VARIOUS

BIRDS AND NATURE, VOL. 10 NO. 1 [JUNE 1901]

Various

Birds and Nature, Vol. 10 No. 1 [June 1901]

Various

Birds and Nature, Vol. 10 No. 1 [June 1901] / Various — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Various
Birds and Nature, Vol. 10 No. 1 [June 1901]

JUNE

No price is set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays:
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;
The cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

– James Russell Lowell, "The Vision of Sir Launfal."

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE.
(*Icterus bullocki.*)

Bullock's Oriole, a species as handsome and conspicuous as the Baltimore Oriole, replaces it in the western portions of the United States and is likewise widely distributed. Its breeding range within our borders corresponds to its distribution. It is only a summer resident with us, arriving usually from its winter haunts in Mexico during the last half of March and, moving slowly northward, reaches the more northern parts of its breeding range from a month to six weeks later. It appears to be much rarer in the immediate vicinity of the seacoast than in the Great Basin regions, where it is common nearly everywhere, especially if sufficient water is found to support a few stunted cottonwoods and willows. During my extensive wanderings through nearly all the states west of the Rocky Mountains and extending from the Mexican to the British borders, I have met with this species almost everywhere in the lowlands and in some localities have found it very abundant. Like the Baltimore Oriole, it avoids densely wooded regions and the higher mountains. It is especially abundant in the rolling prairie country traversed here and there by small streams having their sources in some of the many minor mountain ranges which are such prominent features of the landscape in portions of Idaho, Washington and Oregon. These streams are fringed with groves of cottonwood, mixed with birch, willow and alder bushes, which are the favorite resorts of this Oriole during the breeding season. The immediate vicinity of water is, however, not considered absolutely necessary, as I have found it nesting fully a mile or more away from it on hillsides, the edges of table-lands and in isolated trees, or even in bushes. In Colorado it is said to be found at altitudes of over eight thousand feet, but as a rule it prefers much lower elevations.

The call notes of Bullock's Oriole are very similar to those of the Baltimore, but its song is neither as pleasing to the ear nor as clear and melodious as that of the latter. Its food is similar and consists principally of insects and a few wild berries.

The nest resembles that of the Baltimore Oriole, but as a rule it is not quite as pensile and many are more or less securely fastened by the sides as well as by the rim to some of the adjoining twigs. The general make-up is similar. As many of the sections where Bullock's Oriole breeds are still rather sparsely settled, less twine and such other material as may be picked up about human habitations enter into its composition. Shreds of wild flax and other fiber-bearing plants and the inner bark of the juniper and willow are more extensively utilized; these with horsehair and the down of plants, wool and fine moss furnish the inner lining of the nests. According to my observations, the birch, alder, cottonwood, eucalyptus, willow, sycamore, oak, pine and juniper furnish the favorite nesting sites; and in Southern Arizona and Western Texas it builds frequently in bunches of mistletoe growing on cottonwood and mesquite trees.

The nests are usually placed in low situation, from six to fifteen feet from the ground, but occasionally one is found fully fifty feet up. A very handsome nest, now before me, is placed among six twigs of mistletoe, several of these being incorporated in the sides of the nest, which is woven entirely of horsehair and white cotton thread, making a very pretty combination. The bottom of the nest is lined with wool.

The sexes are extremely devoted to each other and valiantly defend their eggs and young. I once saw a pair vigorously attack a Richardson's squirrel, which evidently was intent on mischief, and drive it out of the tree in which they had their nest. Both birds acted with the greatest courage and dashed at it repeatedly with fury, the squirrel beating a hasty retreat from the combined attack. The young are large enough to leave the nest in about two weeks and are diligently guarded and cared for by both parents until able to provide for themselves.

Charles Bendire.
From "Life Histories of North American Birds."

AN AFTERNOON IN THE CORNFIELD

Uncle Philip was 16 years old, tall and strong, with merry dark eyes, red cheeks and thick, soft, wavy, brown hair. Every day except Saturday he was in school. Sometimes on Saturdays he went in the woods botanizing or he rowed his pretty boat, "The Lorelei," upon the lake. But, often he went to his sister's, Mamma Bryant's, to spend the day and work upon the farm. His little nephew, Leicester, was always glad when he came, for Uncle Philip took him with him to the field or barn, told him funny stories and taught him to take notice of all the things he saw or heard. One beautiful day in October, after the corn had been all cut and was standing in big yellow stooks, making long rows through the stubble, Uncle Philip arrived early in the morning at Leicester's home. Leicester was still in bed when Uncle Philip came, and Mamma Bryant said to herself, "I must go and see if he is awake." But just as she was about to open the door, out came Leicester in his white pajamas, rubbing his eyes and looking a little bit sleepy.

"Come, Leicester," said his mamma, "I will help you dress and then you can have your breakfast. Uncle Philip has been here and he has gone to the cornfield south of the meadow. He hitched up Blotter and Little Gray on the new wagon and will drive back to dinner. Come with me and get ready for breakfast. After breakfast I want you to take little sister Keren with you and hunt for the eggs. If you are a good, pleasant boy this morning you may go this afternoon with uncle, and I will make some cookies for you to take in your lunch basket."

Leicester, who was generally a very good boy, promised to do as his mother desired.

Before dinner time Aunt Dorothy came, and it was decided that she, too, should go to the cornfield and take Keren with her.

By one o'clock dinner was over. Mamma Bryant had decided that Leicester's lunch basket was too small, so she had taken a peach basket, into which she put, among other good things to eat, some large red apples and ever so many fresh baked cookies.

Uncle Philip had driven up the roadway and was standing in the new wagon waiting for his passengers. Corn huskers never take a seat on their wagons, but Uncle Philip had laid a board across the wagon-box and on that Aunt Dorothy seated herself.

It was a warm, bright day and the wagon ride to the cornfield was delightful. Blotter and Little Gray were not a very handsome team, but they were good gentle horses and the children loved them. Blotter was a white horse with black spots on him, which made him look as if he had been used for a pen-wiper.

On the way to the cornfield a little rabbit ran out of the bushes by the roadside, but quickly hid himself again. The chipmunks stood on their hind feet in the tall, withered grass and watched the new wagon coming down the road and popped into their holes when they thought it had come too near. The plumy pappus of the golden rod, with great bunches of scarlet rose seeds, bursting pods of the satin plant and clusters of large red and chocolate oak leaves growing on year-old sprouts which had sprung up from the stumps of trees cut down the fall before made huge bouquets in the fence corners. While driving through the meadow the horses, which were pastured there, came up to neigh a good-day to their friends in the harness and trotted along for some time on both sides of the wagon and behind it. At last the cornfield was reached and Uncle Philip drove up to a corn stook.

"Look at that bird sitting on the wire fence," said Aunt Dorothy. "Isn't that a butcher bird?"

"Yes," said Uncle Philip, "that is a shrike, or butcher bird. I should not wonder if it were the same bird that followed me around this morning. I won't tell you what he did, but if you will watch him maybe you'll see something very interesting yourself."

Uncle Philip put on his husking gloves and began his work, taking the ears of corn from the stalks in the stook without disturbing it any more than he could help.

Aunt Dorothy remained sitting on her board in the wagon.

Leicester and Keren went to play in the meadow through which they had just driven, and they frightened the butcher bird so that he flew away from the fence and perched near the top of a tall cornstalk in a neighboring stook. Keren found a dandelion blossom and Leicester a wild rose, a bit of pale, pink beauty that had blossomed late and alone on a bush whose leaves were dusty and faded. The children went to a hickory tree expecting to find some nuts on the ground, but the squirrels had been there already and nothing was left except some nut-shells. Yes, there were three or four nuts, but when, by the aid of two stones, the children had cracked them, they found the meat inside all dried up and unfit to eat. The squirrels must have known this without cracking the nuts, otherwise they would not have left them as they did.

Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Philip were talking about the butcher bird.

"The butcher bird is found all over the world," said Aunt Dorothy, "and has different names in different countries."

"And it has been written about by men who lived a long, long time ago," said Uncle Philip, and he told Aunt Dorothy some of those men's names. But they are so long and hard to say I will not tell them here.

"The shrike is a cousin to the crow. Nearly all the crows have black feathers, but the butcher bird wears a different dress in France from the one he wears in England, and in India he has still another garb," said Aunt Dorothy.

"Yes," said Uncle Philip, "but all the shrikes everywhere have toothed bills."

By this time two more shrikes or butcher birds had joined the first one and all three were flying about impatiently from place to place.

"Just as if they were waiting for something to happen," said Aunt Dorothy.

"So they are," said Uncle Philip, who had finished husking the corn in his stook. "Call the children now; or I will," he said, and whistled and beckoned till Leicester and Keren came running to where he was.

"Now," he said, "look at that stunted old tree over there, children. Do you see the three butcher birds in it?"

Yes, every one saw the birds.

"Well, then," he said, "get into the wagon and keep watch of them. I am going to drive to the next corn stook," and away they went. After Uncle Philip had stopped the horses he told Aunt Dorothy and the children to sit together on the board with their backs to the horses and keep very still.

"I am going behind the corn stook and will pull it away as best I can from where it now stands. Watch the birds and the ground near the stook."

As soon as he had pulled away the cornstalks he stooped down and walked away some distance as quickly and quietly as he could. Then Aunt Dorothy and the children saw the butcher birds alight on the ground on which the cornstalks had been and catch young mice and moles. One of the birds took a mole to the wire fence near by and stuck it on a barb. Then he flew away, leaving it hanging there. He was going to catch some young mice to eat just then and save the mole for luncheon.

His claws were not strong enough to hold the mole while he could kill and eat it, but if he hung it on the wire fence he could use all his strength in tearing it to pieces with his strong toothed bill. Every one felt sorry for the poor mole, but all were glad to be able to see how the butcher bird gets his dinner.

Time went by and soon Uncle Philip was ready to move another bunch of cornstalks. Aunt Dorothy and the children prepared to watch again, for the butcher birds were still in the neighborhood and waiting anxiously for a chance to secure some more prey. This time there was a rat under the cornstalks and a bold butcher bird flew at him and tried to kill him. The rat, however, got away from his enemy in feathers. One of the butcher birds caught a mole and stuck it on a long thorn on a hawthorn tree.

"Let us have something to eat as well as the birds," said Uncle Philip. So he left Blotter and Little Gray standing in the field – they were never known to run away – and all went to a pleasant

spot in the meadow and ate the luncheon which Mama Bryant had sent in the peach basket. Oh, how good those cookies tasted to Leicester and Keren!

Those were happy passengers who rode home that evening on the yellow ears of corn. Keren had found one red ear and she took it home and gave it a place by the side of her pet playthings.

At supper time Leicester told his papa what they had seen the butcher birds do, and Aunt Dorothy said: “You must tell about it in school, Leicester; it will make a good Monday morning story.”

That evening after Uncle Philip and Aunt Dorothy had gone home and the children had said their little evening prayer Leicester kissed his mother and told her he would try to be a good boy every day for a whole week. “And I hope I will have as good a time next Saturday as I have had to-day,” said he.

And all night long the little stars peeping through the windows saw two happy little faces asleep upon their pillows.

Mary Grant O’Sheridan.

THE RETURN OF THE BIRDS

I hear from many a little throat
A warble interrupted long;
I hear the robin's flute-like note,
The bluebird's slenderer song.

Brown meadows and the russet hill,
Not yet the haunt of grazing herds,
And thickets by the glimmering rill
Are all alive with birds.

– *William Cullen Bryant.*

HOUSE-HUNTING IN ORCHARD TOWN

’Tis up and down
In Orchard town,
When airs with bloom are scented,
You’ll hardly find
To suit your mind
A nook that is not rented.

The old sweet-bough,
They all allow,
The robin first selected.
“Our home is here,
Good cheer, good cheer,
All other claims rejected.”

“Chick-a-dee-dee,
Don’t come to me!”
The titmouse is refusing,
“We’ve leased this tree,
We’ll friendly be,
But say you’re late in choosing.”

“Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet,”
Across the street
The yellow-birds are moving.
“Chip-chip-a-chee;
So dear is she!”
He scarce can work for loving.

On lower floor,
Beside her door,
The wren is surely scolding.
If one but glance
She cries, “No chance
To rent the flat I’m holding.”

To hear her scold,
The sparrow bold
And jay, beside her dwelling,
Cry, “Tschip, tschip, chee!”
“Tease! tease! say we!”
The noise and chatter swelling.

On orchard wall,
To quip and call,
A stranger gay is listening;

His mate can hear
In meadow near,
Where daisy-birds are glistening.

Oh, Lady-link!
Ho, ho! just think!
To nest in trees what folly,
When they might be,
Like you and me,
In Daisy-land so jolly!

Down Pipin-way
Where branches sway,
An oriole hammock swings.
Mistress starling
And kingbird's darling.
Rest near with brooding wings.

If you should go
Down Blossom-row,
Which runs right through the center,
At each day,
In morning gray,
You'd hear from every renter.

For handed down
In Orchard town,
'Tis quite an ancient notion,
To wake the earth
With song and mirth,
Such joy is their devotion.

– Isabel Goodhue.

THE SANDERLING
(*Calidris arenaria.*)

By the beach border, where the breeze
Comes freighted from the briny seas,
By sandy bar and weedy rock
I frequent meet thy roving flock;
Now hovering o'er the bending sedge,
Nor gather'd at the ocean edge;
Probing the sand for shrimps and shells,
Or worms marine in hidden cells.

– Isaac McClellan.

This little shore or beach bird is sometimes called the White or Surf Snipe, and the Ruddy Plover. It breeds only in the colder portions of the northern hemisphere and migrates southward, even beyond the equator where it makes its home during the winter months. It frequents chiefly those regions near the surf-beaten shores of the oceans. It is also a common visitor to the beaches of larger inland waters. On these shores its beautiful form and habits are very noticeable. It walks and runs in a dignified and graceful manner as it chases the receding water searching for its food.

The pure white of the plumage of the under parts of the bird is a striking characteristic as they reflect the sunlight during flight. It is a silent bird and it sometimes appears alone, though it is usually seen in flocks and is frequently associated with other species of the snipe family. Regarding its habits, some one has said: "When feeding along the extreme verge of the ocean it is pleasant to watch its active movements when advancing or retreating with the influx of the sea. It is naturally very unwary and regards man with less suspicion than most of our snipes. When a flock is fired into, those which survive rise with a low whistling note, perform a few evolutions and presently resume their occupation with as much confidence as previously exhibited."

The feet of the Sanderling are unlike the other members of its family, being without a fourth toe, entirely divided and without a membrane. This indicates that it frequents firm surfaces and that it is fitted for running and walking upon the long, shelving beaches over which the tides and surf roll, leaving an abundance of its particular food.

The nest of the Sanderling, rudely constructed of dried grass and decayed leaves, is placed in a depression in the ground so situated as to be protected by the natural vegetation of the region. The eggs, usually three or four in number, have an ashy or greenish brown ground color and are finely spotted with different shades of brown.

The food of the Sanderling consists mainly of sea worms, small bivalve shells and crustaceans, though it will also eat buds and insects. It would seem as if its hunger was never satiated – always busy, always moving. These expressions describe its habits, as with its fellows and the other snipes with which it associates, it seeks its food in the wake of the retreating wave and turning, runs before the incoming water which seldom engulfs it.

For those who are so fortunate as to be located near the feeding grounds there can be no more interesting recreation than to sit on the beach and watch the peculiar antics of these delicate creatures. Frequently, without an apparent reason an entire flock will rise as if in answer to a signal and, after executing a few turns alight, again resume the occupation it had left.

PARTNERS

No doubt every one knows the Lichens, the greenish gray growths, sometimes like rosettes or clusters of leaves or of fruit, on tree trunks or the gray rocks by the water, and even on the ground and old wood. Their forms are various and often graceful, and mingled with their greenish gray are many brighter colors, giving a rich tone to the rough surfaces they cover and adorn. But I dare say that most of us have thought of a Lichen as a single plant. It is not so, though it looks so exactly like one in its close union. It is a partnership, indeed; generally what looks like a single Lichen is a colony of partners keeping house together, or a manufacturing firm, if you like that expression of their business better. The partners are also kindred, or were so, in the past.

For there was a time long ago when there was only one big family of plants, the Algae; the brown Algae or seaweeds known as kelps often form the "wrack" or tangle of weeds like long leaves or branching stems, with berry or fruit-like bladders, thrown on the coast in great masses by a storm; and the red Algae, or the beautiful fern-like and coral-like seaweeds that grow far down in the deep sea. There are also the green Algae, found in fresh water, or even on damp tree trunks and rocks. They have many odd forms. One kind, called a pond scum, is a frothy, slippery mass of spirally wound bands, floating in ponds or still water; another, called "green felt," is found in water also, and has egg-like things from which spores or seed-like bodies escape to form new plants. They have filaments at the bottom, like roots, that are called "holdfasts." Lastly, there are blue-green Algae, jelly-like masses found on trees, rocks, damp earth or floating as green slimes in fresh water. Most water plants are active and independent. They are on the upward road, for though they have not distinct stems, roots, leaves or fruit, their different parts, as I have already said, show a decided likeness to these, especially their "holdfasts" to roots and their air-bladders to fruit. The exquisite red seaweeds are as graceful in form and vivid in color as many flowers.

There is a remarkable foreshadowing of the moral law even among these early growths. Some have shirked their work, which was to absorb waste substances, and manufacture these into organized plant food. They tried to live on other growths, to the injury of the latter, and even sank to feeding on dead substances. They lost the green chlorophyll, which is necessary for manufacturing, though the red and brown Algae do not show its presence because their other coloring is more vivid. But it is present all the same with every busy, self-respecting plant. The lazy, pauper growths deteriorated more and more and at last were no longer Algae at all, but Fungi. They could not live by themselves; their only chance was to get active or well-stocked partners. As the Alga developed more and more into a likeness of a perfect plant, so the Fungus grew less like one. The white furry "mould" on bread or preserved fruit, the "mildew" on grapes and lilac leaves, the "black knot" of cherry and plum, the "ergot" of rye, the "rust" of wheat, do not look like plants unless you study them through a magnifying glass. Nor do the "slime moulds" or the mushrooms, toadstools, puff-balls and truffles bear much resemblance to flowers. Some of these, however, are both pretty and useful.

In the case of a Lichen the partners really seem to be of use to each other. The Fungus is not a mere pauper living on his more active kinsman. If you examine a Lichen you will find a large number of transparent threads, and in their meshes lie the green Algae, giving the whole a greenish tint. The little cups or discs of the Fungus that appear on the surface are lined with vivid colors, and have delicate little bags or sacs, with seed-like spores inside. The Fungus supplies a shelter from extreme cold, and also holds water in which the Algae finds raw material. It is like a man and wife housekeeping, the man providing the house and the raw stuff – flour, eggs, sugar, etc. – and the wife makes these materials into food. Plants, by aid of their green stuff, work over the carbon and other materials they get from air and water and make sugar and starch, or organized food. This is their manufacture and they must have an abundance of light to do it well, so when the sea Algae grow to be immense kelps or seaweed, hundreds of feet long, they are kept afloat by their air bladders. Now,

it is true the Fungus in our Lichen could not live at all without its busy Algae, which it holds in its transparent filaments, but it is not a useless partner, so we will not call it evil names. I think you will be surprised to hear, after all the warning given by these dependent and generally worthless idlers in the plant world, some of the beautiful and blooming flowers have fallen into their bad habits and are regular underground thieves.

For the Gerardia or false foxglove has established no partnership; it is plain stealing. It still works, so it has not lost its green of the leaf, or the purple and gold of its flower, but it steals the materials for its work. When it becomes utterly idle and useless it will lose all its color and be like the ghostly white Indian pipes that grow in the shadowy pine woods.

It is interesting to know how it steals. In the dark basement chambers underground the root servants of the plant move slowly in a certain circle that corresponds to the circle of light that the branches describe overhead. Within this space they gather chemicals from the soil and store up moisture, sending these by the sap up their elevators to the well-lighted leaves, where the manufacturing of starch and sugar goes busily on. Now, the Gerardia, being too trifling to collect its own stuff, sends suckers into the roots of other plants and greedily absorbs their contents. That is the reason it is so hard to transplant the Gerardia – its roots are enmeshed and entangled so in other roots below ground. A very odd thing sometimes happens to it. In the dark the roots occasionally blunder and tap other roots of the same Gerardia, just as if a pickpocket in the dark were by mistake to put his hand slyly into his own pocket and steal his own purse.

Ella F. Mosby.

O violets tender,
Your shy tribute render!
Tie round your wet faces your soft hoods of blue;
And carry your sweetness,
Your dainty completeness,
To some tired hand that is longing for you.

– May Riley Smith.

THE GREAT NORTHERN SHRIKE
(*Lanius borealis.*)

Of the great family Laniidae, the shrikes, of the order Passeres, we have in America only two species, the Great Northern Shrike, Lanius borealis, and the loggerhead shrike, which has been dealt with in a previous article. The name of the Great Northern Shrike is much more than a mouthful, and is all out of proportion to the size and importance of the bird, though when I intimate it lacks in importance I by no means wish to say that it lacks in interest.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.