

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND NATURE

VOL. 9 NO. 2 [FEBRUARY
1901]

Various

Birds and Nature Vol. 9
No. 2 [February 1901]

«Public Domain»

Various

Birds and Nature Vol. 9 No. 2 [February 1901] / Various — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

FEBRUARY	5
FROST-WORK	6
THE HAWKS	7
INTERESTING STONE HOUSES	10
THE ALASKAN SPARROW	11
THE DOWITCHER	12
SOME THINGS WE MIGHT LEARN FROM THE LOWER ANIMALS	13
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

Various Birds and Nature Vol. 9 No. 2 [February 1901]

FEBRUARY

Still lie the sheltering snows, undimmed and white;
And reigns the winter's pregnant silence still;
No sign of spring, save that the catkins fill,
And willow stems grow daily red and bright.
These are the days when ancients held a rite
Of expiation for the old year's ill,
And prayer to purify the new year's will;
Fit days, ere yet the spring rains blur the sight,
Ere yet the bounding blood grows hot with haste,
And dreaming thoughts grow heavy with a greed
The ardent summer's joy to have and taste;
Fit days, to give to last year's losses heed,
To reckon clear the new life's sterner need;
Fit days, for Feast of Expiation placed!

– *Helen Hunt Jackson.*

FROST-WORK

These winter nights, against my window-pane
Nature with busy pencil draws designs
Of ferns and blossoms and fine spray of pines,
Oak-leaf and acorn and fantastic vines,
Which she will make when summer comes again —
Quaint arabesques in argent, flat and cold,
Like curious Chinese etchings... By and by,
Walking my leafy garden as of old,
These frosty fantasies shall charm my eye
In azure, damask, emerald, and gold.

— *Thomas Bailey Aldrich.*

THE HAWKS

Among the birds that are most useful to man may be classed the Hawks. They, with the vultures, the eagles and the owls, belong to the bird order Raptores, or birds of prey. Unlike the vultures the Hawks feed upon living prey while the former seek the dead or dying animal. The vultures are often called "Nature's Scavengers," and in many localities they have been so carefully protected that they will frequent the streets of towns, seeking food in the gutters.

The family Falconidae, which includes the Hawks, the falcons, the vultures, the kites, and the eagles – all diurnal birds of prey – numbers about three hundred and fifty species, of which between forty and fifty are found in North America. The remainder are distributed throughout the world.

The flight of the Hawks is more than beautiful, it is majestic. Even when perched high in the air on the top of a dead monarch of the forest, there is a silent dignity in their pose. It is from these perches that some of the species watch the surrounding country for their prey, swooping down upon it when observed and seizing it in their long, sharp and curved claws. Their food is almost invariably captured while on the wing. The bill, which is short, hooked and with sinuate cutting edges, is used for tearing the flesh of its victim into shreds.

Among our more common hawks there are but five or six that may truthfully be classed among the birds that are injurious to the interests of man. Among these, the Cooper's hawk and the sharp-shinned hawk deserve the most attention, as they feed almost entirely upon other birds and poultry. To these two the name chicken hawk may be aptly applied. The domestic pigeon is a dainty morsel for these ravagers of the barnyard. On the other hand, by far the larger number of the Hawks are of great value to man. They are gluttonous whenever the food supply is unlimited, and, as their powers of digestion are wonderfully developed, it takes but a short time for the food to be absorbed and they are then ready for more. With their keen eyesight they readily detect the rodents and other small mammals that are so destructive to crops and with a remarkable swiftness of flight they pounce upon them. Dr. Fisher says, "Of the rapacious birds with which our country is so well furnished, there are but few which deserve to be put on the black list and pursued without mercy. The greater number either pass their whole lives in the constant performance of acts of direct benefit to man or else more than make good the harm they do in the destruction of insectivorous birds and poultry by destroying a much greater number of mammals well known to be hostile to the farmer."

Dr. Fisher obtained the following results from the examination of the stomachs of two thousand, two hundred and twelve birds of prey. This number does not include any of those that feed extensively upon game and poultry. In three and one-half per centum the remains of poultry or game birds were found; eleven per centum contained remains of other birds; forty-two and one-half per centum contained the remains of mice; in fourteen per centum other mammals were found and twenty-seven per centum contained insect remains. This summary includes not only the Hawks but also the owls, eagles and related birds. It is evident from these results that man has a friend in these birds that is of inestimable value to him.

The use of falcons and Hawks in the chase dates far back in the history of the Old World. For ages it was one of the principal sports of mankind and especially of the nobility. Hawks may be trained to a high degree of efficiency in the capturing of other birds. It is said that the Chinese knew of this characteristic of the Hawks at least two thousand years before the time of Christ. In Japan the art of falconry was practiced about six or seven hundred years before Christ.

The art is also believed to be represented in a bas-relief found in the Khorsahad ruins in which a falconer is apparently bearing a hawk on his wrist. Thus these ancient ruins of Nineveh show that the art must have been known at least seventeen hundred years before Christ.

That falconry was known to the ancient races of Africa is highly probable, though there is but little in the earlier written history of that continent regarding it. Egyptian carvings and drawings,

however, indicate without a doubt that the art was there known centuries ago. Falconry is still practiced to some extent in Africa.

The art, though not obsolete in those countries of Europe where, in the middle ages, it was regarded as the greatest and most noble of all sports, is not national in its character. During the reign of William the Conqueror laws were enacted in England which were most stringent regarding falconry. At one time “falcons and hawks were allotted to degrees and orders of men according to rank and station, to royalty the jerrfalcon, to an earl the peregrine, to a yeoman the goshawk, to a priest the sparrow-hawk, and to a knave or servant the useless kestrel.”

To train a hawk for this sport requires great skill and patience. The temper, disposition and, in fact, every peculiarity of each individual bird must be carefully studied. In these respects it may be said that no two birds are exactly alike. Technically the name falcon, as used by the falconer, is applied only to the female of the various species used in the conducting of this sport.

The peregrine falcon or hawk is usually accepted as the type falcon of falconry. The name peregrine, from the Latin peregrinus, means wandering, and refers to the fact that this species is almost cosmopolitan, though the geographical races are given varietal names. The duck hawk (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) is one of the representatives in America. “The food of this hawk consists almost exclusively of birds, of which water-fowl and shore birds form the greater part.”

The Hawks of our illustration are natives of North America ranging from Mexico northward. The American Rough-legged Hawk (*Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis*) is a geographical variety of a rough-legged form that is found in northern Europe and Asia. It is also known by the names of Black Rough-legged and Black Hawk.

This Hawk is one of the largest and most attractive of all the species of North America. Dr. Fisher tells us that “it is mild and gentle in disposition, and even when adult may be tamed in the course of a few days so that it will take food from the hand and allow its head and back to be stroked. When caged with other species of hawks, it does not as a rule fight for the food, but waits until the others have finished, before it begins to eat.”

In spite of its large size and apparent strength it does not exhibit the spirit that is so characteristic of the falcons. It preys almost entirely on field mice and other rodents, frogs and probably, at times and in certain localities, upon insects especially the grasshoppers. It is said that they will feed upon lizards, snakes and toads. They do not molest the poultry of the farmer or the game birds of the field, forest or of our water courses, at least not to any extent. Their size and their slow and heavy flight would nearly always give sufficient warning to permit the ordinary fowls to seek cover.

No better evidence as to the character of its food can be furnished than the results of the examination of forty-nine stomachs as related by Dr. Fisher. Of these forty contained mice; five, other mammals; one, lizards; one, the remains of seventy insects (this specimen was killed in Nebraska); and four, were empty. It is interesting to note “that the southern limit of its wanderings in winter is nearly coincident with the southern boundary of the region inhabited by meadow mice.”

Sir John Richardson says, “In the softness and fullness of its plumage, its feathered legs and habits, this bird bears some resemblance to the owls. It flies slowly, sits for a long time on the bough of a tree, watching for mice, frogs, etc., and is often seen sailing over swampy pieces of ground, and hunting for its prey by the subdued daylight, which illuminates even the midnight hours in the high parallels of latitude.” Mr. Ridgway says, “for noble presence and piercing eye this bird has few equals among our Falconidae.”

The eggs of this species vary from two to five and are usually somewhat blotched or irregularly marked with chocolate brown on a dull white background.

The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo borealis*) of our illustration is young and shows the plumage of the immature form.

This species may be called our winter hawk and for this reason the name *borealis* is most appropriate. “The coldest days of January serve to give this hawk a keener eye and a deeper zest for

the chase.” The best locality to seek the Red-tail may be found at the wooded borders of pastures and streams, where it can easily perceive and swoop down upon its prey. It seldom visits a barnyard, but will occasionally catch a fowl that has strayed away from the protection of buildings. Its food consists to a great extent of meadow and other species of mice, rabbits and other rodents. The remains of toads, frogs and snakes have also been found in its stomach. One writer says, “The Red-tailed Hawk is a powerful bird and I once saw one strike a full-grown muskrat, which it tore to pieces and devoured the greater part.”

Dr. Fisher gives an interesting summary of the examination of five hundred and sixty-two stomachs. Fifty-four contained poultry or game birds; fifty-one, other birds; two hundred and seventy-eight contained mice; one hundred and thirty-one, other mammals; thirty-seven, frogs and related animals or reptiles; forty-seven, insects; eight, crawfish; one, centipedes; thirteen, offal, and eighty-nine were empty. This surely is not a bad showing for this bird, so often maligned by being called “hen” or “chicken-hawk.” Its preferred food is evidently the smaller mammals, and as it is common or even abundant it must be of great value to agricultural interests. The younger birds are more apt to take poultry because of “a lack of skill in procuring a sufficient quantity of the more usual prey.”

Mr. P. M. Silloway says, “None of the Hawks has suffered more undeserved persecution than has the Red-tailed Buzzard or Hawk, whose characteristics place it among the ignoble falcons, or hawks, of feudal times. Lacking the swiftness and impetuosity of attack peculiar to the true falcons, it depends on its ability to surprise its prey and drop upon it when unable to escape.”

During the summer months it retires to the forests to breed, where it builds a large and bulky though shallow nest in trees, often at a height of from fifty to seventy-five feet from the ground. The nest is constructed of sticks and small twigs and lined with grass, moss, feathers or other soft materials. The number of eggs is usually three, though there may be two or four. They are a little over two inches long and less than two inches in diameter. They are dull whitish in color and usually somewhat marked with various shades of brown.

The full plumage of the adult is not acquired for some time and the bird has been long full grown before the characteristic red color of the tail appears.

Seth Mindwell.

INTERESTING STONE HOUSES

While the children were playing in a small brook, they found something entirely new to them, and as usual, came with hands full, shouting, “We have found something new! Do you know what these are?”

These new treasures proved to be the larvae of the caddis fly in their stone houses. This little creature is noted for its complete metamorphosis. The female fly often descends to the depth of a foot or more in water to deposit her eggs. As the eggs hatch the habits of their larvae are exceedingly interesting.

They are aquatic, being long, softish grubs, with six feet. The fish are very fond of them, for which reason they are in great demand for bait. The angler looks for “cad-bait” along the edges of streams, under stones, or on the stalks of aquatic plants. One can easily see that their lives are not free from care and danger, and so to protect themselves, they are very wise in building cylindrical cases in which they live during this dangerous period. The different species, of which there are many, seem to have their individual preference as to the substance which they employ in building these houses, some using bits of wood, others shells, pebbles, or straws. They readily disregard these preferences when there is a lack of the material which they usually prefer.

Those brought to me were made of different colored pebbles and were very pretty homes. We counted the pebbles in one of them and found there were eighty-nine used, and built so securely that it could not be easily crushed by our fingers. They were all about an inch in length, a quarter of an inch in diameter and were perfect cylinders with a large pebble fastening one end; so no fish could catch them unawares. We placed them in water, where we could watch their development. They never willingly left their homes, only thrusting the head and a portion of the body out in search of food.

When about to pass into the torpid pupa state, they fastened their houses to some sticks and stones in the water, and then closed the end with a strong silken grating, which allowed the water to pass freely through their houses, keeping them sweet and fresh. We are told that this fresh water is necessary for the respiration of the pupa. Thus they remain quiet for a time until they are ready to assume the imago form. When that important period arrives they make an opening in the silken grating with a pair of hooked jaws, which seem to have developed while resting in the pupa state. They also have become efficient swimmers, using their long hind legs to assist them. After enjoying this new exercise of swimming for a short time they evidently become anxious for a wider experience, and coming to the surface of the water, usually climbing up some plant, the skin of the swimmer gapes open and out flies the perfect insect. Sometimes this final change takes place on the surface of the water, when they use their deserted skin as a sort of raft, from which to rise into the air, and away they go to new fields and new experiences. These insects are known as the caddis-fly of the order Neuroptera, having four wings, measuring about an inch when full spread, with branched nervures, of which the anterior pair are clothed with hairs; the posterior pair are folded in repose. The head is furnished with a pair of large eyes, with three ocelli, and the antennae are generally very long.

If you know the haunts of this interesting house builder, scatter some bright sand and tiny pebbles in the water, and when they are deserted, gather the houses for your collection.

Rest H. Metcalf.

THE ALASKAN SPARROW

There's a far-away country, a wonderful land
That the twilight loves best, where the finger of God
Touched the land into shadows; unlighted they stand
As they stood at the first over-ocean and sod,

And the cloud and the mountain are one; all unheard
Is the murmur of traffic, the sigh of unrest,
And the King of the land is a golden-crowned bird
With a robe of plain brown and an ashy-gray vest.

Where the shadows are deepest a musical sound
Cleaves their darkness, the song of the golden-crowned King.
Never day is so dark but the sweet notes are heard,
Never forest so dense but the melodies ring.

Sing on, little King of the twilight land, sing,
Thy kingdom extend through the oncoming days,
Till the spaces between us with music shall ring,
And the world hush its breath but to listen and praise.

– *Nelly Hart Woodworth.*

THE DOWITCHER (*Macrorhamphus griseus.*)

The range of the Dowitcher is limited to the eastern part of North America. It has been reported as far west as the Mississippi river. It breeds in the far north, usually within the Arctic Circle. Its migration is extensive for it winters in Florida, the West Indies and in the northern portion of South America.

The Dowitcher is one of the best known of our coast birds. It bears many popular names, such as Gray Snipe, Gray-back, Dowitch, Driver, Brown-back and Bay Bird. The generic name *Macrorhamphus* is derived from two Greek words, makros, meaning large, and rhamphos, meaning bill. The specific name *griseus* means gray, and probably has reference to the grayish color of the winter plumage.

The Dowitchers are the most numerous of the seaside snipes. Inland it is replaced by the Long-billed Dowitcher (*Macrorhamphus scolopaceus*), which has a longer bill and is a little larger. Mr. Wilson, in his *Ornithology*, gives the following interesting account of their habits: "They frequent the sandbars and mud of flats at low water in search of food and, being less suspicious of a boat than of a person on shore, they are easily approached by this medium and shot down in great numbers. I have frequently amused myself with the various actions of these birds. They fly rapidly, sometimes wheeling, coursing and doubling along the surface of the marshes; then shooting high in the air, there separating and forming in various bodies, uttering a kind of quivering whistle." At the retreat of the tide flocks will frequently settle on the shore in such large numbers and so close together that several dozen have been killed at a single shot.

Mr. Chapman tells us that "they migrate in compact flocks, which are easily attracted to decoys by an imitation of their call. Mud-flats and bars exposed by the falling tide are their chosen feeding grounds. On the Gulf coast of Florida I have seen several hundred gathered in such close rank that they entirely concealed the sandbar on which they were resting."

In summer the general color of these birds is dark-brown and the feathers are more or less edged with a reddish tinge. Underneath, the general color is light cinnamon, with white on the belly. In the winter the plumage is more gray and the under parts are much lighter in color.

This bird usually lays four eggs of a buffy olive color, which are marked by brown, especially near the larger end.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of Night,
Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
Companions of our flight.

— *James Thomson.*

SOME THINGS WE MIGHT LEARN FROM THE LOWER ANIMALS

Man has been instructed in many things by lower animals, but there is yet much to be learned. It is said that the first suspension bridge across the Niagara was constructed after the plainest sort of hint from a spider. Yet we have never found the name of Mr. Spider cut upon the buttresses of a bridge. Who knows but that the builders of the pyramids of ancient Egypt copied their engineering plans from the ants who for generations had pursued similar methods in the architecture of their cities? Spiders had been ballooning for many centuries before man swung his first parachute to the breeze. In fact, there is a species of spider, which, although they have no wings, are able to spin for themselves a sort of apparatus by means of which they navigate the air; yet man, with all his boasted intelligence, has not accomplished this, even with the most complicated machinery. So I might go on to suggest many mechanical and economic contrivances used by lower animals, some of which man has copied but many of which he has as yet been unable to equal.

Before the first potter of old had fashioned a vase or a jug the Eumenes fraterna had constructed his dainty little jugs of mud. But the making of jugs is not the only art man might learn from this little wasp. Upon examination we find the jug filled with small green caterpillars. After depositing her egg Mrs. Wasp thus provides for her baby when it shall appear upon the field of action. Now the peculiar part of this proceeding to which I wish to call attention is that the worm is not dead, but is merely in a comatose state. If it had been killed it would have putrefied and entirely disappeared before the young wasp was hatched. Furthermore, the young wasp is fond of fresh caterpillar steak, preferably from the living animal. So Mrs. Wasp must have a method of preserving the fresh living victim for her rapacious progeny next spring, while he is too young to hunt for himself, and while the caterpillars are still securely hiding in their mummy cases, Mrs. Wasp finds the venturesome young caterpillar crawling somewhere, and pouncing upon him, carefully inserts her sting into the nerve ganglia that are located in a line along his dorsal surface. We don't know how she learned the exact location of the ganglia and that a few well-directed stabs will produce more effect than hundreds of misdirected thrusts in other parts of the body, but it is certainly true that she selects the very segments in which the ganglia are located to inflict the wound. And she had the location of these nerve centers for a long time before biologists made the discovery. What a fine thing it would be for the biologist if he could learn the secret of thus preserving living animals instead of the stiff, discolored and uninteresting alcoholic specimens. Then think of the economic value of such a discovery. Animals could be fattened in summer at much smaller expense and then injected and set away until needed. We would have no more difficulty in providing our armies with beef on the hoof, and fresh meat could be shipped at much less expense over long distances, as no ice would be necessary. We would have no more complaint of embalmed beef and putrid canned goods.

The common mud wasp that builds in old garrets fills his nest with a species of spider much relished by the young wasp and exhibits much judgment in supplying exactly the right number to provide for the growing wasp until he is able to sally forth and seize prey for himself. These spiders – often seventeen or eighteen of them – are stupefied in the same manner as in the case of the potter wasp, and are living when the young wasp begins his repast. This habit is peculiar to many species of wasp and is, I think, worthy of careful study. I wish I had space to tell of the almost fiendish ingenuity that certain parasites show in maintaining themselves at the expense of their hosts.

The ground hog has a knack of spending his winter in a way that is at once economical and pleasant. They generally hibernate in pairs, rolling themselves up into balls. They do not seem to breathe or to perform any of the life functions during their long six months' sleep. There is, I fear, no foundation of fact for the ancient fiction of the ground hog appearing and making weather

prognostications on the second of February. A gentleman writing in the New York Sun of some years since says: "I took the trouble once to dig into a woodchuck's burrow on Candlemas day, and a warm, cloudy day it was; just such a day when the ground hog is said to come out of his hole and stay out. I found two woodchucks in the burrow, with no more signs of life about them than if they had been shot and killed. From all outward appearances I could have taken them out and had a game of football with them without their knowing it."

Nor is it true that hibernating animals live upon their accumulated fat, for digestion, as well as other active life processes, ceases. Hibernating animals always begin their long sleep upon an empty stomach, and food injected into their stomach is not digested. The fat disappears, it is true, but it is not in any strict sense digested. Any experienced hunter is aware that unless the entrails are removed from the shot rabbit the fat will disappear from about the kidneys. The fat may, and no doubt does, assist in some way in the long sleep. It may act as fuel to keep up the right living temperature. At any rate, it is true that hibernating animals eat voraciously and grow very fat just before they go to sleep. It is a peculiar fact that many hibernating animals bring forth their young during this period. This is especially true of woodchucks and bears. It is a common experience with hunters that only male bears are killed during the winter season.

Mr. Andrew Fuller of Ridgewood, New Jersey, according to the article above quoted, had an interesting experience with a pair of Rocky Mountain ground squirrels. After missing them for a month he accidentally found them curled up under some straw, apparently frozen stiff. He brought them to the house to show his wife the misfortune that had befallen his pets. Soon they seemed to thaw out and scampered about as lively as ever. No sooner were they put out in the cold than they resumed their sleep, which continued all winter, their bodies maintaining a fairly constant temperature, seldom falling below three degrees above the freezing point of water. They came out in the spring as chipper as if they had been asleep but one night. Many hibernating animals will if wakened by being placed in a warm room, eat eagerly, but they soon show a desire to resume their nap.

The Loir, a peculiar little native of Senegal, never hibernates in its native clime, but every specimen brought to Europe becomes torpid when exposed to cold. The common land tortoise – wherever he may be and he is a voracious eater of almost anything – always goes to sleep in November, and wakes some time in May.

Just as in the north numerous animals hibernate upon approach of cold, so in the south there are species that may be said to estivate during the hottest weather. While the northern animals curl up so as to retain heat, his southern cousin straightens out as much as possible to allow the heat to escape from all parts of the body.

But it was not my intention to write an essay upon hibernation and allied phenomena, but merely to speak of it as a subject that should be investigated. What a splendid arrangement it would be for the poor, the sick, and the melancholy folk if they could just hibernate for six months occasionally.

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.