

VARIOUS

BIRDS, ILLUSTRATED BY
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY,
VOL. 2, NO. 5

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Various Birds, Illustrated by Color Photography, Vol. 2, No. 5 November 1897

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON has always been a favorite with the writer, for the invincibility of his love of Nature and of birds is only equalled by the spontaneous freshness of his style, springing from an affectionate and joyous nature. Recently there was found by accident, in an old calf-skin bound volume, an autobiography of the naturalist. It is entitled "Audubon's Story of his Youth," and would make a very pretty book. As introductory to the diaries and ornithological biographies of the birds, it would be very useful.

Two or three incidents in the life of this fascinating character are interesting as showing the influence of the accidental in ultimate achievement.

"One incident," he says, "which is as perfect in my memory as if it had occurred this very day, I have thought thousands of times since, and will now put on paper as one of the curious things which perhaps did lead me in after times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite. My mother had several beautiful parrots, and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full-grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, 'Pretty Polly' asking for her breakfast as usual, '*Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Mignonne*,' (bread and milk for the parrot Mignonne,) the man of the woods probably thought the bird presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason, preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room; I was tranquilized; the monkey was forever afterward chained, and Mignonne buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one. This made, as I have said, a very deep impression on my youthful mind."

In consequence of the long absences of his father, who was an admiral in the French navy, the young naturalist's education was neglected, his mother suffering him to do much as he pleased, and it was not to be wondered at, as he says, that instead of applying closely to his studies, he preferred associating with boys of his own age and disposition, who were more fond of going in search of bird's nests, fishing, or shooting, than of better studies. Thus almost every day, instead of going to school, he usually made for the fields where he spent the day, returning with his little basket filled with what he called curiosities, such as birds' nests, birds' eggs, curious lichens, flowers of all sorts, and even pebbles gathered along the shore of some rivulet. Nevertheless, he did study drawing and music, for which he had some talent. His subsequent study of drawing under the celebrated David, richly equipped him for a work which he did not know was ever to be his, and enabled him to commence a series of drawings of birds of France, which he continued until he had upwards of two hundred completed. "All bad enough," he says, "yet they were representations of birds, and I felt pleased with them." Before sailing for France, he had begun a series of drawings of the birds of America, and had also begun a study of their habits. His efforts were commended by one of his friends, who assured him the time might come when he should be a great American naturalist, which had such weight with him that he felt a certain degree of pride in the words, even then, when he was about eighteen years of age.

"The store at Louisville went on prosperously, when I attended to it; but birds were birds then as now, and my thoughts were ever and anon turning toward them as the objects of my greatest delight. I

shot, I drew, I looked on nature only; my days were happy beyond human conception, and beyond this I really cared not.” [How like Agassiz, who said he had not time to make money.] As he could not bear to give the attention required by his business, his business abandoned him. “Indeed, I never thought of business beyond the ever-engaging journeys which I was in the habit of taking to Philadelphia or New York, to purchase goods; those journeys I greatly enjoyed, as they afforded me ample means to study birds and their habits as I traveled through the beautiful, the darling forests of Ohio, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania.” Poor fellow, how many ups and downs he had! He lost everything and became burdened with debt. But he did not despair for had he not a talent for drawing? He at once undertook to take portraits of the human head divine in black chalk, and thanks to his master, David, succeeded admirably. He established a large drawing school at Cincinnati, and formed an engagement to stuff birds for the museum there at a large salary.

“One of the most extraordinary things among all these adverse circumstances” he adds, “was, that I never for a day give up listening to the songs of our birds, or watching their peculiar habits, or delineating them in the best way I could; nay, during my deepest troubles, I frequently would wrench myself from the persons around me and retire to some secluded part of our noble forests; and many a time, at the sound of the wood-thrushes’ melodies, have I fallen on my knees and there prayed earnestly to our God. This never failed to bring me the most valuable of thoughts, and always comfort, and it was often necessary for me to exert my will and compel myself to return to my fellow-beings.”

Do you not fancy that Audubon was himself a *rara avis* and worthy of admiration and study?

Such a man, in the language of a contemporary, should have a monument in the old Creole country in which he was born, and whose birds inspired his childish visions. It should be the most beautiful work possible to the sculptor’s art, portraying Audubon in the garb he wore when he was proud and happy to be called the “American Woodman,” and at his feet should stand the Eagle which he named the “Bird of Washington,” and near should perch the Mocking Bird, as once, in his description, it flew and fluttered and sang to the mind’s eye and ear from the pages of the old reading book.

C. C. Marble.

THE SUMMER TANAGER

THE TANAGERS are birds of such uncommon beauty that when we have taken the pictures of the entire family the group will be a notable one and will add attractiveness to the portfolio. This specimen is also called the Summer Red-bird or Rose Tanager, and is found pretty generally distributed over the United States during the summer months, wintering in Cuba, Central America, and northern South America. As will be seen, the adult male is a plain vermilion red. The plumage of the female is less attractive. In habits this species resembles the Scarlet Tanager, perhaps the most brilliant of the group, but is not so retiring, frequenting open groves and often visiting towns and cities.

The nesting season of this charming bird extends to the latter part of July, but varies with the latitude and season. Bark strips and leaves interwoven with various vegetable substances compose the nest, which is usually built on a horizontal or drooping branch, near its extremity and situated at the edge of a grove near the roadside. Davie says: "All the nests of this species which I have seen collected in Ohio are very thin and frail structures; so thin that the eggs may often be seen from beneath. A nest sent me from Lee county, Texas, is compactly built of a cottony weed, a few stems of Spanish moss, and lined with fine grass stems." Mr. L. O. Pindar states that nests found in Kentucky are compactly built, but not very thickly lined. The eggs are beautiful, being a bright, light emerald green, spotted, dotted, and blotched with various shades of lilac, brownish-purple, and dark brown.

Chapman says the Summer Tanager may be easily identified, not alone by its color but by its unique call-note, a clearly enunciated *chicky, tucky, tuck*. Its song bears a general resemblance to that of the Scarlet, but to some ears is much sweeter, better sustained, and more musical. It equals in strength, according to one authority, that of the Robin, but is uttered more hurriedly, is more "wiry," and much more continued.

The Summer Tanager is to a greater or less extent known to farmers as the Red Bee-Bird. Its food consists largely of hornets, wasps, and bees.

The male of this species requires several years to attain the full plumage. Immature individuals, it is said, show a mixture of red and yellow in relative proportions according to age. The female has more red than the male, but the tint is peculiar, a dull Chinese orange, instead of a pure rosy vermilion, as in the male.

An interesting study for many of our readers during the summer months when the Tanagers are gay in their full plumage, would be to seek out, with Birds in hand, the most attractive denizens of the groves, identifying and observing them in their haunts until the entire group, of which five species are represented in the United States, is made familiar. When we remember that there are about three hundred and eighty known species of Tanagers in Tropical America, it would seem a light task to acquaint oneself with the small family at home.

THE AMERICAN WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

“As stupid as a Goose!”

Yes, I know that is the way our family is usually spoken of. But then I'm not a tame Goose, you know. We wild fellows think we know a little more than the one which waddles about the duck-pond in your back yard.

He sticks to one old place all the time. Waddles and talks and looks the same year after year. We migratory birds, on the other hand, fly from place to place. Our summers are passed here, our winters there; so that we pick up a thing or two the common Goose never dreams of.

“The laughing Goose!”

Yes, some people call me that. I don't know why, unless my *Honk, honk, honk!* sounds like a laugh. Perhaps, though, it is because the look about my mouth is so pleasant.

Did you ever see a flock of us in motion, in October or November, going to our winter home?

Ah, that is a sight! When the time comes for us to start, we form ourselves into a figure like this >· a big gander taking the lead where the dot is. Such a *honk, honk, honking* you never heard. People who have heard us, and seen us, say it sounds like a great army overhead.

Where do we live in summer, and what do we eat?

You will find us throughout the whole of North America, but in greater numbers on the Pacific coast. The fresh-water lakes are our favorite resorts. We visit the wheat fields and corn fields, nibbling the young, tender blades and feeding on the scattered grain. The farmers don't like it a bit, but we don't care. That is the reason our flesh tastes so sweet.

And tough!

My, how you talk! It is only we old fellows that are tough, we fellows over a year old. But of course a great many people don't know that, or don't care.

Why, I once heard of a gander that had waddled around a barnyard for five long years. Thanksgiving Day arrived, and they roasted him for dinner.

Think of eating an old, *old* friend like that!

Where do we build our nests?

Away up north, in Alaska, and on the islands of the Arctic Sea. We make them of hay, feathers, and down, building them in hollow places on the ground.

How many eggs?

Six. I am very good to my mate, and an affectionate father.

THE AMERICAN WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

WHITE-FRONTED or Laughing Geese are found in considerable numbers on the prairies of the Mississippi Valley. They are called Prairie Brant by market-men and gunners. Though not abundant on the Atlantic seaboard, vast flocks may be seen in the autumn months on the Pacific Slope. In Oregon and northern California some remain all winter, though the greater number go farther south. They appear to prefer the grassy patches along streams flowing into the ocean, or the tide-water flats so abundant in Oregon and Washington, where the Speckle-bellies, as they are called, feed in company with the Snow Geese. The nesting place of this favorite species is in the wooded districts of Alaska and along the Yukon river. No nest is formed, from seven to ten eggs being laid in a depression in the sand.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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