

VARIOUS

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SNOW-FLAKES

Out of the bosom of the Air,
Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
Over the harvest-fields forsaken,
Silent, and soft, and slow
Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take
Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession,
The troubled sky reveals
The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
Now whispered and revealed
To wood and field.

– *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.*

O wonderful world of white!
When trees are hung with lace,
And the rough winds chide,
And snowflakes hide
Each break unsheltered place;
When birds and brooks are dumb, – what then?
O, round we go to the green again!

– *G. Cooper, "Round the Year."*

THE WHITE-EYED VIREO. (*Vireo noveboracensis.*)

“And then the wren and vireo
Begin with song to overflow.”

– *Thomas Hill* – “*Sunrise.*”

The vireos form a peculiar and interesting family – the Vireonidæ, which includes about fifty species. All are strictly American and the larger number inhabit only the forest or shrubby regions of Central and South America. The name vireo signifies a green finch and is from the Latin word meaning “to be green.” The body color of nearly all the species is more or less olive green.

About fifteen species frequent the United States. These are all members of the genus *Vireo*, and some of them have a wide range, only equaled in extent by some of the warblers.

Dr. Coues has said of these birds: “Next after the warblers the greenlets (vireos) are the most delightful of our forest birds, though their charms address the ear and not the eye. Clad in simple tints that harmonize with the verdure, these gentle songsters warble their lays unseen, while the foliage itself seems stirred to music. In the quaint and curious ditty of the white-eye, in the earnest, voluble strains of the red-eye, in the tender secret that the warbling vireo confides in whispers to the passing breeze, he is insensible who does not hear the echo of thoughts he never clothes in words.”

The vireos are strikingly alike. In habit, in color, in structure, in size and in their home-building peculiarities they resemble each other. Their eggs are similar and “fashioned almost as from the same mold, and colored as if by the same brush.”

The vireos build pensile nests that are ingeniously concealed under the surrounding foliage. They are in the form of a rather deep cup, which is suspended from two or more converging twigs. The materials used in the construction are similar in all cases, though they vary somewhat according to the locality and the abundance of desirable textiles. A favorite substance used by some of the birds is the tough and flexible fibers of the inner bark of trees. Thoreau, speaking of this habit, says: “What a wonderful genius it is that leads the vireo to select the tough fiber of the inner bark instead of the more brittle grasses!”

The White-eyed Vireo has an extensive range, extending over the eastern United States from the Atlantic Ocean to the great plains and from Mexico and Guatemala, where it winters, northward to the borders of British America. It nests practically throughout its range within the United States.

This pert and trim little bird is known by other suggestive names. Because of the character of its nest it is called the “little green hanging bird.” Its song, as translated by boys, has given it the name “chicky-bearer,” or “chickity.” Except when nesting this vireo is unsuspecting and will permit a near approach. Dr. Brewer says that “when whistled to it will often stop and eye you with marked curiosity, and even approach a little nearer, as if to obtain a better view, entirely unconscious of any danger.” Impertinent at all times, they are especially so when the nest is approached. At such times it exhibits great uneasiness, and even its expressive eyes seem to flash. Continually scolding the intruder, it utters “a hoarse mewling that is very peculiar.”

The nest of the White-eyed Vireo is a beautiful structure. It is artistic, durable and a wonderfully pretty home for its beautiful architect. It is seldom placed higher than five feet from the ground. Dr. Brewer thus describes one of these nests. It was “composed of a singular medley of various materials, among which may be noticed broken fragments of dry leaves, bits of decayed wood and bark, coarse blades of grass, various fibers, lichens, fragments of insects, mosses, straws, stems, etc. These were all wrapped round and firmly bound together with strong hempen fibers of vegetables. Within this

outer envelope was an inner nest, made of the finer stems of grasses and dry needles of the white pine, firmly interwoven.” There are usually either three or four eggs, which are white and speckled at the larger end, with black or some shade of brown.

Mr. Chapman says: “I have always regretted that the manners of this vireo have been a bar to our better acquaintance, for he is a bird of marked character and with unusual vocal talents. He is a capital mimic, and in the retirement of his home sometimes amuses himself by combining the songs of other birds in an intricate potpourri.”

TO A WHITE-EYED VIREO

Up there among the maple's leaves,
One morning bright in May,
A tiny bird I chanced to spy,
And plainly heard him say:
"Sweet, who-are-you?"

"Dost call to me, in words so fair,
O little friend?" I cried;
"Or to some feathered dame up there?"
For answer he replied:
"Sweet, do you hear?"

O yes, I hear you, little bird,
All clad in leafy hue;
And I in turn, would like to ask
The question, "Who are *you*?"

But you might deem the question vain,
And bid me note your size;
The shading of your dainty coat;
The color of your eyes.

For there I shall my answer find.
Shall you be answered, too?
Will your wee feathered love reply,
When asked, "Sweet, who-are-you?"

– *Annie Wakely Jackson.*

PLEA OF THE YOUNG EVERGREENS

We hide the stony mountain side with green,
And grow in beauty where the plain was bare;
We cling to crannies of the walled ravine,
And through faint valleys waft a strengthening air.

On coastings gray we stay the creeping sand;
We lift our spears and halt the shifting dunes;
Our bounteous youth makes glad the scanty land,
While it transforms rank fens, and salt lagunes.

We veil the prairies from the heat, while slow
Across their farmsteads breathes our Summer balm,
And shield them when the winds of Winter blow,
And all our aisles and pleasant rooms are calm.

Through charming days we spread our branches wide,
And live through drouths, and floods, and whirling storms,
Till comes to man his merry Christmas tide,
That lays in myriad deaths our fairest forms.

Men drag us from our fragrant winding vales,
They fell us on the mountain slopes, and bare
The prairies unto heat, and freezing gales,
And thinned, the chaparral plains fail unaware.

They tear us from the wall-chinks of the glens,
And hew us on the marsh we helped to drain,
And where our beauty graced, the tawny fens
Shall lapse to weeds and sworded flags again.

Up coastings, line the lispings, creeping sands,
While inland move the dunes we bravely stayed,
When we are borne away by wasteful hands,
To tower in rooms, with lights and gifts arrayed.

Spare us! – oh! spare our youth, with verdure crowned —
Our groves return to deserts when we pass;
The coasts which we revived, in sands are drowned;
Bare slopes but yield their stones and bitter-grass.

Spare us! we bring you beauty, shelter, wealth,
Oh! waste us not. Oh! keep with guiltless show
The Holy Time; and life, and joy, and health,
Be gifts to you, while winds of Winter blow.

– *Eliza Woodworth.*

THE RIVOLI HUMMINGBIRD. (*Eugenes fulgens.*)

In that wonderful and magnificent book “A Monograph of the Trochilidæ,” the family of hummingbirds, Mr. John Gould, the author, writing of his experiences with these mites of bird life, says:

“How vivid is my recollection of the first hummingbird which met my admiring gaze! With what delight did I examine its tiny body and feast my eyes on its glittering plumage! These early impressions, I well remember, gradually increased into an earnest desire to attain a more intimate acquaintance with the lovely group of birds to which it pertained. During the first twenty years of my acquaintance with these wonderful works of creation my thoughts were often directed to them in the day, and my dreams have not unfrequently carried me to their native forests in the distant country of America.”

These birds have ever been an inspiration to the poet. How beautiful are these lines of Maurice Thompson, addressed to the hummingbird:

Zephyr loves thy wings
Above all lovable things,
And brings them gifts with rapturous murmurings.
Thine is the golden reach of blooming hours;
Spirit of flowers!

Thou art a winged thought
Of tropical hours,
With all the tropics' rare bloom-splendor fraught;
Surcharged with beauty's indefinable powers,
Angel of flowers!

It seems cruel and strange that any person should kill these tiny creatures especially for ornamental purpose. They are the gems of nature, yet one day, in the year 1888, over twelve thousand skins of hummingbirds were sold in London. “And in one week during the same year there were sold at auction, in that city, four hundred thousand hummingbirds and other birds from North and South America, the former doubtless comprising a very considerable percentage of the whole number.” When we remember that the hummingbird lays but two eggs, the rapid extermination of some of the species is evident unless this wholesale slaughter is stopped. Even the tropics, where bird life is wonderfully abundant, cannot support such wanton destruction.

The Rivoli, or the Refulgent hummingbird, as it is frequently called, has a very limited range. It is found in the “mountains of southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico and over the table lands of Mexico,” southward to Nicaragua. It is one of the largest and most beautiful of the hummingbirds that frequent the United States. Its royal appearance led Lesson, in the year 1829, to name it Rivoli, in honor of M. Massena, the Duke of Rivoli. It is noted “for the beauty of its coloring and the bold style of its markings.”

Mr. Salvin, writing of the pugnacious character of this species, says: “Many a time have I thought to secure a fine male, which I had, perhaps, been following from tree to tree, and had at last seen quietly perched on a leafless twig, when my deadly intention has been anticipated by one less so in fact, but to all appearances equally so in will. Another hummingbird rushes in, knocks the one I covet off his perch, and the two go fighting and screaming away at a pace hardly to be followed by

the eye. Another time this flying fight was sustained in midair, the belligerents mounting higher and higher, until the one worsted in battle darts away seeking shelter, followed by the victor, who never relinquishes the pursuit till the vanquished, by doubling and hiding, succeeds in making his escape.” Not only do they resent the presence of their own kind, but also of other hummingbirds.

Mr. H. W. Henshaw, who was the first scientist to discover that the Rivoli was a member of the bird fauna of the United States, thus describes its nest: “It is composed of mosses nicely woven into an almost circular cup, the interior possessing a lining of the softest and downiest feathers, while the exterior is elaborately covered with lichens, which are securely bound on by a network of the finest silk from spiders’ webs. It was saddled on the horizontal limb of an alder, about twenty feet above the bed of a running mountain stream, in a glen which was overarched and shadowed by several huge spruces, making it one of the most shady and retired nooks that could be imagined.”

The note of this bird gem of the pine-clad mountains is a “twittering sound, louder, not so shrill and uttered more slowly than those of the small hummers.”

As the Rivoli hovers over the mescal and gathers from its flowers the numerous insects that infest them; or, as it takes the sweets from the flowers of the boreal honeysuckle, one is reminded of the words of the poet:

“Art thou a bird, a bee, or butterfly?”
“Each and all three – a bird in shape am I,
A bee collecting sweets from bloom to bloom,
A butterfly in brilliancy of plume.”

THE SEA-GULL

From the frozen Pole to the Tropic sea
Thou wingest thy course with the drifting clouds;
O'er ghostly bergs and vessels' shrouds
The beat of thy wings is strong and free.
Alone, or with thy tribe a host
Thou spreadest the bars of the low-ebbed tide.
On the wave-washed drift of wrecks canst ride
Or crowd the cliffs of a rock bound coast.

No home is thine save the ocean's waste;
Unrestrained o'er thousands of miles dost roam;
And follow the trail of the liners' foam
On wings that show no signs of haste.
Thou canst rest on the height of vessels' yards,
Or the gleaming ice of the northern floe.
As the changing tides thou dost come and go
And the shifting wind thy strange course guards.

The seaman well knows the signs thou canst show
Of weather, and luck of the fishing grounds;
And the whaler smiles when the sea abounds
With thy thousands that come as the falling snow.
Yet stranger those thoughts that arise in me,
As I watch thee wheel of thy shining wings,
Of thy life o'er the depths where the ocean flings
From the frozen Pole to the Tropic sea.

– *Julian Hinckley.*

THE BIRD OF CONSOLATION

There is a Scandinavian tradition that the swallow hovered over the cross of our Lord crying “Svala! Svala!” (Console, console). Hence comes its name, “svalow” – the bird of consolation.

The habitat of the swallow is the whole of North America and parts of South America. The chief characteristic is usually a deeply forked tail. The swallows of this country are called Bank, Barn, Bridge, Chimney, Cliff, Tree, Land, Purple, Violet, Black, White, Crescent, Green, Blue, Republican, White-billed and White-fronted. There are some twenty common kinds, beside the Swift, which is called a swallow because of certain resemblances. But its structure is different. It has its name from the rapidity of its flight. It is almost always on the wing. Its feet are so seldom used that they are very weak. The chimney swallow has a bristly tail, which assists in its support when the bird alights. Its color is a sooty gray. Of the true swallows none is more familiar than the barn swallow, whose nest adds a picturesque interest to the eaves of the building. This swallow has a steel blue coat, a pale chestnut vest, with a bit of chocolate on chin and throat. The tail is deeply forked. It is not a noisy bird, but has a song – a little trill – aside from the note it uses when flying. Like a merry laugh, it says “Tittle-ittle-ittle-ee.” The barn swallow is sympathetic with its mates when they are in trouble and is friendly to man, who sometimes feels like questioning it —

“Is it far to heaven, O Swallow, Swallow!
The heavy-hearted sings;
I watch thy flight – and I long to follow.
The while I wait for wings.”

The flight of the swallow is in the curved line, which is that of beauty, and is without effort or restraint.

The cliff swallow, petrochelidon lunifrons – gets part of its name – lunifrons (moon front) – from its white, crescent-like frontlet. It builds a bottle or gourd-shaped nest under the protection of shelving cliffs. A whole colony will sometimes build under the eaves of out-buildings, when the shape of the nest is modified. This bird may be distinguished from the barn swallow by its less forked tail and its blackish color. It is a very useful bird, as it seems tireless in its destruction of injurious insects.

The tree or white-billed swallow wears a bluish-green coat, with white vest. It will sometimes rob the woodpecker of holes in trees in which to build.

The bank swallow or sand martin is the cosmopolitan of birds, as it thrives equally well in Asia, Africa, Europe and America.

Of all the swallows none is a greater favorite than the purple martin. It was doubtless the bird to which Shakespeare alludes when he says, “Where the temple haunting martlet breeds the air is delicate.” The purple martin, in iridescent coat, with soft, musical cry of “Peuo-peuo-peuo,” is a well protected guest, provided with pretty boxes for homes on tall poles or nailed to the sides of trees. It is a courageous bird, defending its home and young against any ruthless invader.

There is an old true saying that “one swallow does not make a summer.” Yet its advent is looked for as the harbinger of warm weather.

“Birds teach us as they come and go
When to sail and when to sow.
Cuckoo calling from the hill,
Swallow skimming by the mill.
Mark the seasons, map the year,
As they show and disappear.”

Belle Paxson Drury.

THE WORM-EATING WARBLER. (*Helmitherus vermivorus*.)

The Worm-eating Warbler is much more retiring and less often noticed than most of the species of warblers. Unlike many of the species its range does not reach to the northern coniferous forests. Passing the winter in the countries bordering the Gulf of Mexico, it migrates in the spring throughout the Eastern United States, breeding as far north as Illinois and Connecticut. Its dull color and retiring and shy disposition eminently fit it for its chosen hunting grounds – the deep and thick woods, bordering ravines, where there is an abundant undergrowth of shrubs. Though preferring such localities, it is occasionally seen in rather open places.

Its companion in the woods is the golden-crowned thrush, for which it might easily be mistaken were it not for the absence of streaks on its breast. Its song closely resembles that of the chipping sparrow and may even mislead the trained field ornithologist. As it deliberately hunts for insects among the dry leaves on the ground or on the lower branches of shrubs, its slow motions are more like those of the vireo than of a warbler.

While walking through woods frequented by this rare little warbler the experiences of Mr. Leander Keyser is that of all who have had the pleasure of meeting it among the trees. He says: “Suddenly there was a twinkle of wings, a flash of olive-green, a sharp chirp, and then before me, a few rods away, a little bird went hopping about on the ground, picking up dainties from the brown leaves. It was a rare Worm-eating Warbler. The little charmer was quite wary, chirping nervously while I ogled him – for it was a male – and then hopped up into a sapling and finally scurried away out of sight.”

It builds its nest on the ground among the dead leaves and under the protecting shade of large leaved herbage or low shrubs. The nest is rather large for the size of the bird. Grasses, small roots, the fibrous shreds of bark and a few dried leaves are used in its construction.

Regarding the habits of this warbler Dr. Coues writes as follows: “It is a sedate, rather a demure, little bird, without the vivacity of most warblers. When startled from the dead leaves on the ground, where it spends most of its time rambling, like the golden-crowned thrush, it flies to a low limb and then often sits motionless or hops listlessly about.”

THE HUMMINGBIRD

A wheel of emerald set to song,
Song of a thousand murmurings;
A rainbow held in its leashes long,
A whirl of color, a rush of wings,
The branches tilt and the petals quake
("There is honey, my love, for you!")
And the frowzled heads of the blossoms shake
After each whispered interview.

Nelly Hart Woodworth.

NEVA'S BUTTERFLY

“Oh! Oh! Auntie, please come here, my foot's caught in this hammock and I can't get out and there's a caterpillar going to crawl right on me!” called little Neva Birdsell in an excited tone.

Aunt Doris laid down her sewing and went over to where her little niece was lying with her eyes riveted on a caterpillar which was slowly crawling along quite ignorant that anyone was being alarmed by its presence.

Neva gave a sigh of relief when her aunt picked a leaf from the vine and the caterpillar crawled off on to it.

“Now what shall I do with him?” asked Aunt Doris as the caterpillar curled itself up in a little ball.

“Why, kill it, quick as ever you can,” replied Neva promptly, “I don't want horrid old caterpillars crawling 'round me.”

Just then a beautiful butterfly lighted on the vine near by and Aunt Doris questioned, “Shall I catch the butterfly and kill that, too?”

“O, auntie, how could you kill a beautiful butterfly?” exclaimed the little girl. “Catch it, though, I'd love to see it close to. But there, now!” she added in a disappointed tone as the butterfly flitted away, “It's gone; they always fly away from me.”

Aunt Doris went back to her chair carrying the caterpillar in the leaf with her. She seemed to be studying it for a moment and then asked, “Do you know what I have here, Neva?”

“Why, that caterpillar,” answered the little girl in a surprised tone. Then growing curious she left the hammock and went nearer her aunt's chair.

“Yes,” said her aunt, “you are right, yet if I should keep it long enough it would turn into a butterfly just like the one that flew away a moment ago; but I suppose I had better kill it as you wish me to.”

“O, please don't,” said Neva quickly as her aunt started from her chair, “I didn't know 'bout it's ever being a butterfly. Will it really be like that other one, and could you keep it long enough; and how can you tell what kind of a butterfly it will be?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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