous limbs, and such remarkably long ears that the popular name it bears is fully justified.

This northern species is found on the western prairies from British America to Colorado. It undergoes a winter change of coat, becoming nearly white, but the blanching is never complete and russet streaks or patches remain through the winter. The habits of this animal are those of hares in general, and all the species known as jack rabbits are famous for their great speed and for the astounding leaps they make in running. They are the most fleet and agile of American mammals. They are not much pursued for the reason that they are difficult to shoot, and their celerity of movement enables them to elude four-footed foes also. Pending the complete change from the summer brown to the snowy-white coat of winter, the animal presents a very singular mottled appearance.

Hares are a very important article of commerce and, during the winter season, tons of them are daily shipped to the principal markets from all quarters. They are sold at cheap rates, and are frequently peddled about the streets by the cartload at surprisingly low figures.

The methods of pursuit and capture of these animals are numerous, but the most common and successful are trailing in the snow with dogs, hounding, and coursing. To trail hares in the winter one must have dogs of keen scent and a light fall of from two to four inches of snow must have been deposited the night previous to an early morning start. Two or more hunters equipped with dogs and guns usually start together. Thickets of elder and blackberry are sought where the game is known to lie. The hunters skirt the border of a patch of these bushes and the dogs are sent in. The dogs soon drive the hares from cover when they become a ready mark for the gunners. Where the ground is rocky they will try to hide by running into any hole or crevice which may offer protection. In hounding hares the hunters are stationed at various points on the paths as the hares, like deer and foxes, follow regular beaten tracks. The hounds start the game from belts of pine, cedar, or hemlock. Each hunter waits for the animals to pass his station and fires at them as they go by at full run. It is considered no mean accomplishment to secure a hare under these circumstances. Trapping and snaring are also methods of capturing jack rabbits. They are principally employed by pot hunters, and many people make it their sole business during the winter months. Greyhounds are used in coursing hares, but the jack rabbit frequently discomfits both horse and hound. Hares do not live in burrows, as is the case with the rabbit, but lie in a form in bush or thicket, a slight depression in the ground serving for a nest, or sometimes a hollow stump, or the under side of a ledge of rock is selected. The young, when born, are covered with hair, their eyes are open, and they are able almost immediately to support themselves. The rabbit, on the other hand, is born with closed eyes, and requires the constant attention of the mother for some time. The hares are not so prolific as the rabbits, the female bringing forth but from three to five young at a litter, the rabbits bearing from five to eight.

Hares generally feed at night, lying in their forms in some bush or copse during the greater part of the day; rabbits, on the contrary, generally remain in the warmest corner of the burrow during the dark hours. The food of the hare consists of all kinds of vegetables similar in nature to cabbage and turnips, which are favorite dainties with it; it is also especially fond of lettuce and parsley.

The great speed of the hare in running is chiefly due to the fact that the hind legs are longer than the fore. This is also the reason why it can run better up hill than down. Generally it utters a sound only when it sees itself in danger. This cry resembles that of a little child, being a shrill scream or squeak.

Among the perceptive senses of the hare, hearing is best developed; the smell is fairly keen, but sight is rather deficient. Prudence and vigilance are its most prominent characteristics. The slightest noise – the wind rustling in the leaves, a falling leaf – suffices to excite its attention and awaken it from sleep. Dietrich Aus Dem Winckell says that the greatest vice of the hare is its malice, not because it expresses it in biting and scratching, but because it often proves its disposition in the most revolting manner, the female by denying her maternal love, and the male by his cruelty to the little leverets.

It is said that captive hares are easily tamed, become readily used to all kinds of nourishment usually fed to rabbits, but are very delicate and apt to die. If they are fed only on hay, bread, oats, and water, and never anything green, they live longer. A tame hare, in the possession of Mr. Fuchs in Wildenberg, which slept and ate with his dogs, ate vegetable food only in default of meat – veal, pork, liver, and sausage causing it to go into such raptures that it would execute a regular dance to get at these dainties.

Besides the flesh, which as food is justly esteemed, the fur of the hare is also put to account. The skin is deprived of its hair, tanned and used in the manufacture of shoes, of one kind of parchment, and of glue; the hair is used in the manufacture of felt.

Mark Twain, in his "Roughing It," gives this humorous and characteristic description of the jack rabbit:

"As the sun was going down, we saw the first specimen of an animal known familiarly over two thousand miles of mountain and desert – from Kansas clear to the Pacific ocean – as the 'jackass-rabbit.' He is well named. He is just like any other rabbit, except that he is from one-third to twice as large, has longer legs in proportion to his size, and has the most preposterous ears that ever were mounted on any creature but a jackass. When he is sitting quiet, thinking about his sins, or is absent-minded, or unapprehensive of danger, his majestic ears project above him conspicuously; but the breaking of a twig will scare him nearly to death, and then he tilts his ears back gently, and starts for home. All you can see then, for the next minute, is his long form stretched out straight, and 'streaking it' through the low sage-bushes, head erect, eyes right, and ears just canted to the rear, but showing you just where the animal is, just the same as if he carried a jib. When he is frightened clear through, he lays his long ears down on his back, straightens himself out like a yardstick every spring he makes, and scatters miles behind him with an easy indifference that is enchanting. Our party made this specimen 'hump himself.' I commenced spitting at him with my weapon, and all at the same instant let go with a rattling crash. He frantically dropped his ears, set up his tail, and left for San Francisco at lightning speed. Long after he was out of sight we could hear him whiz."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.