

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND ALL NATURE,
VOL. III, NO. 3, MARCH
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Various

**Birds and All Nature, Vol.
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SOME BIRD LOVERS

THE happiness that is added to human lives by love for the lower creatures is beyond telling. Ernest von Vogelweide, the great German lyric poet of the middle ages, so loved the birds that he left a large bequest to the monks of Wurtzburg on condition that they should feed the birds every day on the tomb-stone over his grave.

Of St. Francis of Assisi's love and tenderness for birds and animals many beautiful stories have been told. The former he particularly loved, and 'tis related they were wont to fly to him, while he talked to, and blessed them. From the hands of a cruel boy he once rescued a pigeon, emblem of innocence and purity, made a nest for it, and watched over it and its young.

Of George Stephenson, the inventor, a beautiful story is told. One day in an upper room of his home he closed the window. Two or three days afterwards, however, he observed a bird flying against, and violently beating its wings as though trying to break the window. His sympathy and curiosity were aroused. What could the little creature want? The window was opened and the bird flew to one particular spot. Alas! one look into the little nest and the bird with the worm still in its beak which he had brought to the mother and his four little ones, fluttered to the floor. Stephenson lifted the exhausted bird, and tried to revive it. But all his efforts proved in vain. At that time the force of George Stephenson's mind was changing the face of the earth; yet he wept at the sight of the dead family and grieved because he had all unconsciously been the cause of their death.

BIRD DAY

THE United States Department of Agriculture issued in July, 1896, a circular suggesting that a "Bird Day" be added to the school calendar. In this circular J. Sterling Morton, Secretary of Agriculture, says:

"The cause of bird protection is one that appeals to the best side of our natures. Let us yield to the appeal. Let us have a Bird Day – a day set apart from all the other days of the year to tell the children about the birds. But we must not stop here. We should strive continually to develop and intensify the sentiment of bird protection, not alone for the sake of preserving the birds, but also for the sake of replacing as far as possible the barbaric impulses inherent in child nature by the nobler impulses and aspirations that should characterize advanced civilization."

Prof. C. A. Babcock, superintendent of schools, Oil City, Pa., who has acted upon the suggestion in his schools, says:

"The preservation of the birds is not merely a matter of sentiment, or of education in that high and fine feeling, kindness to all living things. It has an utilitarian side of vast extent, as broad as our boundless fields and our orchards' sweep. The birds are necessary to us. Only by their means can the insects which injure, and if not checked, destroy vegetation, be kept within bounds..."

"What is most needed is the knowledge of the birds themselves, their modes of life, their curious ways, and their relation to the scheme of things. To know a bird is to love him. Birds are beautiful and interesting objects of study and make appeals to children that are responded to with delight."

MARCH

The stormy March has come at last,
With wind and cloud and changing skies,
I hear the rushing of the blast,
That through the snowy valley flies.

Ah, passing few are they who speak,
Wild stormy month! in praise of thee;
Yet, though thy winds are loud and bleak,
Thou art a welcome month to me.

For thou, to northern lands, again
The glad and glorious sun dost bring,
And thou hast joined the gentle train
And wear'st the gentle name of Spring.

And, in thy reign of blast and storm,
Smiles many a long, bright, sunny day,
When the changed winds are soft and warm,
And heaven puts on the blue of May.

Then sing aloud the gushing rills,
And the full springs, from frost set free,
That, brightly leaping down the hills,
Are just set out to meet the sea.

– *Bryant.*

THE BIRD'S ANSWER

"A little bird sat on the twig of a tree,
A-swinging and singing as glad as could be,
And shaking his tail and smoothing his dress,
And having such fun as you never could guess;
And when he had finished his gay little song,
He flew down the street and went hopping along,
This way and that way with both little feet,
While his sharp little eyes looked for something to eat.

A little boy said to him, 'Little bird, stop
And tell me the reason you go with a hop;
Why don't you walk as boys do, and men,
One foot at a time, like a duck or a hen?'
Then the little bird went with a hop, hop, hop,
And laughed as if he never could stop:
And he said, 'Little boy, there are some birds that talk,
And some birds that hop, and some birds that walk,
But most little birds that can sing you a song,
Are so small that their legs are not very strong
To scratch with, or wade with, or catch things, that's why
They hop with both feet, little boy, good-bye.'"

WHERE MISSOURI BIRDS SPEND CHRISTMAS

OF course we know where the English Sparrow spends his Christmas. And the Snowbird came down in October and is with us yet. Likewise the Bluejay is here in many of our yards, and is quite respectable – like Eugene Field's boy, now that there are no eggs to eat nor young birds to destroy. The Redhead Woodpecker is probably in the deeper woods, though I have not yet seen him this winter. Sometimes he goes south and digs grubs off the tall, dead, southern trees.

But we may be interested in where some of our departed friends are Christmasing.

All our other Woodpeckers stay with us – except the Yellowhammer. He has taken to feeding upon the ground a good deal of late and does not like it frozen.

The Redbreasted Woodpecker and our two little Sapsuckers as we call them, are always here in the winter – the most optimistic birds we have.

I heard the Nuthatch only a few days ago. I did not see him but I knew by the way he talked through his nose that he was hanging head down on some nearby tree. The only other little bird that climbs up tree trunks – except the Woodpeckers – is the Brown creeper, a rather rare bird with us. Some years ago one of the public school teachers sent me one that a little boy had found so chilled that it was helpless; so I suspect that he ought to spend Christmas further south – for his health.

In the woods, the Tree-Sparrow, associating with the Snowbird, occasionally sings us a Christmas Carol – the only bird here now from which we may expect a song, unless some vernal day should loose the syrinx of the Cardinal, or provoke the "*fee-bee*" of the Crested Titmouse.

Christmas is on the vernal side of the winter solstice and any sunny day thereabout is more like spring than autumn.

Sometimes in warm swampy places, the Fox-Sparrow spends the winter about us, but I have never seen any here, though they are on the river about Louisiana, Mo., now, I suspect, along with the Winter-Wren. They both sing occasionally in winter.

On our high backbone position here at Mexico, between the rivers, we are not favorably situated for bird study because the little feathered folks prefer the deep tangles of the river bottoms, and they appreciate the fact that it is naturally warmer there also. Even Robins and Bluebirds sometimes stop in these over winter here in Missouri.

The Doves and Blackbirds are mostly in the southern states, but not far; for, eating grain only now, they are after climate rather than food. But such birds as our swallows and the Fly-catchers – say the Peewees, Bee-Martins, and their kind – are much farther on where the insects fly all the year round. Some of them are in Florida and some are in South America and a few perhaps are banqueting in Old Mexico, studying the silver question. – J. N. Baskett, in *Mexico (Mo.) Intelligencer*.

THE BLACK DUCK

DUSKY DUCK, Black Mallard, Black English Duck, (Florida), are some of the names by which this well-known member of the family is recognized throughout eastern North America, west to Utah, and north to Labrador. It is much less common in the interior than along the Atlantic coast. It is called the characteristic and one of the commonest Ducks of New England, where it breeds at large, and from thence northeastward, but is most numerous during the migrations.

The nest of the Black Duck is placed on the ground, in grass or rushes in the neighborhood of ponds, pools, and streams, in meadows and sometimes in swamps. It is a large and neatly arranged structure of weeds and grass, hollowed and lined with down and feathers from the breast of the bird. In rare instances it has been known to build its nest in the hollow of a tree, or a "stub" projecting from the water of a swamp. Mr. Frazer found the nest of this Duck in Labrador usually placed upon the out-reaching branches of stunted spruces, which are seldom higher than four feet.

The eggs of this species are from six to twelve in number, usually seven or eight, and vary in color from pale buff to pale greenish buff. The nesting period is from the last of April to the early part of June.

The Black Duck is a very wary creature, exceedingly difficult of approach. They are found in great numbers, except when congregated on salt water, five to ten being an average flock started from pond and feeding ground.

During very severe winters, says Hallock, when every sheet of water is bound in with a thick covering of ice, the Black Ducks are driven to warm spring holes where the water never freezes. The approach of evening drives the Ducks from the bay or sound, where they have been sitting during the day, and they seek these open inland spots for food and shelter. Brush-houses are constructed of sedge, cedar boughs, etc., at the mouths of fresh water rivers and creeks, in places where the marsh land is low and intersected by branches of the main stream. Here the Ducks come to feed at night and are taken by hunters who are concealed in the bushes. These houses are left standing, however, and the wary Ducks soon avoid entirely this locality, and feed elsewhere. The brush-house building on feeding grounds cannot be too severely condemned.

Hallock observes that of all the birds which during spring and fall traverse our country probably none equal these Ducks in point of size, numbers and economic value. The group is confined neither to the sea coast, nor to the interior, but is spread out over the whole breadth of the continent, in summer extending its migrations to the furthest north, and in winter proceeding only so far south as it is forced to by the freezing of the waters of its northern home.

THE STORMY PETREL

"The Stormy Petrel, mamma, is a very interesting bird. I should like very much to be in a ship and see him walking on the water, wouldn't you?"

Mamma, who thought of the apostle St. Peter, shook her head.

"You must be mistaken, Bobbie," said she. "I never heard of a bird that could walk on the water."

"Well, that's what my magazine says," replied Bobbie, "and I am sure Birds ought to know. Listen!" and Bobbie, stopping to spell a word now and then, and to ask the meaning of many, managed to inform his mother what the *Stormy Petrel* had to say about himself.

"Though I am the smallest of the web-footed birds I am a great traveler," read Bobbie. "Everywhere over the entire surface of the watery globe you will find members of my order; far north in the Arctic seas and away down in the Southern oceans. We love the sea, and the food which is thrown up by the waves. Anything oily or greasy we particularly like. No matter how stormy the weather, nor how high the billows roll, you will see us little fellows, with outstretched wings, sweeping along in the hollow trough of the sea. From one side of a ship to the other, now far ahead, then a great way behind, catching up easily with the ship though making ten knots an hour."

"What is a knot, mamma?" queried Bobbie.

"A knot means a sailors' mile. An engineer says his locomotive runs at the rate of so many miles an hour; a seaman says so many 'knots.' A knot is something more than our English mile."

"The sailors call us 'Mother Carey's Chickens.' Because we walk and run on the surface of the water they think us uncanny, foretelling bad weather, or something else bad for the crew, when – let me whisper it into your ear – it is our outstretched wings which uphold us, our wings as well as our broad, flat feet.

There is something else I want to tell you though before I close. Think of making a lamp out of a bird's body! That is what they do with a *Stormy Petrel's* body on a certain island in the Atlantic ocean. They find our carcass so oily from the food we eat, that all they have to do is to draw a wick through our body, light it, and lo they have a lamp."

WILSON'S PETREL

PETRELS are dispersed throughout all the seas and oceans of the world. Wilson's Stormy Petrel is one of the best known and commonest. It is to be met with nearly everywhere over the entire watery surface of the globe – far north in the icy regions of the Arctic seas and south to the sunny isles of southern oceans. It breeds in the months of March, April, May, June, July and August, according to the locality, in the northern latitudes of Europe, eastern and western North America. Dr. J. H. Kidder found it on Kerguelen Island, southeast of Africa. He had previously seen the birds at the sea coast off the Cape of Good Hope, and, on December 14, saw them out by day feeding on the oily matter floating away from the carcass of a sea-elephant. The birds, he says, frequent the rocky parts of hillsides, and flitting about like swallows, catch very minute insects. "Mother Carey's Chicken," as it is called by sailors, is widely believed to be the harbinger of bad weather, and many superstitions have grown out of the habit which they possess of apparently walking on the surface of the water as the Apostle St. Peter is recorded to have done. It is the smallest of the web-footed birds, yet few storms are violent enough to keep it from wandering over the waves in search of the food that the disturbed water casts to the surface.

The Stormy Petrel is so exceedingly oily in texture, that the inhabitants of the Ferol islands draw a wick through its body and use it as a lamp.

Wilson gives the following account of its habits while following a ship under sail:

"It is indeed an interesting sight to observe these little birds in a gale, coursing over the waves, down the declivities, up the ascents of the foaming surf that threatens to bend over their head; sweeping along through the hollow troughs of the sea, as in a sheltered valley, and again mounting with the rising billow, and just above its surface, occasionally dropping their feet, which, striking the water, throws the birds up again with additional force; sometimes leaping, with both legs parallel, on the surface of the roughest wave for several yards at a time. Meanwhile they continue coursing from side to side of the ship's wake, making excursions far and wide, to the right and to the left, now a great way ahead, and now shooting astern for several hundred yards, returning again to the ship, as if she were all the time stationary, though perhaps running at the rate of ten knots an hour! But the most singular peculiarity of this bird is its faculty of standing and even running on the surface of the water, which it performs with apparent facility. When any greasy matter is thrown overboard these birds instantly collect around it, and face to windward, with their long wings expanded and their webbed feet patting the water, which the lightness of their bodies and the action of the wind on their wings enable them to do with ease. In calm weather they perform the same maneuver by keeping their wings just so much in action as to prevent their feet from sinking below the surface."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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