

VARIOUS

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Birds and All Nature, Vol. V,
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THE NUTMEG

(*Myristica fragrans* Hauthrbyn.)

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***Dum:* A gilt nutmeg**

***Biron:* A lemon**

THE nutmeg is the spice obtained from a medium-sized evergreen tree reaching a height of from twenty-five to forty feet. This tree is dioecious, that is the male flowers and the female flowers are borne upon different plants. The male flower consists of a column of from six to ten stamens enclosed by a pale yellow tubular perianth. The female flowers occur singly, in twos or threes, in the axils of the leaves; they also have a pale yellow perianth. The ovary has a single seed which finally matures into the nutmeg and mace. The mature seed is about one and one-fourth inches long and somewhat less in transverse diameter, so that it is somewhat oval in outline. It is almost entirely enveloped by a fringed scarlet covering known as arillus or arillode (mace). The entire fruit, nut, mace, and all, is about the size of a walnut and like that nut has a thick outer covering, the pericarp, which is fibrous and attains a thickness of about half an inch. At maturity the pericarp splits in halves from the top to the base or point of attachment. The leaves of the nutmeg tree are simple, entire, and comparatively large.

The English word nutmeg and the apparently wholly different German *Muskatnuss*, are etymologically similar. The "meg" of nutmeg is said to be derived from the old English "muge," which is from the Latin "muscus," meaning musk, in reference to the odor. "Muskat" of the German name is also derived from "muscus" and "nuss" means nut, so we have in both instances "musk nut." The arillus was named *Muscatenbluome* (nutmeg flower) by the early Dutch because of its bright red color.

It is generally believed that nutmeg and mace were not used in ancient times. Martius maintains that the word *macis* mentioned in a comedy by Plautus (260-180 B. C.) refers to mace. Flückiger, however, is inclined to believe that this word refers to the bark of some tree of India, as the word is frequently used in that sense by noted writers, as Scribonius, Largus, Dioscorides, Galenus, Plinius, and others. About 800 or 900 A. D., the Arabian physicians were familiar with nutmeg and were instrumental in introducing it into western countries. The Europeans first used nutmegs in church ceremonies as incense. Previous to 1200 nutmegs were quite expensive, but soon became cheaper as the plant was more and more extensively cultivated. About 1214 they found their way into pharmacy and began to be used among cosmetics. Hildegard described nutmegs in 1150, and Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) described the tree and fruit. Not until about 1500 did European writers learn the home of the nutmeg. Ludovico Bartheima designates the island Banda as its habitat.

The Portuguese monopolized the spice trade, including nutmegs, for a time, but as stated in a previous paper, they were driven out by the Dutch, who regulated the nutmeg trade as they did the clove trade. That is, they destroyed all nutmeg trees not under the control of the government and burned all nutmegs which could not be sold. The government nutmeg plantations were in charge of army officials and worked by slaves. In 1769 the French succeeded in transplanting the nutmeg to

the Isle de France. From 1796 to 1802 the spice islands were under the control of the English, who transplanted the nutmeg to Bencoolen, Penang, and, later, to Singapore. In 1860 the Singapore plantations were destroyed by a disease of the tree. The nutmeg is now cultivated in the Philippines, West Indies, South America, and other tropical islands and countries. The botanic gardens have been largely instrumental in extending nutmeg cultivation in the tropical English possessions. Besides *Myristica fragrans* there are several other species which are found useful. *M. Otoa* of the U. S. of Colombia yields an edible article known as Santa Fé nutmeg. The seeds of the tropical *M. sebifera* (tallow nutmeg) yield a fixed oil or fat used in making soap and candles. This oil is also known as American nutmeg oil.

The trees are produced from seeds. After sprouting the plants are transferred to pots, in which they are kept until ready for the nutmeg plantation. Transferring from the pots to the soil must be done carefully, as any considerable injury to the terminal rootlets kills the plants. A rich, loamy soil with considerable moisture is required for the favorable and rapid growth of the plants. They thrive best in river valleys, from sea-level to 300 and 400 feet or even to an elevation of 2,000 feet. The trees are usually planted twenty-five or thirty feet apart, in protected situations, so as to shelter them from strong winds and excessive sunlight.

The trees do not yield a crop until about the ninth year and continue productive for seventy or eighty years. Each tree yields on an average about ten pounds of nutmegs and about one pound

of mace annually. If the trees are well cared for and the soil well fertilized, the yield is much greater, even tenfold.

As already stated the nutmeg plant is dioecious. A seed may therefore develop into a male or female plant; if a male plant it will of course not produce nutmegs. The only way to learn whether it is one or the other is to wait until the first flowers are formed during the fifth or sixth year. The planter does, however, not sit by and wait; he simply grafts the young shoots with branches of the female tree. Some male trees, about one to twenty female trees, are allowed to mature in order that pollination, by insects, may be possible, as without pollination and subsequent fertilization the seed could not develop.

The tree bears fruit all the year round, so that nutmegs may be collected at all times. It is, however, customary to collect two principal crops, one during October, November, and December, and another during April, May, and June. The nuts are picked by hand or gathered by means of long hooks and the thick pericarp removed. The red arillus is also carefully removed and flattened between blocks of wood so as to reduce the danger of breaking as much as possible. Mace and nuts are then dried separately. The nuts are placed upon hurdles for several weeks until the kernels, nutmegs, rattle inside of the thin, tasteless, and odorless hard shell. This shell is now carefully broken and removed; the worm-eaten nutmegs are thrown away and the sound ones are rolled in powdered lime and again dried for several weeks. Generally the drying is done over a smoldering fire so that the nuts are really

smoke dried. For shipment they are packed in air-tight boxes which have been smoked and dusted with lime on the inside. Liming gives the nuts a peculiar mottled appearance and tends to destroy parasites which may be present.

Mace loses its carmine color upon drying and becomes reddish-brown and very brittle. It has an odor and taste similar to those of the nut, but is more delicately aromatic. Wild or Bombay mace is obtained from *Myristica fatua* and is frequently used to adulterate the true mace or Banda mace. The nuts of *M. fatua* are longer than those of *M. fragrans* and are therefore designated as long nutmegs; the term "male nutmegs" applied to them is incorrect. The long nutmeg is greatly inferior to the true nutmeg, or round nutmeg as it is sometimes called.

Banda supplies by far the most nutmegs at the present time. Penang nutmegs are of excellent quality and are always placed upon the market unlimed, but they are frequently limed subsequently in foreign ports and markets. Singapore nutmegs are usually unlimed. Nutmegs are generally designated by the name of the country from which they are obtained, as Dutch or Batavian, Sumatra, Penang, Singapore, Java, and Banda nutmegs.

There are a number of so-called nutmegs which are derived from plants not even remotely related to *Myristica*. Ackawai, Camara, or Camaru nutmeg is the nut of a tree growing in Guiana highly valued as a cure for colic and dysentery. American, Jamaica, Mexican, or Calabash nutmeg is the spicy

seed of *Monodora Myristica*. Brazilian nutmeg is the seed of *Cryptocarya moschata*, which serves as a very inferior substitute for nutmeg. California nutmeg is the fruit of a conifer (*Torreya*), which resembles nutmeg so closely in appearance that it has been supposed that *Myristica fragrans* was a native of California. This fruit has, however, a very camphoraceous odor. Clove or Madagascar nutmeg is the fruit of *Ravensara aromatica*, a tree native in Madagascar. Peruvian nutmeg is the seed of *Laurelia sempervirens*.

The nutmeg has a peculiar mottled appearance, ranging from grayish brown to light gray or white in the limed article, the depressions and grooves holding the lime while the ridges and elevations are free from it. In Shakespeare's Henry V. the Duke of Orleans, in speaking of the dauphin's dapple-gray horse, says: "He's of the color of nutmeg." The taste of nutmeg is peculiarly aromatic, pungent, and somewhat bitter.

The principal use of nutmeg is that of a spice, although not so commonly employed or so well liked as some other spices. It contains a fat which forms the nutmeg butter; this is an unctuous solid substance of an orange-brown or yellowish-brown color, with the odor and taste of nutmeg. This fat is used as a stimulating application in rheumatism, sprains, and paralysis. Nutmegs also contain some volatile oil, which is said to be poisonous; at least some persons are very susceptible to the effects of the volatile oil of nutmeg. In this connection it might be stated that the frequent and long-continued use of spices is injurious,

producing dyspepsia, functional heart trouble, and nervousness, and seems to have a special action upon the liver, causing an excessive development of connective tissue and a reduction in the functional activity of the liver cells: "Nutmeg liver" is a condition resulting from passive venous congestion of that organ, and refers to its mottled or nut-meggy appearance only.

Mace is comparatively rich in volatile oil. Nutmeg and mace are both extensively employed as condiments. They are frequently given in the form of a powder to stimulate and aid digestion. Nutmeg flavor consists of nutmeg, oil of nutmeg, and alcohol. Mace-ale is ale sweetened and spiced with mace.

It is stated that whole nutmegs have been adulterated with wooden imitations. Connecticut is known as the Wooden Nutmeg State because it is facetiously said that such nutmegs were manufactured there.

AN ABANDONED HOME

ELANORA KINSLEY MARBLE

WELL," said Jenny Sparrow one fine day in April, as she fluttered from bough to bough in a maple tree near my study-window, "spring is advancing and already the housewives are bustling about busy from morning till night. Such fetching and carrying of grass and straw and feathers! Mamma concluded to build a new house this spring but papa said the old homestead would do, with new furnishings. Papa always has his way; he's such a tyrant. I'm a fortunate creature that I have no such cares, I'm sure. Mamma says I may as well sing and fly high while youth and beauty last, for my troubles will begin soon enough. Troubles! The idea of my having trouble! Old people must croak, I suppose, and would really be disappointed if their children failed to experience the trials they have.

"I often wonder if papa strutted and bowed and swelled himself out as my suitors do, when he courted mamma. Now he does nothing but scold, and I never make an unusually fine toilet but he shakes his head, and lectures mamma on the sin of idleness and vanity. I'm not vain, I'm sure. I only feel strong and happy, and when I'm challenged by a neighbor's sons and their

ugly sisters for a long flight or graceful curve, I would be a silly creature indeed if I didn't display my accomplishments to good advantage.

"There, now, is the son of our nearest neighbor twittering on that roof opposite and trying to attract my attention. He prides himself on being a direct descendant of one of the sparrows first imported into this country from England, so we call him Mr. Britisher. He has the most affected way of turning his head on one side and glancing at me. I can't help admiring his engaging manners, though, and there is a certain boldness in his address which the rest of my admirers lack, much to their disadvantage. He's going to fly over here presently, I know by the way he is strutting about and fluttering his wings. Talk about the vanity of my sex! Gracious! He is priding himself now on the manner in which his toes turn out, and the beauty of his plumage, and how much broader is that black ring about his throat than those on some of his neighbors. Here he comes. I'll pretend to be looking another way.

"Ah, is that you, Mr. Britisher? How you startled me. Yes, 'tis a lovely day. After the storms of winter, the warm sunshine is a blessing to us little creatures who live under the eaves."

"True, Miss Jenny, true. But with companionship even the storms of winter can be borne cheerfully. Don't you agree with me that a loving home is a very desirable thing?"

"Oh, Mr. Britisher, how you talk! Have your parents been away from home, that you are so lonesome?"

"You know they have not, Miss Jenny. You know full well that I was not speaking of *that* kind of companionship. Permit me to sit beside you on that bough, for I have that to say which I desire shall not be overheard. The leaves even seem to have ears at this season of the year, and do a deal of whispering about the numerous courtships which they hear and see going on."

"True, very true, Mr. Britisher," returned Miss Jenny, making room for him beside her on the limb. "There is a great amount of gossip going on just now in bird-land, I understand. Why, only the other day I heard – but ah – there is Mrs. Cowbird skulking below us, and no meaner bird flies, I think, than she. Fancy her laying her eggs in another bird's nest, because she is too lazy to make one of her own! A tramp bird must do a great deal of gossiping, so be careful what you say."

"She is not nearly such a mischief-maker as Mr. Blue Jay," replied Mr. Britisher, "nor half so impertinent. I heard him chattering with Mr. Blackbird the other day and he said all sparrows were alike to him. Fancy it! A field sparrow, vesper sparrow, swamp sparrow, white-throated sparrow, yellow-winged sparrow, fox sparrow, and dear knows how many other common American sparrows, the same to him as a blue-blooded English one. Why, my ancestors lived under the roof of Windsor Castle, and flew over the head of Queen Victoria many, many a time."

"You don't say?" returned Miss Jenny, very much impressed. "Why, you are a member of the royal family, you may say. Our

family, I have heard mother tell, always made their home in the city – London proper, you know, right under the eaves of the Bank of England. But come, that is not what you flew over here to say, surely," demurely casting her eyes upon the ground.

"How charmingly you coquette with me," said Mr. Britisher, moving closer to her on the limb. "Have you not seen for weeks past that I have had no thoughts for any girl-sparrow but you, Miss Jenny?"

"La, Mr. Britisher, I really have had so much attention from your sex this spring that I – "

"But none of them have been so devoted as I," interrupted her companion. "Think of the many delicious morsels I have laid at your feet, and all I ask in return is – "

"What?" coyly asked Miss Jenny, pretending she was about to fly away.

"This little hand," stooping and pecking her dainty claws with his bill. "Will you be my wife, Miss Jenny, the queen of my heart and home?"

"The queen of your heart and home," repeated Miss Jenny. "That sounds very nice, indeed. But when one gets married, my mamma says, then one's troubles begin."

"No, no, my dear one. Your husband will hold it his dearest privilege to guard you from every care. Life will be one long dream of bliss for us both. Say you will be mine."

"Well, I suppose I may as well say yes. Mamma says girls must be settled in life some time, and I am sure I fancy you infinitely

more than any of the young sparrows hereabouts. So you can ask papa and – there, there! You will twist my bill off, and Mr. Woodpecker over there, I am sure is watching us. Really you put me in such a flutter with your fervor. There, you naughty boy; you mustn't any more. My! I am so nervous. I'll fly home now and quiet my nerves with a nap. I'm off. By-by."

The courtship was brief, as is the custom with our feathered friends, and so the wedding took place in a few days. The bride received the blessing of her parents for a dot and the groom a shrug of the shoulders and the comforting assurance from his father that he was a "ninny" and not aware when he was well off.

All went merry as a marriage bell for a season, Mr. Britisher twittering daily in soft low tones his prettiest love songs and his spouse listening in proud complacency as she oiled her feathers and curled them prettily with her bill.

"O," she said one day, when making a call upon a neighbor, "I'm quite the happiest creature in the world. *Such* a husband, and how he dotes on me! I had no idea I was such a piece of perfection, really. I wish all my friends were as well and happily mated. Those who have no such prospects are to be pitied indeed. Ah! you needn't bridle that way, Miss Brownie, for I had no particular individual in mind when I made that remark, believe me. Well, I must cut my visit short, for hubby will be looking for me, and he grows so impatient when I am out of his sight a moment. By-by. Run in and see us, do, all of you. We are stopping, you know, with papa and mamma for awhile."

"Did you ever see such a vain, silly thing?" said the mother of a large brood of very homely sparrows. "If my girls had no more sense than she, I'd strip every feather off 'em and keep 'em at home, I would!"

"She makes me sick," said a pert young thing in the group. "*Perfection* indeed! Why, when she laughs I'm always uneasy for fear her face will disappear down her throat. Such a mouth!"

"Hubby," mimicked another, "I thought I should collapse when she said that with her sickening simper."

"Well, well," smilingly said an old mother sparrow, "she'll sing another song before long. I predict she'll be a shiftless sort of a thing when it comes to housekeeping. Mr. Britisher will repent him of his bargain ere many days, mark my words! Dearie," turning to her only daughter, "sing that dear little note you learned of Mr. Lark for the company. Thank heaven," stroking her darling's ugly feathers, "I have my precious child still with me. She is not in a hurry to leave her poor mamma, is she?"

Many sly winks and smiles were exchanged among the matron's friends at this remark, for "dearie" had chirped that little note many summers and winters, and many a snare had mother and daughter set to entrap the sons of more than one lady sparrow there.

"My dear," said Mr. Britisher the very next morning, "we must begin to build a nest and make a home like other people. I think we may as well begin to-day."

"Build our nest?" responded Mrs. B. "Well, do as you think

best, my dear. I intend to make a few calls to-day, so you may as well employ your time whilst I am away. I presume some of your folks will help you."

"I suppose nothing of the sort," replied Mr. B., curtly. "Do you think you are to do nothing but make calls from morning till night? I chose you for a helpmate, madam, and not a figurehead, let me tell you, and the sooner you settle down to your duties the better it will be for us both."

"Duties?" retorted Mrs. B., "the idea! Who was it that promised me that if I would marry him I should not have a care in the world?"

"Oh, all lovers say such things," replied Mr. B., with a contemptuous laugh. "They expect their lady-loves to have better sense than to believe them."

"Better sense than to believe them!" repeated Mrs. B., angrily. "So you admit your sex are all gay deceivers, do you? Oh, dear," tears coursing down her pretty feathered cheeks, "that I should be brought to this! Woe is me, woe is me!"

Mr. Britisher immediately flew to her side, and by caresses and fond words endeavored to tranquillize his spouse, for what husband can look upon the first tears of his bride and not upbraid himself for bringing a cloud over the heaven of her smiles?

Mrs. B. flew and hopped about with her wonted gaiety the remainder of the day, whilst Mr. B.'s preoccupation and downcast air was the cause of much comment and many wise "I told you so's," among the old lady-birds of the neighborhood.

The subject of nest-building was, of course, next day resumed; but Mrs. B. proved as indifferent and indisposed to participate in the labor as ever.

"Very well," said Mr. B., at last, resolutely disregarding her tears, "you will do as other wives do or else return to your mother. When a sparrow marries he expects his mate to do her share in making a home, and rearing a family. There is something to do in this world, madame, besides rollicking, singing, and visiting from post to pillar. Indeed, it is a wild scramble we have to make for a living, and you can no longer expect me to be furnishing you with tid-bits and insects out of season, while you gossip and idle your time away. You will have to-day to decide upon the matter," and off Mr. Britisher flew, with a heavy frown upon his face.

"Oh! I wish I had never been born," wailed Mrs. B., as the gentle wind stirred the leaves and swayed the branch upon which she was perched. "Already I begin to experience the troubles which old folks talk about. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I'll fly over to mother and tell her how shamefully Mr. B. is treating me. I won't stand it, there! Gracious! there is that meddling Mr. Blue Jay sneaking around as usual. He has heard me sobbing, I'm afraid, and all the neighbors will be gossiping before night of our affairs. There! how cheerily I sang when I flew off! He will think my sobs were a new song, perhaps. To think that I should be making believe I'm happy already. Happy! I shall never be happy again. My heart is broken. Mother will give Mr. Britisher a piece of her mind, I hope, and let him know I was never brought up to work,

much less to be any man's slave."

(To be concluded.)

THE AMERICAN BARN OWL

(*Strix pratincola*)

LYNDS JONES

OUR barn owl belongs to the tropical and warm temperate genus *Strix*, which is scattered widely over the greater part of the earth in the tropical and subtropical parts of both hemispheres, and scatteringly into the temperate zones. In Europe one species is common as far north as the British Isles, while our own bird is found as far north as southern New England in the East, Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, and southern Minnesota in the interior, and Oregon and Washington on the Pacific coast. It is hardly common anywhere except in the extreme southwestern part of the United States, where it is the most abundant owl in California. It is rare or casual north of about the fortieth parallel. But two specimens have been brought to the Oberlin College Museum in twenty years, one of which was found dead in a barn a mile east of Oberlin in December of 1898.

The barn owl is the most nocturnal of all our owls, although he can see perfectly in the brightest day. Not until twilight does

he issue from his secure hiding-place to do battle with the farm and orchard pests. Then he may be seen sailing noiselessly over orchard and meadow in quest of any mischievous rodent that may be menacing the farmer's prospects. He seems to single out intelligently the ones that do the most injury, destroying large numbers of pouched gophers and other annoying and destructive creatures, asking only in return to be left in peace in his hiding-place. The farmer certainly has no better friend than this owl, for he destroys poultry only when driven to it by the direst necessity. In the East, his food consists largely of rats and mice; in some parts of the South the cotton rat is the chief diet; while in the West he feeds principally upon the gopher (*Thomomys talpoides bulbivorus*) and the California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus grammurus beecheyi*), according to Prof. B. W. Evermann. It seems pretty certain that fish are sometimes captured and eaten.

This owl undoubtedly breeds, though sparingly, in all suitable localities wherever it is found, and probably migrates more or less in the northern part of its range. In Europe it nests in old ruins, towers, and abutments of bridges, but our American species finds few such places, so he resorts to hollow trees, caves, crevices in rocks, and banks, and even to burrows in the level ground, as we find to be the case in parts of the West. The burrows are undoubtedly the deserted burrows of some other animal. In the eastern parts of the country the owls frequently nest in buildings. It is well known that a pair occupied one of the towers of the Smithsonian building in the city of Washington in 1890, raising

a brood of seven young. It is stated that the period of incubation is from three to three and a half weeks, and that brooding begins with the deposit of the first egg; thus there may be fresh eggs and young in the same nest. This accounts for the long period of incubation.

The eggs are pure white, usually from four to seven in number, rarely twelve. They are rather longer in proportion than those of the other owls – in about the proportion of 1.30×1.70 . But the average size is variously given by the various authors.

It seems a little curious that there should be such a marked difference between the hawks and owls as regards nest material. They belong to the same order of birds, and yet the hawks build their own nests, collecting the material and arranging it much after the fashion of higher birds, while the owls make practically no nest, at the most collecting a little material and scattering it about with little regard for arrangement. But the difficulty disappears when we realize that the owls have probably always nested in hollows which require no nest material, while the hawks, if they ever nested in hollows, have long ceased to do so, building their nests among the branches of trees, where a relatively large amount of material is necessary. The few species of hawks which now nest in hollows have gone back to that method after a long period of open nesting and have retained the nest material even here where it seems unnecessary.

The monkey-like appearance of this owl, emphasized by his tawny color and screeching voice, gives him a decidedly uncanny

appearance. His plumage is unusually soft and fluffy, but is too thin to enable him to withstand the rigors of a northern winter. Curiously enough, the feathers on the back of his tarsus grow up instead of down, giving that part of his plumage a rather ungroomed appearance. One edge of his middle toe-nail is toothed like a comb.

During the nesting season only a single pair can be found in a place, but at other times the species is more or less gregarious in the regions in which it is numerous. Often a dozen individuals may be found in a company. The extreme seclusiveness of the birds during the day makes it very difficult to find them, and they are undoubtedly more numerous than generally reported, and are likely to be present in many places where their presence is not now suspected. They seek the darkest and most secluded corner possible and remain quiet all day. Their noiseless flight might easily be mistaken for that of the whippoorwill. Let us hope that the good qualities of this owl will be fully recognized before his hiding-place is discovered.

A SPRINGTIME

One knows the spring is coming;
There are birds; the fields are green;
There is balm in the sunlight and moonlight,
A dew in the twilights between.

But ever there is a silence,
A rapture great and dumb,
That day when the doubt is ended,
And at last the spring is come.

Behold the wonder, O silence!
Strange as if wrought in a night, —
The waited and lingering glory,
The world-old fresh delight!

O blossoms that hang like winter,
Drifted upon the trees,
O birds that sing in the blossoms,
O blossom-haunting bees, —

O green leaves on the branches,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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