

# VARIOUS

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[OCTOBER 1901]

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# Various

## Birds and Nature, Vol. 10 No. 3 [October 1901]

### SONNET – OCTOBER

The month of carnival of all the year,  
When Nature lets the wild earth go its way,  
And spend whole seasons on a single day.  
The spring-time holds her white and purple dear;  
October, lavish, flaunts them far and near;  
The summer charily her reds doth lay  
Like jewels on her costliest array;  
October, scornful, burns them on a bier.  
The winter hoards his pearls of frost in sign  
Of kingdom: whiter pearls than winter knew,  
Or Empress wore, in Egypt's ancient line,  
October, feasting 'neath her dome of blue,  
Drinks at a single draught, slow filtered through  
Sunshiny air, as in a tingling wine!

– *Helen Hunt Jackson.*

October comes, a woodman old,  
Fenced with tough leather from the cold;  
Round swings his sturdy axe, and lo!  
A fir-branch falls at every blow.

– *Walter Thornbury.*

## THE YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax flaviventris.*)

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher with the kingbird, the phoebe and the wood pewee belongs to a family of birds peculiar to America – the family Tyrannidæ or the family of tyrants. No better name could be applied to these birds when we take into consideration the enormous number of insects, of all descriptions, that they capture and devour and their method of doing it. They resemble the hawks in some respects. They are at home only where there are trees, on the outer branches of which they can perch and await a passing insect, and when one appears they “launch forth into the air; there is a sharp, suggestive click of the broad bill and, completing their aerial circle, they return to their perch and are again en garde.”

In the tropics, the land of luxuriant vegetable growth, where the number and kinds of insects seem almost innumerable, the larger number of the three hundred and fifty known species are found. In the United States we are favored with the visits, during the warmer months, of but thirty-five species of these interesting and useful birds.

As we would naturally expect of birds of prey, whether hunters of insects or of higher animal life, these birds are not usually social, even with their own kind. They are also practically songless, a characteristic which seems perfectly fitted to the habits of the Flycatchers. Some of the species have sweet-voiced calls. This is the case with the wood pewee, of which Trowbridge has so beautifully written in the following verse:

“Long-drawn and clear its closes were —  
As if the hand of Music through  
The sombre robe of Silence drew  
A thread of golden gossamer;  
So pure a flute the fairy blew.  
Like beggared princes of the wood,  
In silver rags the birches stood;  
The hemlocks, lordly counselors,  
Were dumb; the sturdy servitors,  
In beechen jackets patched and gray,  
Seemed waiting spellbound all the day  
That low, entrancing note to hear —  
‘Pe-wee! pe-wee! peer!’”

The Flycatchers are fitted both in the structure of their bills and in the colors of their plumage for the kind of life that they live. The bills are broad and flat, permitting an extensive gape. They live in trees and are usually plainly colored, either a grayish or greenish olive, being not so easily seen by the insects as if more brightly arrayed. This characteristic is known as deceptive coloration.

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has its summer home in eastern North America, breeding from Massachusetts northward to Labrador. In the United States it frequents only the forests of the northern portion and the mountain regions. In the winter it passes southward into Mexico and Central America. Like all the Flycatchers of North America, the very nature of its food necessitates extensive migrations.

Its generic name is very suggestive. It is *Empidonax*, from two Greek words, meaning mosquito and a prince – Mosquito Prince!

Major Bendire says: "In the Adirondack mountains, where I have met with it, it was observed only in primitive mixed and rather open woods, where the ground was thickly strewn with decaying, moss-covered logs and boles, and almost constantly shaded from the rays of the sun. The most gloomy looking places, fairly reeking with moisture, where nearly every inch of ground is covered with a luxuriant carpet of spagnum moss, into which one sinks several inches at every step, regions swarming with mosquitoes and black flies, are the localities that seem to constitute their favorite summer haunts." Surely the name *Empidonax* is most appropriate.

The nest is usually constructed on upturned roots near the ground, or on the ground deeply imbedded in the long mosses. A nest belonging to the National Museum is thus described: "The primary foundation of the nest was a layer of brown rootlets; upon this rested the bulk of the structure, consisting of moss matted together with fine broken weed stalks and other fragmentary material. The inner nest could be removed entire from the outer wall, and was composed of a loosely woven but, from its thickness, somewhat dense fabric of fine materials, consisting mainly of the bleached stems of some slender sedge and the black and shining rootlets of ferns, closely resembling horsehair. Between the two sections of the structure and appearing only when they were separated, was a scant layer of the glossy orange pedicels of a moss not a fragment of which was elsewhere visible. The walls of the internal nest were about one-half an inch in thickness and had doubtless been accomplished with a view of protection from dampness." The nests are sometimes made of dried grasses interwoven with various mosses and lined with moss and fine black wire-like roots. Again, the birds seem to have an eye for color and will face the outside of the nest with fresh and bright green moss. In every way the nest seems a large house for so small a bird.

To study this Flycatcher "one must seek the northern evergreen forests, where, far from human habitations, its mournful notes blend with the murmur of some icy brook tumbling over mossy stones or gushing beneath the still mossier decayed logs that threaten to bar the way. Where all is green and dark and cool, in some glen overarched by crowding spruces and firs, birches and maples, there it is we find him and in the beds of damp moss he skillfully conceals his nest."

## THE REIGN OF THE WHIPPOORWILLS

When dews begin to chill  
The blossom throngs,  
And soft the brooklets trill  
Their slumber-songs,  
We dusky Whippoorwills  
In conquest hold the hills.

When, thro' the midnight dells,  
Wild star-beams glow,  
Like wan-eyed sentinels,  
We dreamward go,  
And hear sung sweetly o'er  
The songs we stilled before.

When waketh dawn, we flee  
The slumber-main,  
And bid the songsters be  
With us again  
To sing in praise of light  
Above the buried night.

But O, when sunrise gleams,  
We vanish fast,  
And woo again in dreams  
The starlit past,  
Till, lo! at twilight gray,  
We wail the dirge of day!

– *Frank English.*

## RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula.*)

“What wondrous power from heaven upon thee wrought?  
What prisoned Ariel within thee broods?”

– *Celia Thaxter.*

“Thou singest as if the God of Wine  
Had helped thee to a valentine;  
A song in mockery and despite  
Of shades and dews and silent night,  
And steady bliss and all the loves  
Now sleeping in these peaceful groves.”

– *Wordsworth.*

Like a bee with its honey, when the Ruby-crown has unloaded his vocal sweetness, there is comparatively little left of him, and, ebullient with an energy that would otherwise rend him, his incredible vocal achievement is the safety valve that has so far preserved his atoms in their Avian semblance.

Dr. Coues says that his lower larynx, the sound-producing organ, is not much bigger than a good-sized pin's head, and the muscles that move it are almost microscopic shreds of flesh. “If the strength of the human voice were in the same proportion to the size of the larynx, we could converse with ease at a distance of a mile or more.”

“The Kinglet's exquisite vocalization,” he continues, “defies description; we can only speak in general terms of the power, purity and volume of the notes, their faultless modulation and long continuance. Many doubtless, have listened to this music without suspecting that the author was the diminutive Ruby-crown, with whose commonplace utterance, the slender, wiry ‘tsip,’ they were already familiar. This delightful role, of musician, is chiefly executed during the mating season, and the brief period of exaltation which precedes it. It is consequently seldom heard in regions where the bird does not rear its young, except when the little performer breaks forth in song on nearing its summer resorts.”

When Rev. J. H. Langille heard his first *Regulus calendula*, he said, “The song came from out of a thick clump of thorns, and was so loud and spirited that I was led to expect a bird at least as large as a thrush. Chee-oo, chee-oo, chee-oo, choo, choo, tseet, tseet, te-tseet, te-tseet, te-tseet, etc., may represent this wonderful melody, the first notes being strongly palatal and somewhat aspirated, the latter slender and sibilant and more rapidly uttered; the first part being also so full and animated as to make one think of the water-thrush, or the winter wren; while the last part sounded like a succeedant song from a slender-voiced warbler. Could all this come from the throat of this tiny, four-inch Sylvia? I was obliged to believe my own eyes, for I saw the bird many times in the act of singing. The melody was such as to mark the day on which I heard it.”

H. D. Minot says, “In autumn and winter their only note is a feeble lisp. In spring, besides occasionally uttering an indescribable querulous sound, and a harsh, ‘grating’ note, which belongs exclusively to that season, the Ruby-crowned wrens sing extremely well and louder than such small birds seem capable of singing. Their song begins with a few clear whistles, followed by a short, very sweet, and complicated warble, and ending with notes like the syllables tu-we-we, tu-we-we, tu-

we-we. These latter are often repeated separately, as if the birds had no time for a prelude, or are sometimes prefaced by merely a few rather shrill notes with a rising inflection.”

Messrs. Baird, Brewer and Ridgway say that “The song of this bird is by far the most remarkable of its specific peculiarities,” and Mr. Chapman declares, “Taking the small size of the bird into consideration, the Ruby-crown’s song is one of the most marvellous vocal performances among birds; being not only surpassingly sweet, varied and sustained, but possessed of sufficient volume to be heard at a distance of two hundred yards. Fortunately he sings both on the spring and fall migrations.”

Mrs. Wright describes the call-note as “Thin and metallic, like a vibrating wire,” and quotes Mr. Nehrling, who speaks of the “Power, purity and volume of the notes, their faultless modulation and long continuance.”

Mr. Robert Ridgway wrote that this little king of song was one of our very smallest birds he also “ranks among the sweetest singers of the country. It is wonderfully powerful for one so small, but it is remarkable for its softness and sweet expression more than for other qualities. It consists of an inexpressibly delicate and musical warble, astonishingly protracted at times, and most beautifully varied by softly rising and falling cadences, and the most tender whistlings imaginable.”

Mr. Ridgway quotes from Dr. Brewer: “The notes are clear, resonant and high, and constitute a prolonged series, varying from the lowest tones to the highest, and terminating with the latter. It may be heard at quite a distance, and in some respects bears more resemblance to the song of the English skylark than to that of the canary, to which Mr. Audubon compares it.” Mr. Ridgway continues: “We have never heard the skylark sing, but there is certainly no resemblance between the notes of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet and those of the canary, the latter being as inferior in tenderness and softness as they excel in loudness.”

Mr. Audubon had stated: “When I tell you that its song is fully as sonorous as that of the canary-bird, and much richer, I do not come up to the truth, for it is not only as powerful and clear, but much more varied and pleasing to the ear.”

While the frequent sacrifice of the adult regulus and regina through their reckless absorption in their own affairs and obliviousness to the presence of enemies, lends color to the statement that “The spirits of the martyrs will be lodged in the crops of green birds,” yet by virtue of a talent other than vocal, they compel few of the human family to echo the remorseful lament of John Halifax, Gentleman,

“I took the wren’s nest,  
Bird, forgive me!”

For but few of the most ardent seekers have succeeded in locating the habitation of the fairy kinglet, and the unsuccessful majority perforce exclaim with Wordsworth,

“Oh, blessed bird! The earth we pace  
Again appears to be  
An unsubstantial, fairy place,  
That is fit home for thee!”

*Juliette A. Owen.*

## THE CORN SONG

Heap high the farmer's wintry hoard!  
Heap high the golden corn!  
No richer gift has autumn poured  
From out her lavish horn!

Let other lands, exulting, glean  
The apple from the pine,  
The orange from its glossy green,  
The cluster from the vine;

We better love the hardy gift  
Our ragged vales bestow,  
To cheer us when the storm shall drift  
Our harvest-fields with snow.

Through vales of grass and meads of flowers,  
Our ploughs their furrows made,  
While on the hills the sun and showers  
Of changeful April played.

We dropped the seed o'er hill and plain,  
Beneath the sun of May,  
And frightened from our sprouting grain  
The robber crows away.

All through the long, bright days of June,  
Its leaves grew green and fair,  
And waved in hot midsummer's noon  
Its soft and yellow hair.

And now, with Autumn's moonlit eyes,  
Its harvest time has come,  
We pluck away the frosted leaves,  
And bear the treasure home.

Then, richer than the fabled gift  
Apollo showered of old,  
Fair hands the broken grain shall sift,  
And knead its meal of gold.

Let vapid idlers loll in silk,  
Around their costly board;  
Give us the bowl of samp and milk,  
By homespun beauty poured!

Where'er the wide old kitchen hearth  
Sends up its smoky curls,  
Who will not thank the kindly earth,  
And bless our farmer girls?

Then shame on all the proud and vain,  
Whose folly laughs to scorn  
The blessing of our hardy grain,  
Our wealth of golden corn!

Let earth withhold her goodly root,  
Let mildew blight the rye,  
Give to the worm the orchard's fruit,  
The wheat-field to the fly;

But let the good old crop adorn  
The hills our fathers trod;  
Still let us, for his golden corn,  
Send up our thanks to God!

– *John Greenleaf Whittier.*

## THE OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus borealis.*)

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is a North American bird breeding in the coniferous forests of our Northern States, northward into Canada and in mountainous regions. It winters in Central and South America.

Like all Flycatchers, their food consists almost exclusively of winged insects, such as beetles, butterflies, moths and the numerous gadflies which abound in the places frequented by these birds. A dead limb or the decayed top of some tall tree giving a good outlook close to the nesting site, is usually selected for a perch, from which excursions are made in different directions after passing insects, which are often chased for quite a distance. This Flycatcher usually arrives on its breeding grounds about the middle of May, and its far-reaching call notes can then be heard almost constantly in the early morning hours and again in the Four Birds & Nature Tues – Hammond evening. Unless close to the bird, this note sounds much like that of the wood pewee, which utters a note of only two syllables, like “pee-wee,” while that of the Olive-sided Flycatcher really consists of three, like “hip-pin-whee.” The first part is uttered short and quick, while the latter two are so accented and drawn out, that at a distance the call sounds as if likewise composed of only two notes, but this is not the case. Their alarm note sounds like “puip-puip-puip,” several times repeated, or “puill-puill-puill;” this is usually given only when the nest is approached, and occasionally a purring sound is also uttered.

Tall evergreen trees, such as pines, hemlocks, spruces, firs and cedars, situated near the edge of an opening or clearing in the forest, not too far from water and commanding a good outlook, or on a bluff along a stream, a hillside, the shore of a lake or pond, are usually selected as nesting sites by this species, and the nest is generally saddled well out on one of the limbs, where it is difficult to see and still more difficult to get at. Only on rare occasions will this species nest in a deciduous tree.

While it appears tolerant enough toward other species, it will not allow any of its own kind to nest in close proximity to its chosen home, to which it returns from year to year. Each pair seems to claim a certain range, which is rarely less than half a mile in extent, and is usually located along some stream, near the shore of a lake, or by some little pond; generally coniferous forests are preferred, but mixed ones answer their purpose almost equally well as long as they border on a body of water or a beaver meadow and have a few clumps of hemlock or spruce trees scattered through them which will furnish suitable nesting sites and lookout perches.

While on a collecting trip a nest of this species was observed in a spruce tree and about forty-five feet from the ground. The birds betrayed the location of the nest by their excited actions and incessant scolding. They were very bold, flying close around the climber’s head, snapping their bills at him, and uttering angry notes of defiance rather than of distress, something like “puy-pip-pip.” They could not possibly have been more pugnacious.

The nest was a well-built structure. It was outwardly composed of fine, wiry roots and small twigs, mixed with green moss and lined with fine roots and moss. It was securely fixed among a mass of fine twigs growing out at that point of the limb.

As a rule the nests are placed at a considerable height from the ground, usually from forty to sixty feet, though occasionally one is found that is not more than twenty feet.

In spite of their pugnacious and quarrelsome habits these birds are so attached to the localities they have selected for their homes that they will usually lay a second set of eggs in the same nest from which their first set has been taken – Adapted from Charles Bendire’s Life Histories of North American Birds.

## THE COMING OF MISS OCTOBER MONTH

Over in Farmer Goodman's timber there was a great stir. Everybody was busy. All summer the trees had been planning a picnic reception to be given to the Month brothers and sisters when the hot weather had passed.

When it became noised around the whole neighborhood was delighted with the thought. Everyone wanted to do what little he could to help things along. Several dignified old owls, who had holes in the trees, promptly offered to chaperone the party. The cat-tails along the brook just at the edge of the timber promised to wear their prettiest head-dresses if they would be allowed to wait on the door. The golden rod, purple asters and other flowers along the road and the ferns, wahoo, sumac and their companions agreed to outdo themselves in the effort to furnish beautiful, tasty decorations.

The refreshments would cost nothing. The spring at the foot of the hill offered to supply clear cool drinks for all, free of charge. They had an abundance of wild grapes, wild cherries, pawpaws, red haws, hazel, hickory and other nuts.

Prof. Wind was engaged to have his band there to furnish music for the dancing.

As it was hoped to make this a long-to-be-remembered event, all summer was spent in planning and preparation. Many were the happy hours passed by the trees in discussing the styles and colors in which they were to be decked. Whenever the band was practicing its new pieces for the occasion the little leaves would dance and skip for joy.

The names of Mr. January Month and all his brothers and sisters, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December were written on a sheet of paper. The list was handed to a gay little squirrel, with a handsome tail and pretty stripes down his back. He was then given instructions and sent to do the inviting. A funny little hop-toad wished to go along. The squirrel said that he would be pleased to have company, but he scampered around from place to place as though he were going for a doctor for a dying child. As the little hop-toad could not keep up, he came home crying.

Fancy the disappointment when the squirrel brought back word that pretty Miss October Month was the only one who had accepted the kind invitation. All said that they would be delighted to be there, that they knew that it would be a very happy, jolly affair; but each month claimed that having his own work to do without help he is kept so busy that he has no time for roving and sport. After the trees and their friends had so kindly made such great arrangements for their entertainment and honor, the narrow-minded months were not grateful nor polite enough to even try to manage their work so that they could get off for a day. Perhaps they had forgotten that there is such a thing as fun and rest. Poor Months! No wonder they die so early!

Every plan for a brilliant event had been made. Bright, amiable October came. The day was sunny and warm, but not hot. Everyone did his part according to agreement. The common yellow butterflies, some caterpillars and other insects who had been in no hurry to disappear, were there. Although many of the birds had left for their southern trip, there were a number of catbirds, hermit thrushes, brown thrushes, phoebes, song sparrows and others who furnished rare solos and grand choruses between dances. The cowbirds and yellow-bellied sapsuckers who do not sing wished to do something, too. The cowbirds offered to keep the flies and other insects off of the victuals, and the sapsuckers agreed to give tapping signals from their high places in the tall trees whenever a change of program was to be announced.

A mischievous blue jay made a slight disturbance by trying to steal some of the dinner before the table was set. When Mrs. Chipmunk tried to drive him off, he showed fight, but in less than a minute such a crowd had gathered to see what was the matter that he took flight in great shame.

Everybody seemed to have fallen in love with Miss October. The affair was such a success and the very air was filled with such good will and jollity, that all begged and coaxed her to remain for a visit.

They had no trouble in arranging amusements for every day. Granddaddy long legs danced several jigs. The crickets and the grasshoppers got up a baseball game. When the baby show came off, Mrs. Quail took the prize for the prettiest baby under a year. Mother Pig who had heard of it and had broken out of Farmer Goodman's pasture in order to bring the plumpest of her litter, carried back the prize for the fattest baby. Mrs. English Sparrow reported the largest number of broods raised. The locusts and the katydids took part in a cake walk.

A great fat young grasshopper and a young robin entered a hopping race. As they came out even there was trouble and prospects of hard feelings. Three butterflies who were acting as judges decided to award the prize to the grasshopper because he was smaller. This decision did not suit the robin. In a fit of impatience he ended the matter by swallowing the grasshopper – legs and all.

During the moonshiny nights Mr. Man-in-the-Moon took great pains to furnish excellent light. On other nights the fireflies showed their brightest lanterns.

Sometimes at night, white-robed Jack Frost would come and play kissing games with the leaves who would then get happier, more radiant faces. But he would box and wrestle with the nuts until their shells would crack open. Then when they came to play tag or puss-wants-a-corner with the leaves, as the little West Wind brothers frequently did, they, in their rough sport, would knock the nuts out of their cosy shells upon the ground, so that the children could pick them up. Merry times were these!

In this way the sports were carried on for thirty-one days and nights. By that time everyone, even Miss October herself, was tired out. The fine dresses of the trees being the worse for wear, dropped, leaf by leaf, and some of the trees were left nearly naked. The grasshoppers, butterflies and caterpillars who could no longer keep their eyes open had dropped into their winter's sleep.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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