VARIOUS

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Содержание

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MAY

May brings all the flowers at once,
Teased by rains and kissed by suns;
Now the meadows white and gold;
Now the lambs leap in the fold.
May is wreathed with virgin white;
Glad May dances all the night;
May laughs, rolling 'mong the flowers,
Careless of the wintry hours.
May's storms turn to sunny rain,
And, when Iris springs again,
All the angels clap their hands,
Singing in their seraph bands.

– Walter Thornbury, "The Twelve Brothers."

Now, shrilleth clear each several bird his note,

The Halcyon charms the wave that knows no gale,
About our eaves the swallow tells her tale,
Along the river banks the swan, afloat,
And down the woodland glades the nightingale.

Now tendrils curl and earth bursts forth anew —
Now shepherds pipe and fleecy flocks are gay —
Now sailors sail, and Bacchus gets his due —
Now wild birds chirp and bees their toil pursue —
Sing, poet, thou – and sing thy best for May!

– William M. Hardinge, "Spring."

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE

(Icterus audubonii.)

The name oriole is from the French word oriol, which is a corruption of the Latin word aureolus, meaning golden. The name was originally applied to a vire, but is now used in a much wider sense and includes a number of birds.

The true orioles are birds of the Old World and are closely related to the thrushes. It is said that no fewer than twenty species from Asia and Africa have been described.

The orioles of America belong to a very different group of birds and are related to our blackbirds, the bobolink and the meadowlark. All these birds belong to the family Icteridae, the representatives of which are confined to the New World.

The genus of orioles (Icterus) contains about forty species, chiefly natives of Central and South America. The plumage of nearly all the species is more or less colored with shades of yellow, orange and black.

Audubon's Oriole, the male of which we illustrate, has a very limited range, including the "valley of the Lower Rio Grande in Texas and southward in Mexico to Oaxaca." It is more common in central and eastern Mexico than in any other part of its

range. In the summer, it only frequents the denser forests of its Texas home, but during the winter months it will approach the inhabited regions.

The Mexicans capture these Orioles and offer them for sale. In captivity, however, they seem to lose their vivacity and will not sing. "When free their usual song is a prolonged and repeated whistle of extraordinary mellowness and sweetness, each note varying in pitch from the preceding."

It is said that this beautiful bird is frequently called upon to become the foster parents of the offspring of some of those birds that have neither the inclination to build their own nests or to raise their own families. The ingenious nests of the orioles seem to be especially attractive to these tramp birds which possess parasitic tastes.

The red-eyed cowbird (Callothrus robustus), of the Southern United States and Central America, seems to be the pest that infests the homes of Audubon's Oriole. It has been stated that the majority of the sets of eggs collected from the nests of this Oriole contain one or more of the cowbird's eggs. It is also probable that many of the Oriole's eggs are destroyed by the cowbirds as well as by other agencies, and thus, though the raising of two broods the same season is frequently attempted, the species is far from abundant.

Regarding the nesting habits of the Audubon's Oriole, Captain Charles Bendire says, "The nest of this Oriole is usually placed in mesquite trees, in thickets and open woods, from six to fourteen

feet from the ground. It is a semipensile structure, woven of fine, wire-like grass used while still green and resembles those of the hooded and orchard orioles, which are much better known. The nest is firmly attached, both on the top and sides, to small branches and growing twigs and, for the size of the bird, it appears rather small. One now before me measures three inches in depth inside by about the same in inner diameter. The rim of the nest is somewhat contracted to prevent the eggs from being thrown out during high winds. The inner lining consists of somewhat finer grass tops, which still retain considerable strength and are even now, when perfectly dry, difficult to break. Only a single nest of those found was placed in a bunch of Spanish moss and this was suspended within reach of the ground; the others were attached to small twigs."

The number of eggs vary from two to five and "sets of one or two eggs of this Oriole, with two or three cowbird's eggs, seem to be most frequently found, some of the first named eggs being thrown out to make room." The eggs are ovate in form and the general color varies from white with a bluish cast to white with a grayish cast and in some instances a purple shade predominates. The markings vary greatly both in color and form. They may be either thread-like, in streaks or in blotches. In color they may be various shades of either brown, purple or lavender.

The food of Audubon's Oriole consists of insects and, to some extent, of berries and other fruits. Mr. Chark, who studied the habits of this species in Texas, says that he observed it frequently

feeding on the fruit of the hackberry. He also states that these birds were usually in pairs and exhibited a retiring disposition, preferring the thick foliage of the margins of streams rather than that of more open and exposed places.

Seth Mindwell.

TO A SEA-BIRD

Sauntering hither on listless wings,
Careless vagabond of the sea,
Little thou heedest the surf that sings,
The bar that thunders, the shale that rings, —

Give me to keep thy company.
Little thou hast, old friend, that's new,
Storms and wrecks are old things to thee;
Sick am I of these changes, too;

Little to care for, little to rue, —
I on the shore, and thou on the sea,
All of thy wanderings, far and near,
Bring thee at last to shore and me;

All of my journeyings end them here,
This our tether must be our cheer, —
I on the shore and thou on the sea.
Lazily rocking on ocean's breast,

Something in common, old friend, have we;
Thou on the shingle seek'st thy nest,
I to the waters look for rest, —
I on the shore, and thou on the sea.

– Bret Harte.

FROM AN ORNITHOLOGIST'S YEAR BOOK

THE HEART OF A DRYAD

I

It was an oak wood. A few hickories and chestnuts grew there, but the oaks ruled; great of girth, brawny of limb, with knotted muscles like the figures of Michael Angelo or Tintoretto's workmen in his painting of the Forge of Vulcan. As to coloring, the oaks were of the Venetian painter's following, every oak of them! In summer they were "men in green," rich, vigorous green, with blue shadows between the rustling boughs; in early autumn, though russet in the shadow, the sunshine showed them a deep and splendid crimson, pouring through them like a libation to the gods of the lower earth, and to the noble dead, for the Dryad had a heart for heroes and all oak-like men.

Immediately before the great winds came, stripping them bare, and dashing silver cymbals to wild airs of triumph, they wore a sober brown, but it put on a glow, as of bronze or heated metal after a rain, when the sun's rays smote them with shining

spears smiting aslant with unwonted glittering. Under the moon or after a freeze they were all clad in steel, armor of proof, and mighty was the tumult, as of meeting swords, when the great boughs swung, and the long icicles fell upon ice below.

But these days were far off. It was summer, and a crystal brook slipped from level to level, singing its sweet water-song, and bringing cool water to bathe the feet of the oak which the Dryad loved and decked with green garlands. The orioles loved it, flashing here and there with rich red gold or flame-like orange on breast and wings and soft, velvety black on head and shoulders, splendidly beautiful as some tropic flower, they chose the end of an oak bough to hang their pensile nest. The male oriole shone in the sun, but his mate glowed with a duller hue, an orange veiled with gray, and mottled and spotted or splashed with white and fuscous and black, as a brooding creature should be that sits all day long amid the play of fleeting light and shade upon constant color. But both were beautiful in their strong and darting flight, and their labors of love.

The mother alone fashioned the nest, weaving it strongly of grasses and bark, of fibre, hair and string, and lashing it firmly near the end, a hanging cradle for the wind to rock at will and safely, and beautifully adorned with a fantastic pattern of green oak leaves, woven across, and aiding to conceal the nest itself. The eggs, four to six, were white, but marked with strange characters, sometimes distinct, sometimes obscure, a hieroglyphic of black or fuscous lines, over which the mother

brooded patiently for many days. But the male oriole was not indifferent, even while the young were in the egg. He did not fear to expose himself upon an upper branch, where he could watch untiringly over the safety of the beloved nest and all day long, in bright or cloudy weather, floated down to his silent mate a song of courage and tenderness.

Ah, no shepherds in far-off Arcady ever piped more sweetly to their beloved than this winged lover! His note is wild and free, a touch of anxious pleading perhaps in the brooding song that one does not catch in the first triumphant cry of joy with which he flashes upon our sight in April, but inexpressibly sweet and liquid. It is essentially music of the pipes, like the soft airs blown by lips of happy children upon reeds cut from the brook-side in the first joyous days of spring, but it is different in its airy quality, as if a melody, unfinished, were floating far above our heads! They are loving house-holders, and, if undisturbed, will return, year after year, to the same nest.

Happy is the Dryad that dwells in an oak where the orioles build and sing!

Ella F. Mosby.

THE MARBLED GODWIT

(Limosa fedoa.)

– I behold
The godwits running by the water edge,
The mossy bridges mirrored as of old;
The little curlews creeping from the sedge.

– Jean Ingelow, "The Four Bridges."

The Godwits form an interesting group of the shore birds (Limicolae) and belong in the same family as the snipes and sandpipers. They command attention not alone because of their habits, but also because they have for centuries been considered a delicate food for man, and much has been written in praise of their flesh.

Early in the sixteenth century one of the European species was rated as "worth three times as much as the snipe," and was considered a delicacy of the French epicure. We are told that the black-tailed Godwit in the year 1766 was sold in England for half-a-crown. Ben Jonson speaks enthusiastically of this bird as a delicate morsel for the appetite.

The origin of the name Godwit is veiled in obscurity. It has

been suggested that it may be a corruption of the two words good and the antiquated word wight, the latter meaning swift, though the Godwits are not birds of very rapid flight.

The Marbled Godwit belongs to a genus (Limosa) which, though not rich in the number of species, has representatives throughout the Northern Hemisphere. This bird frequents muddy pools and marshes and wet, sandy shores. It is this habit that suggested to the naturalist the generic name, which is derived from the Latin word limosus, meaning muddy.

As is the case with many of our game birds, this species bears a number of common names, such as the Straight-Billed Curlew, the Marbled or Brown Marlin, the Red Curlew and, among sportsmen, the Dough and the Doe Bird.

With the exception of the long-billed curlew the Marbled Godwit is the largest of the "Bay Birds." These two birds closely resemble each other in coloration, but may be easily distinguished by the characteristics of the bills, which are very long. The terminal half of the bill of the curlew is curved downward, while that of the Godwit is either straight or slightly curved upward.

The geographical distribution of the Marbled Godwit includes the whole of North America, though it is infrequent on the Atlantic coast. Its nesting range is chiefly limited to the interior from Iowa and Nebraska northward to the Saskatchewan. In winter it migrates to Central America, Cuba and the northern part of South America.

In company with the long-billed curlew and some species of sandpipers it builds its nest on the grassy banks of rivers and ponds, usually in some natural depression. Occasionally, however, the nests are found on moist prairies some distance from a stream. In these grass-lined nests are laid the three or four bright olivaceous, drab or creamy buff eggs that are variously spotted or blotched with varying shades of brown. They are domestic and seemingly devoted to their fellows. When one of their number is wounded and unable to fly they will frequently remain in the vicinity, flying around the spot where lies their wounded comrade.

Dr. Coues tells us that "on intrusion near the nest the birds mount in the air with loud, piercing cries, hovering slowly around with labored flight, in evident distress and approaching sometimes within a few feet of the observer."

Its food consists of the smaller crustaceans, worms, snails, insects and their larvae. These are captured from the surface of the water, on the shore or are probed for, with the long, sensitive bills, in the soft soil of the banks or under shallow water. When feeding it moves in an easy and graceful manner. Its grace and dignity well merit the saying that "it is one of the most beautiful of the birds sought by the sportsman."

Neltje Blanchan has very aptly described the habits of this bird. She says: "It is not the intention of the Godwit to give anyone a near view of either plumage or bill. The most stealthy intruder on its domains – salt or fresh water shores, marshes or

prairie lands – startles it to wing; its loud, whistled notes sound the alarm to other marlins hidden among the tall sedges, and the entire flock flies off at an easy, steady pace, not rapid, yet not to be overtaken afoot. A beautiful posture, common to the plovers, curlews, terns and some other birds, is struck just as they alight. Raising the tips of the wings till they meet high above the back, the marlins suggest the favorite attitude of angels shown by the early Italian painters."

A BIRD-JOKE AT LEAFY LAWN

In early spring Robin Redbreast returned to Leafy Lawn and selected a new site for his nest in the same apple tree his father and grandfather had occupied during preceding summers. No other birds had yet arrived and Robin jumped about on the sprouting lawn master of all he surveyed.

He soon discovered to his sorrow that those selfish, quarrelsome sparrows who tormented the birds last summer and drove away the wrens, had gone no farther during the winter than to the eaves of a near barn, and were already back to their nest in the tall poplar, scolding and threatening as disagreeably as ever. But Robin noticed that the limb which held their nest so high was dead and he hoped a strong wind would dash limb, nest and ugly sparrows all to the ground.

Robin looked very handsome in his crimson vest, hopping over the grass in a scalloped path, with his modest little mate following in a similar path beside him. Suddenly they stopped and listened.

"Surely that is Mr. Woodpecker pounding on the tin roof-drain," said Robin; and Mrs. Robin looked about curiously and spied Mrs. Woodpecker on a near tree listening to her husband's wonderful drumming. Mrs. Woodpecker was thinking what a fine nest such a strong husband could cut out and what quantities of corn and nuts he could hammer into the bark of the trees for an

extra food supply. In a very short time the woodpeckers selected the balm-of-Gilead tree by the gate for their home and the work began of cutting and tossing the tiny shavings and so making a hole large enough to accommodate Mrs. Woodpecker while she sat over the ivory eggs waiting the day of their hatching.

Mr. Woodpecker was recognized as king of Leafy Lawn, perhaps because of his lordly manner and fine clothes. He always wore a jet black coat and white satin vest, and what was queer on a king, a large scarlet bonnet.

A few days after the arrival of the Woodpeckers, Robin saw Mr. Blue Jay making a circuitous route to the tall pine and he knew the Jays had located there. Though Mr. Blue Jay was always cautious, trying to deceive every one concerning the whereabouts of his home, he himself knew every other nest in the yard.

So persistent was he in patrolling Leafy Lawn, jumping from tree to tree and from branch to branch, reporting his presence, and in case of danger threatening, squawking so loudly and repeatedly, that it was agreed, as he already had a blue uniform, that he should be the policeman for this precinct.

There came a day early in the season when Mr. Woodpecker, Robin Redbreast and Mr. Blue Jay all assembled within speaking distance on the lower branches of a silver maple tree and excitedly discussed the arrival of a number of birds which they had heard early that morning but had been unable to find.

"My wife," said Robin, "awakened me from the twig near her nest, where I usually sleep and keep guard, and she said that one

of our kin had arrived for she had heard a voice exactly like mine from the plum tree. Hoping it was one of my brothers I searched eagerly until sunrise, and though I heard him twice I could not find him."

Mr. Blue Jay was more excited than before and turned about, twitched his tail violently, scolded and sputtered that he had had just such an experience and he believed the sparrows had added witchcraft to their other sins and were trying to hoodoo the birds of Leafy Lawn.

A frightened sparrow overheard this accusation and came near enough to protest that they were not guilty and had been themselves trying in vain to find their newly-arrived English relatives, whom they had believed they heard that morning.

Mr. Woodpecker said it might be no personal affair of his as he had heard no drumming nor mocking of his song, but if Leafy Lawn were to be occupied by kildares, bobolinks, meadow larks and blackbirds he thought there would be scarce picking of worms, bugs or seeds for the old settlers who were the rightful possessors of these premises and it was a serious condition of things. In closing his pompous speech he shook his scarlet bonnet furiously, smoothed his waistcoat and jumped upon a higher limp and called off his "chit-it-it-it-it-it" so shrill and high that his companions were for the moment alarmed lest he should split his throat. But he stopped as suddenly as he had begun, and upon the silence that followed the birds heard, as surely as they saw the blossoms on the apple trees, the song of the thrush.

"It is undoubtedly a hobgoblin," hoarsely whispered Mr. Woodpecker, "for Mr. Blue Jay swore to me this morning that during the seasons he and his ancestors have patrolled this lawn never have they seen a thrush even alight here."

It was decided that the three birds make one more immediate and thorough search for the monster hobgoblin which infested the Lawn.

Imagine their chagrin when they saw tilting upon the unleaved twig of a late catalpa tree a modest little gray bird with keen, bright eyes, who commenced a garble of all their songs called off in such merriment that the birds could not but appreciate the sport. Then the stranger, who was no other than Mr. Cat-bird, a cousin to the brown mocking-bird of the south, gave a weird cry exactly like a cat's meow which so frightened the birds they flew hastily away to their several homes.

Mr. Cat-bird was welcomed to Leafy Lawn, for his beautiful voice was an esteemed acquisition to the morning chorus, but he could not deceive the birds again with his imitative songs.

Many a time, however, he would sit upon the corner of the house roof and perpetrate his joke on the boy in the hammock below, who thought he knew much about birds, but who could not understand why, when he heard so many different voices, there was only a little gray cat-bird within sight.

Gertrude Southwick Kingsland.

THE RUSTY BLACKBIRD OR GRACKLE

(Scolecophagus carolinus.)

Unlike the other blackbirds and our common orioles the Rusty Blackbird must not be sought in the orchards and fields of our farms and waysides, but in our forests and the heavily wooded banks of mountain streams and lakes. In such places this retiring bird passes the breeding season and raises its family in quiet solitude. It even seems to shun the company of its own kind and, unlike the red-winged blackbird, is seldom seen in large flocks. It is only in the spring that we may observe even small flocks from "whence issues a confused medley of whistles, sweeter and higher-pitched than the best efforts of the redwings." Captain Charles Bendire says: "The ordinary call note sounds like 'tehack, tehack,' several times repeated; another like 'turnlee, turnlee, turnlee,' uttered in a clear tone and varied occasionally to 'trallahee, trallahee.'"

Few birds exhibit a more happy disposition. They seem always to be perfectly satisfied with their surroundings. One writer, quietly watching them, gathered in the trees about him, says that "The wind whistled loudly through the branches above, but

these lively fellows began a serenade so joyous and full of gleeful abandon that I lingered long to hear them. In singing they opened the bill widely and the throat swelled with melody. Their notes are rich, varied and energetic. They are almost constantly in motion, chasing each other or flying from perch to perch, singing merrily most of the time."

The Rusty Blackbird has a wide range. It is more common in the eastern portion of North America from Florida and the Gulf of Mexico northward to the northern limit of the forests. Westward, though constantly decreasing in numbers as the distance increases from the Atlantic coast, it is found as far as the great plains and very rarely on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. It frequents practically the whole forest area of British America from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean. Mr. E. W. Nelson says: "I found it abundant at the Yukon mouth, where the widely extended areas of bush grown country offered suitable shelter and where it consequently nested in considerable numbers."

Their nesting range covers the whole of British America, but in the United States it is restricted to a comparatively small area. Its nests have only been reported as occurring in portions of New England and in the wild Adirondack forests. In winter it makes its home in the Middle and Southern States. At this time, from necessity, it is often seen around barn and stock yards, feeding on the grain that has been dropped by the cattle.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.