

VARIOUS

BIRDS ILLUSTRATED BY
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY,
VOL 3. NO 6, JUNE 1898

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JUNE

"What is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days."

YES, Lowell, in a few words, describes the month of June, or, at least, he indicates something of it. But, still, what are perfect days? We look for them in April, when the birds, many of them, certainly the most attractive of them, return from the south, and we find ourselves, when we visit the woods and parks, disappointed that the sun does not shine, that the air is not soft and balmy, and that the grass and leaves and buds do not show themselves in spring attire, for, on the contrary, we find winter lingering distressingly near, that the merry Warblers are silent, and that the "greenery of young Nature" is very slow to indicate her presence or even her early coming. We pull our

wrappings about us and go home. April past, we then fancy that her older sister, May, beautiful in literary imagery – for do we not recall descriptive visions of May days of long ago, when the human blossoms danced about the May pole, lolled luxuriantly in the soft, tender grass, hid themselves in the deep-leaved trees, and at last gratified our imaginations with the belief that she is altogether perfect? Unfortunately a chill takes possession of us and we return home disconsolate. May also has disappointed us. We have had an experience which we shall not forget. We have seen and recognized many birds, but they have not sung for us. They have been, as they almost always are, influenced by the elements. And why should they not be? They have but one suit of clothes. Have you observed the Robin in the early spring? He is worth watching. We watched a fine specimen in south Washington Park in March last. It was a comparatively mild day for the windy month. He perched on a lateral limb of a leafless tree a few yards from Sixtieth street. Whether he saw us or not we could not be sure, as he took little notice beyond saying *Toot-tut, toot-tut!* He ruffled his suit and seemed as fat as feathers could make him. They seemed as important to him as were buffalo robes to the sleighing parties of a few days before. Still he was observant and seemed to be looking for stray food that would warm him up. We had some fresh crackers in our pocket, which we broke into fine fragments, and scattered, withdrawing several yards away. To our surprise, not only the Robin but several Nuthatches, some Brown Creepers, a number

of English Sparrows, three or four Bluejays, and a gray Squirrel, (from whence he came I could not conceive, there being no large tree near in which he might have had a winter home) came with great promptitude to feed on the unexpected offering. Others, no doubt, have had this experience. Does it not suggest that the birds which remain with us the whole year round – finding, of course, during the spring, summer, and fall, sufficient for their wants, – should be looked after a little bit, if only that they may be permitted to escape from the sometime unusually severe storms of winter? Nature has provided them with ample feathery protection from her ordinary moods, but when she breaks out in icy blasts and snow that covers the very face of her they suffer and they perish.

But April, with its weather uncertainties – although it has long been said and believed that its showers bring May flowers – with its disappointments to all those who wish that the balm of mild breezes would come – longed for by the invalid and the convalescent, the lover of nature who would go forth to visit her and to court her, April seems a sort of humbug. And is May much better? How many days, "so calm, so sweet, so bright, the bridal of the earth and sky," come in May? A few do come, and we remember them. But, as Lowell says, perfect days are rare, even in June, when, if ever, come "perfect days." We think that Lowell nevertheless lived a little too far north to entitle him to state, even poetically, that perfect days are only to be enjoyed in June. Had he, with the writer, lived in southern Ohio, on the Little

Miami river, and gone fishing in the month of May, he would, we think, have changed his mind. Or had he read the little less than perfect poem of W. H. Venable, which, it may be, however, was written later than the verses of our, many think, greatest poet, "June on the Miami," he might have put aside his books and his criticisms and his philosophy, and sought out the beautiful river of western history – then the sweetest stream that flowed in America, and even now, notwithstanding the giant sycamores have largely disappeared and the waters of the river have greatly diminished in volume, leaving only holes and ripples, – and modified his views of days perfect only in June. There were perfect days in May on the Miami. There were perfect days on all the streams that made it. The birds were multitudinous; they sang in chorus; they were, indeed, almost infinite in number – for the naturalist and the collector were unknown – the birds were *natural* residents, without fear of man, building their nests close to his habitations. A year or two ago we stopped off the cars in May in order to recall, if possible, in the shadow of a few remaining trees at a familiar place on the vanishing river, in the expected voices of the well known native birds, the delightful far-gone years. Verily we had our reward, but it was not satisfactory. It seems to us we should do our best, through legislation and personal influence to protect and multiply the birds.

– C. C. Marble.

OUR NEIGHBOR

We've a charming new neighbor moved in the next door;
He is hardly new either, he's lived there before;
I should think he had come here two summers or more;
His winters he spends far away.

He is handsome and stylish, most fine to behold,
In his glossy black coat and his vest of bright gold;
He is "proud of his feathers," so I have been told,
And I half believe what people say.

His wife is a beauty, he's fond of her, too;
He calls her his "Judy;" I like it, don't you?
And he sings every day all the long summer through,
Yet he is not a bit of a bore.

For he's a musician of wonderful power;
I could list to his beautiful voice by the hour,
As he sings to his wife in their green, shady bower
In the elm tree that shadows my door.

He's a sociable neighbor, we like him full well,
Although we've not called yet, and cannot quite tell
All he says, tho' his voice is as clear as a bell,
And as sweet as the notes of a psalm.

Do you ask what his name is? Our dear little Sue
Was anxious to know it, and asked him it, too,
And this was his answer, I'll tell it to you —
"My name is Sir Oriole, ma'am."

— *L. A. P.*, in *Our Dumb Animals*.

BIRDS' NESTS

THE nest of the mourning dove. – The nest of the Carolina or Mourning Dove, which authorities place on the horizontal limb of a tree, is not always found in this situation, as I can testify. Last year, while wandering in early May through a piece of low woodland in Amherst, Mass., my eye was caught by a pair of well-grown youngsters covered with bluish pin feathers. The nest containing them – a loose affair of small sticks and leaves – was placed on the ground, or rather on the decayed base of a stump, surrounded by a ring of second-growth birches. Immediately suspecting their identity, I merged myself in the landscape after the manner of bird-lovers, and was soon rewarded by a sight of the parent Doves, who came sweeping down from a neighboring tree, uttering their pensive call-note. The pair had been frequent visitors about the lawn and drive-way for a few weeks previous.

I have heard of another similar instance of ground-nesting on the part of Wild Doves.

– *Dora Read Goodale.*

Wrens – That clumsy little bunch of animated feathers, the Wren, is undoubtedly the most contented of dwellers on the face of the earth. In country or city he is never homeless. Anything hollow, with an aperture large enough to admit his jaunty little self is sufficient, and so long as it remains undisturbed he is

a happy tenant. The variety of sites selected by this agile little creature, is greater than that of any other bird.

It has been said that "a Wren will build in anything from a bootleg to a bomb-shell." And this seems to be so. Many an urchin can testify to having found the neat nest of the Wren in his cast-off shoe or a tin can, and nests filled with Wren eggs are frequent finds in odd places around the battle fields of the South.

The home of a Wren, a few miles from Petersburg, Va., furnishes the strangest case in the matter of queer habitations yet discovered. This country is the site of one of the most dramatic epochs of the civil war, and frequently the bones of unburied soldiers are picked up. Recently a rusty old skull was found in which one of these Wrens chose a shelter. The skull, when found, was hidden in a patch of shrubbery. The interior of the one-time pate was carefully cleaned out, and nestled in the basin of the bony structure was the birth-place of many a baby Wren. The skull made a perfect domicile. A bullet hole in the rear formed a window. An eyeless socket was the exit and entrance to the grim home. It is easy to imagine that many a family feud had its origin in the desire of others to possess so secure a home.

"I have myself," says A. W. Anthony, of San Diego, Cal., "watched Cactus Wrens in New Mexico carrying grass and thickening the walls of their old nests in October, for winter use, and have found them hidden in their nests during a snowstorm in November. But there is another trait in bird nature that I have seen very little of in print – that of building nests before or after

the proper season, seemingly for the sole purpose of practice or pastime, the out-cropping of an instinct that prompts ambitious birds to build out of season even though they know that their work will be lost."

BRÜNNICH'S MURRE

THIS species, which inhabits the coasts and islands of the north Atlantic and eastern Arctic ocean, and the Atlantic coast south to New Jersey, has the same general habits as the common Murre, which, like all the Auks, Murres and, Puffins, is eminently gregarious, especially in the breeding season. Davie says that tens of thousands of these birds congregate to make their nests on the rocky islands, laying single eggs near one another on the shelves of the cliffs. The birds sit side by side, and although crowded together never make the least attempt to quarrel. Clouds of birds may be seen circling in the air over some huge, rugged bastion, "forming a picture which would seem to belong to the imaginary rather than the realistic." They utter a syllable which sounds exactly like *murre*. The eggs are so numerous as to have commercial value, and they are noted for their great variation in markings and ground color. On the Farallones islands, where the eggs were until recently collected for market purposes, the Murres nest chiefly in colonies, the largest rookery covering a hillside and surrounding cliffs at West End, and being known as the Great Rookery. To observe the egg-gatherers, says an eye-witness, is most interesting. "As an egger climbs his familiar trail toward the birds a commotion becomes apparent among the Murres. They jostle their neighbors about the uneven rocks and now and then with open bills utter

a vain protest and crowd as far as possible from the intruder without deserting their eggs. But they do not stay his progress and soon a pair, then a group, and finally, as the fright spreads, the whole vast rookery take wing toward the ocean. In the distance, perhaps, we see, suspended over a cliff by a slender rope, an egger gathering the eggs from along the narrow shelves of rock, seeming indifferent to the danger of the work." All this is now changed, the authorities having intervened to prevent the wholesale destruction of the eggs. The Western Gull, however, is another enemy of the Murre (the California species;) it carries off and devours both eggs and young. Mr. Bryant says the Gull picks up a Murre's egg bodily and carries it away in his capacious mouth, but does not stick his bill into it to get hold, as is stated by some writers, whose observations must have referred to the eggs already broken by the Gulls or eggers.

The eggs of Brunnich's Murre cannot be distinguished from those of the common species. They show a wonderful diversity of color, varying from white to bluish or dark emerald-green. Occasionally unmarked specimens are found, but they are usually handsomely spotted, blotched, and lined in patterns of lilac, brown, and black over the surface.

THE CANADA GOOSE

Just a common Wild Goose of North America. In the spring and fall you will see great flocks of us flying overhead, an old Gander in the lead, crying *honk, honk* as loud as he can. Our nests are only simple hollows in the sand, on the shores of lakes and rivers, around which are placed a few sticks and twigs, the five eggs laid on a layer of gray down.

"You're a Goose."

That's a polite way some people have of calling another stupid, but there are Geese and Geese as well as men and men. I am going to tell you about one Goose that dearly loved her master, and considering the way he treated her you may conclude she *was* a stupid Goose after all.

Well, this particular Goose took such a fancy to her owner that she would follow him about like a dog, even to the village, where she would wait outside the barber's or other shop which he might enter.

People noticed this, and instead of calling the farmer by his proper name began to speak of him as "Mr. Goosey." This angered the man and he ordered the poor loving Goose to be locked up in the poultry-yard. Shortly after he went to an adjoining town to attend a meeting; in the midst of the business he felt something warm and soft rubbing against his legs; he looked down and there stood his Goose, with protruding neck

and quivering wings, gazing up at him with pleasure and fondness unutterable.

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