

# VARIOUS

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Various

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## Содержание

“HARK, HARK, THE LARK!”	5
THE LITTLE GREEN HERON	6
THE HAND THAT STRUCK THEE DOWN	8
THE GOBBLER WHO WAS LONESOME	9
THE VARIED THRUSH	10
MISSOURI SKYLARK	11
THE MASTER’S PROTEST	13
THE SHORT-BILLED MARSH WREN	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

**Various**  
**Birds and Nature Vol. 11 No. 5 [May**  
**1902] Illustrated by Color Photography**

**“HARK, HARK, THE LARK!”**

A little lyric, as clear as water,  
Sweeter voiced than the river daughter,  
Or Dryope's moan,  
Rang from the heart of the truest singer,  
And straight the sound was the magic bringer  
Of joys unknown.

For night had fallen and day had risen,  
And, breaking through his eastern prison,  
The glad sun shone;  
And all was fragrant and sweet with morning,  
And to the sky, the sad earth scorning,  
The lark had flown.

And, faintly heard from the coast of heaven,  
The song of the glad strong seraphs seven  
Was earthward blown,  
And echoed, with a strange completeness,  
(As a small bloom treasures infinite sweetness),  
In the lyric's tone.

And the marvelous freedom of the dawning  
Breathed large through the gates of life,  
Wide yawning,  
Far open thrown;  
And the trembling thrill of incarnation  
Awoke the earth to the new creation  
Of Beauty's own.

– *Edward O. Jackson.*

## THE LITTLE GREEN HERON

(*Ardea virescens*.)

Oh, give me back my thicket by the marsh!  
Let me see the herons wade  
In the watery glade,  
And let me see the water-fowl go by  
Glimmering against the sky.

– *Maurice Thompson, "In Captivity."*

The Ardeidae, or the family of herons, egrets and bitterns, includes about seventy-five species, which are world wide in their distribution, though much more common in temperate regions. So widely scattered are the species of this family, whose Latin name means heron, that most persons who are deeply interested in the study of bird life are more or less familiar with their habits. The large size of the herons, together with their long bills, necks and legs, renders them conspicuous and demands more than a passing glance from even the casual observer. Many bodies of water in retired locations will harbor at the proper season one or more species of this interesting family.

One of the smallest of the herons, and one of the most common in many localities, is the Little Green Heron, familiarly known to the rural Hoosier boy as the "Schytelope," and to others as the "Poke." It is not the purpose to give a description of this bird; those of our readers – if there be any – who are not familiar with it will find minute descriptions of it in all the standard manuals. However, a few observations on its nesting and feeding habits may be of some value and interest.

In central Indiana the Little Green Heron arrives from its winter residence in Florida, or farther southward, about the last of April, and immediately begins nesting, selecting, if convenient, second growth timber, especially if there be a thicket of undergrowth. But if these conditions be not at hand, it seems to prefer, as a site for its nest, an old abandoned orchard, or at least one somewhat remote from human habitation, but not very far distant from a stream or pond. In the fork of some tree ten to twenty feet above ground is collected a considerable sized but irregular and loose bundle of rough sticks. In this by the middle of May, or at times even earlier, it lays from three to six greenish blue eggs, about an inch and a half long by an inch and a quarter in diameter. The period of incubation cannot be long, as some years young almost ready to fly can be found before the last of May. We have never found more than one nest in the same immediate vicinity, but, according to Ridgway, it sometimes nests in colonies.

For the remainder of the summer this is a social bird, at least to the extent that the whole family remain together, wading the water, stalking along the banks or perching on trees, bushes and logs. At this time it displays some curiosity when a person comes warily into its haunts. Its long neck is stretched to its limit as the bird endeavors to keep an eye on the intruder, and at the slightest suspicious movement on the part of the latter, its long wings are raised in readiness for flight. Remain perfectly quiet, however, and it again resumes its occupation, apparently unconcerned; but let a sudden movement be made, and then it awkwardly but quickly flies away, uttering meanwhile a discordant squawk.

It is quite interesting to see one of these herons feeding. It will wade along the edge of a pond or stream, very slowly lifting its feet out of the water and carefully putting them down again. Its neck is folded so that it almost disappears, the head being drawn back against the shoulders. At last it sees an

unwary minnow swimming lazily along. Slowly and carefully it leans its body forward and downward toward the water, the long legs looking and acting almost like stilts; still more slowly the head with its long, stout beak moves cautiously toward the water surface, very much like a young turkey seeks to capture a grasshopper. Then suddenly, as if a spring had been set free in its neck, the head is thrust downward until the beak, or more, disappears beneath the surface, but only to reappear immediately with the struggling minnow or sunfish between its mandibles.

The prey secured, the bird now walks to an open spot on the bank several feet away, if possible, from the water so that the fish cannot flop back into its native element. With a blow or two from the bird's bill the fish is stunned and in another moment has started head first down the heron's throat. As the latter stretches its neck, the descent of the fish is plainly to be seen until it reaches the body of the bird. If the heron is not yet satisfied with its meal, the same performance is repeated until at last it flies to some overhanging limb – usually a dead one – of a tree where it wipes its bill and finally flies away. By the last of August or first of September it has gone on its southern journey, and Indiana knows it no more till spring.

*Henry H. Lane.*

## THE HAND THAT STRUCK THEE DOWN

The hand that struck thee down  
Could not have known  
That thou hadst songs unsung  
And flights unflown.

But ours will be the loss —  
No more at morn  
Will sound the reveillé  
From thy wee horn.

Thy form will not be one  
That flits the air,  
As one that trusts in God  
And knows no care.

Then when the shadows creep,  
And light grows dim,  
We'll list, but never hear,  
Thy vesper-hymn.

The hand that struck thee down  
Could not have known  
That thou hadst songs unsung  
And flights unflown.

— *J. D. LaBarre Van Schoonhoven.*

# THE GOBBLER WHO WAS LONESOME

## A HISTORICAL FACT

Turkeys are social creatures and, like some boys and girls, do not like to be left for any length of time to find their food or their pleasures alone.

Big Tom was a mammoth gobbler of the bronze family, which stands high in Turkeydom. Big Tom loved to have a group of admiring mates and social equals about when he spread his jaw and sang his song. Some taller bipeds who spoke a different language said that his song of “gobble-obble-obble” was not pleasing. This remark may have been the reason why Big Tom’s wattles grew so scarlet each time he sang, but it is to be doubted.

When the spring days had grown long three hen turkeys came off their nests with broods of turkey chicks, too valuable to the farmer to be left entirely to the turkey mother’s judgment and care. Hence these various broods, numbering in all twenty-seven chicks, were penned into tiny homes and fed on food furnished by their master.

Big Tom watched these proceedings for about one week, and then evidently rebelled at the taking of his kingdom away from him.

He first persuaded one brood to follow him into a field where grasshoppers bounded and abounded. This brood he kept over night housed under his great wings. His success pleased him, for in a few days a second brood was discovered to be missing, and two hen turkeys were idling away their time talking over their troubles or happiness through the bars of their wooden prisons.

But the climax was reached when in a distant field a few days later Big Tom was found chaperoning a party of twenty-seven young tourist turkeys of a very tender age, through a field where insect food was too plentiful for the farmer’s profit, but just right for sturdy bronze turkeys, both young and old.

The farmer attempted to drive his majesty, Big Tom, back to his quarters near the barn, but the young turks disappeared at their father’s first warning cluck or signal, and Big Tom showed plainly that he resented interference with his own plans for his children’s future.

The farmer returned to the house alone and finding the three turkey hens calmly gossiping through the slatted fronts of their coops, gave them their liberty, and went back to planting his crop in the distant field, where he found Big Tom happy with his party of young adventurers.

Big Tom never allowed one turkey chick to return night or day to its coop or its mother. In the fall, the farmer and his boys counted twenty-seven well grown turkeys perched on the fence back of the barn, with his majesty, their father, half way down the line, where his eyes could take in all their doings.

The hen turkeys had gone about their own work, raised other broods and brought them up in coops with various losses, but Big Tom of the red wattles has always been celebrated in that locality from that year down to the present date as the best manager of a turkey ranch ever known.

At Thanksgiving time Big Tom’s good qualities were enumerated by a large party gathered at the farmer’s table, and if his majesty could have heard the flattering remarks his pride would have perhaps caused him to give back an answering “gobble-obble-obble.”

*Mary Catherine Judd.*

## THE VARIED THRUSH

(*Hesperocichla naevia*.)

The Varied Thrush is one of the most beautiful members of the family of thrushes. Its range is somewhat limited as it frequents only the coastal regions of the northwestern part of North America. In winter, however, it may be found in California and is occasionally seen as far south as Lower California. As a straggler, it is sometimes noticed in the New England states.

Mr. Mitchell says that the Varied Thrush reaches the Columbia river in its southward flight some time in October. He also states that “at this time they flit through the forests in small flocks, usually frequenting the low trees, on which they perch in perfect silence and are at times very timorous and difficult to approach, having all the sly sagacity of the robin.” In fact this bird, which is often called the Western Robin, is not only much more shy and retiring than our well known eastern friend, but their song is also very different, “consisting only of five or six notes in a minor key and a scale regularly descending.” Mr. Townsend speaks of the song as being louder, sharper and quicker than that of the robin and adds that its song just before its northward flight, in the spring, is pleasant. Its song is seldom heard except from the tree tops, and in summer, as a rule, only from the deeper forests.

Dr. Suckley describes the Varied Thrush as he studied it in Oregon and Washington. He says: “In winter it is a shy bird, not generally becoming noticeable in the open districts until after a fall of snow, when many individuals may be seen along the sand beaches near salt water. They are at such times tame and abundant. I suppose that they are driven out of the woods during the heavy snows by hunger. It may then frequently be found in company with the robin, with which it has many similar habits. At this time of the year it is a very silent bird, quite tame and will allow near approach. It appears to be fond of flying by short stages in a desultory manner, sometimes alighting on the ground, at other times on fences, bushes or trees.”

Mr. Cooper, speaking of the bird as he found it near San Francisco, says that they begin to appear in October, when “they are usually timid, but toward spring come more familiarly around houses and utter their shrill, low notes, which seem much more distant than the bird itself really is. If pursued they hide, and sit unmovable among the foliage.”

The bird is also known by several other names, such as the Spotted, Golden, Painted or Columbia Robin or Thrush, and sometimes it is called the Thrush-like Mockingbird. A marked characteristic of the male is the black crescent on the breast.

Mr. Davie describes the nest as found by Dr. Minor in Alaska: “Its base and periphery are composed of an elaborate basket-work of slender twigs. Within these is an inner nest consisting of an interweaving of fine dry grasses and long gray lichen.” The eggs are said to be a light greenish-blue, slightly sprinkled with spots of a dark umber-brown.

## MISSOURI SKYLARK

(*Anthus spragueii*.)

“What thou art we know not  
What is most like thee?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see,  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.”

– *Shelley*.

When the umber skylark is struck into glory of plume and of song by the rising sun, we can conceive that the song is indeed “the nearest approach, in animal nature, to the ringing of the hydrogen bells in the physics of light,” and that when “the music soars within the little lark and the lark soars,” he is almost an involuntary agent, the song, like the summer, owing its creation, as George MacDonald tells, to

“The sun that rises early,  
Shining, shining all day rarely;  
Drawing up the larks to meet him,  
Earth’s bird-angels, wild to greet him.”

Although the skylark, more than any other of the aerial tribes, “holds the middle rank ’twixt heaven and earth, on the last verge of mortal being stand,” the fate of the Missouri skylark is more unhappy than that of a prophet, for, being so little known in comparison with his deserts, he is almost without honor in his own country or any other. Yet it was so long ago as May 19, 1843, that Audubon, near the headwaters of the Missouri, celebrated in his journal the glad tidings of his discovery: “Harris and Bell have returned, and, to my delight and utter astonishment, have brought two new birds, one a lark, small and beautiful.” And again, on June 22, he writes: “The little new lark, that I have named for Sprague, has almost all the habits of the skylark of Europe. Whilst looking anxiously for it on the ground, where we supposed it to be singing, we discovered it to be high over our heads, and that sometimes it went too high for us to see at all. When this species start from the ground they fly in succession of undulations, which renders aim at them quite difficult. After this, and in the same manner, they elevate themselves to some considerable height, as if about to sing, and presently pitch toward the ground, where they run prettily, and at times stand still and quite erect for a few minutes.”

On June 24 he continues: “This afternoon I thought would be a fair opportunity to examine the manners of Sprague’s lark on the wing. The male rises, by constant undulations, to a great height, say one hundred yards or more; and, whilst singing its sweetest sounding notes, beats its wings, poised in the air like a hawk, without rising at this time, after which, and after each burst of singing, it sails in divers directions, forming three-quarters of a circle or thereabouts, then rises again, and again sings. The intervals between the singing are longer than those the song occupies (the latter about fifteen to twenty minutes), and at times the bird remains so long in the air as to render it quite fatiguing to follow it with the eye. Sprague thought one he watched yesterday remained in the air about an hour. Bell and Harris watched one for more than half an hour, and this afternoon I gazed upon one, whilst Bell timed it, for thirty-six minutes.”

In November, 1873, Dr. Coues discovered this pipit in considerable numbers, and continues Audubon's enthusiastic description: The ordinary straightforward flight of the bird is performed with a regular rising and falling like that of the titlark; but its course, when startled from the ground, is exceedingly rapid and wayward. At such times, after the first alarm, they are wont to hover around in a desultory manner for a considerable time and then pitch suddenly down to the ground, often near where they rose. Under these circumstances they have a lisping, querulous note. But these common traits have nothing to do with the wonderful soaring action and the inimitable, matchless song of the birds during the breeding season. It is no wonder Audubon grew enthusiastic in describing it.

“Rising from the nest or from its grassy bed, this plain-looking little bird, clad in the simplest colors, and making but a speck in the boundless expanse, mounts straight up on tremulous wings, until lost to view in the blue ether, and then sends back to earth a song of gladness that seems to come from the sky itself, to cheer the weary, give hope to the disheartened, and turn the most indifferent, for the moment at least, from sordid thoughts. No other bird music heard in our land compares with the wonderful strains of this songster; there is something not of earth in the melody, coming from above, yet from no visible source. The notes are simply indescribable; but once heard they can never be forgotten. Their volume and penetration are truly wonderful. They are neither loud nor strong, yet the whole air seems filled with the tender strains and the delightful melody continues long unbroken. The song is only heard for a brief period in the summer, ceasing when the inspiration of the love season is over, and it is only uttered when the birds are soaring.”

Baird, Brewer and Ridgway tell that Captain Blackiston found this skylark common on the prairies of the Saskatchewan, and described the song as consisting of a quick succession of notes, in a descending scale, each note being lower than the preceding. The bird then descends to the ground with great rapidity, almost like a stone, and somewhat in the manner of a hawk sweeping on its prey. He also saw these birds in northern Minnesota.

Some one says that the larks, those creatures of “light and air and motion, whose nest is in the stubble and whose tryst is in the cloud,” are well-known as the symbol of poets and victim of epicures, and Burroughs, to whom they are a symbol, says: “Its type is the grass where the bird makes its home, abounding, multitudinous, the notes nearly all alike and in the same key, but rapid, swarming, prodigal, showering down as thick and fast as drops of rain in a summer shower.” This of the skylark of Europe. But he adds: “On the Great Plains of the West there is a bird whose song resembles the lark's quite closely, and it is said to be not at all inferior – the Missouri Skylark, an excelsior songster, which from far up in the transparent blue rains down its notes for many minutes together. It is no doubt destined to figure in the future poetical literature of the West.”

Yet all that has been written of the “Star of music in a fiery cloud” by Burroughs and by Wadsworth, Shelley and the rest, might properly have been indited to the “Musical Cherub” of the Big Muddy Valley, when, climbing, “shrill with ecstasy, the trembling air,” he “calls up the tuneful nations,” and the same celestial pilgrim might have appeared to Eric MacKay:

“In the light of the day,  
Like a soul on its way  
To the gardens of God, it was loosed from the earth;  
And the song that it sang was a pæan of mirth  
For the raptures of birth.”

*Juliette A. Owen.*

## THE MASTER'S PROTEST

My song consists of all the notes  
That flow from feathered songsters' throats;  
My heart is thrilled with all their pain,  
Their sorrow, love, and joy again.  
They have but taken of my song  
A measure, which they warble long.  
So let my protest now be heard —  
O call me not a Mocking-bird!

— *Hildane Harrington.*

## THE SHORT-BILLED MARSH WREN

(*Cistothorus stellaris*.)

Because of its shy and retiring disposition and its apparent dislike to take wing the Short-billed Marsh Wren is not very often seen. It is usually found closely associated with its first cousin, the long-billed marsh wren, from which it is distinguished by the markings on the back and its short bill.

It inhabits the reeds and tall grass of our marshes of the central states and ranges as far north as Massachusetts and Manitoba to as far west as Utah.

After spending the winter in the southern states it reaches this locality about the last of April or the first of May. The marshes which it inhabits prevent close observation. But the fact that nests have been found with eggs in as early as the last week of May indicates it arrives about the last of April.

The nest is a loose, globular affair situated in the top of a tussock of grass or in rushes some twelve or eighteen inches above the ground or water. It is composed of coarse grass closely interwoven with fine blades and fibers, making a compact structure. The inner part is lined with fine materials, such as soft down, cat-tail blossoms, etc. At one side, sometimes ingeniously hidden, is a small round entrance. The nest resembles very closely that of its first cousin in shape and location, but can easily be recognized by the eggs, which are pure white.

This little bird sometimes builds a number of nests, but lays eggs in but one. Whether it does this because it enjoys the occupation, or for the purpose of producing a "blind," no one can say. A number will nest in the same locality, thus forming quite a colony.

Its song is quite different from that of the long-billed. Mr. Gault says: "In the manner of delivery it forcibly reminds one of the song of the dickcissel, although, of course, it is not near as loud. They are quite shy, but would allow one to approach within forty or fifty feet of them, when they would dart down into the thick grass, from which it was almost impossible to dislodge them."

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