

VARIOUS

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DECEMBER

When the feud of hot and cold
Leaves the autumn woodlands bare;
When the year is getting old,
And flowers are dead, and keen the air;

When the crow has new concern,
And early sounds his raucous note;
And – where the late witch-hazels burn —
The squirrel from a chuckling throat

Tells that one larder's space is filled,
And tilts upon a towering tree;
And, valiant, quick, and keenly thrilled,
Upstarts the tiny chickadee;

When the sun's still shortening arc
Too soon night's shadows dun and gray
Brings on, and fields are drear and dark,
And summer birds have flown away, —

I feel the year's slow-beating heart,
The sky's chill prophecy I know;
And welcome the consummate art
Which weaves this spotless shroud of snow!

– *Joel Benton, in "Songs of Nature."*

THE HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus.*)

Only a very limited portion of the United States is beautified by the presence of the bright colored Hooded Oriole. The North has the richly plumaged Baltimore oriole for a short time each year, but only the far southeastern part of Texas is enlivened by this graceful, active bird of our illustration, which is “so full of song that the woods are filled with music all the day.” Both of these birds seem hardly to belong to the North, where somber colors seem more in harmony with a severer climate. The Hooded Oriole does not attempt the journey and when we see the Baltimore,

“A winged flame that darts and burns,
Dazzling where'er his bright wing turns,”

in our northern woods we cannot but ask, with the poet,

“How falls it, Oriole, thou hast come to fly
In tropic splendor through our northern sky?
At some glad moment was it Nature's choice
To dower a scrap of sunset with a voice?”

The Hooded Oriole has a very narrow range, reaching from Texas southward through eastern Mexico to Honduras, and during our northern winters it has the Baltimore as an associate. It is a social bird and frequents the home of man. One writer relating his experience with this Oriole says: “They were continually appearing about the thatched roof of our houses and the arbors adjoining for insects; they were more familiar than any of the other Orioles about the ranch.”

It not only delights man by its song and beautiful coloring, but its presence is also beneficial, for it destroys countless adult insects and their larvæ.

The Hooded Oriole seldom builds its nest higher than from six to twelve feet above the ground, though in a few instances it has been found as high as thirty feet. Dr. James C. Merrill, in his Notes on the Ornithology of Texas, says, “The nests of this bird found here are perfectly characteristic, and cannot be confounded with those of any allied species. They are usually found in one of the two following situations: The first and most frequent is in a bunch of hanging moss, usually at no great height from the ground; when so placed the nests are formed almost entirely by hollowing out and matting the moss, with a few filaments of a dark, hairlike moss as a lining. The second situation is in a bush growing to a height of about six feet, a nearly bare stem, throwing out two or three irregular masses of leaves at the top. These bunches of dark green leaves conceal the nest admirably. It is constructed of filaments of the hair-like mass just referred to, with a little Spanish moss, wool, or a few feathers for the lining. They are rather wide and shallow for orioles' nests, and though strong they appear thin and delicate.” Not infrequently the Hooded Oriole builds its nest in plants called the Spanish bayonet or yucca. In such a situation the walls are constructed almost entirely of the fibers of the plant torn from dried leaves. These fibers are tough and the nest walls are much more durable than when made with moss. Wool or vegetable down may be used as a lining, but it is not uncommon to find no lining. The Hooded Oriole is not free from the intrusion of feathered rascals. Major Bendire says that it “is considerably imposed upon by both the red-eyed and the dwarf cow-birds, and in a few instances parasitic eggs of both species are found in the same nest.”

THE ORIOLE'S MISSION

Sweet little bird on yonder tree,
Fly to the town with song of glee
And comfort there some lonely soul,
Thou sweetest, dearest oriole!

Perch on an open window sill,
And then pour forth thy mellowest trill.
What griefs thy carol will console,
Thou sweetest, dearest oriole!

A tale of hope to each sad heart
Thy notes of love will soon impart;
And in their memory will roll
The sweet strain of the oriole.

– *Christine B. Moray.*

THE CLOTHES MOTH AND ITS METHODS

Though it has incurred the bitter condemnation of all housewives, the clothes moth is quite an interesting little body from the naturalist's point of view. The species known in the United States bears the long name *Pellionella*. Its larva constructs a case for its occupancy. The moths themselves are very small and well fitted for making their way through minute holes and chinks. The mother insect deposits her eggs in or near such material as will be best adapted for food for the young. Further, she distributes them so that there may be a plentiful supply and enough room for each.

When one of the scattered family issues from the egg its first care is to provide itself with a home, or more correctly speaking, a dress. Having decided upon a proper site it cuts out a filament of cloth and places it on a line with its body. Another is cut and placed parallel with the first. The two are then bound together by a few threads of silk from the caterpillar's own body. The same process is repeated with other hairs until the little creature has made a fabric of some thickness. This it extends until it is large enough to cover its whole body. It chooses the longer threads for the outside and finishes the inner side by a closely woven tapestry of silk. The dress being complete, the larva begins to feed on the material of the cloth.

When it outgrows its clothes, which happens in the course of time, it proceeds to enlarge them. With the dexterity of a tailor it slits the coat, or case, on the two opposite sides, and inserts two pieces of the requisite size. All this is managed without the least exposure of its body. Neither side being slit all at once. Concealed in its movable silk lined roll it spends the summer plying its sharp reaping hooks amid the harvest of tapestry.

In the fall it ceases to eat, fixes its habitation, and lies torpid during the winter. With the early spring it changes to a chrysalis within its case, and in about twenty days thereafter it emerges as a winged moth, which flies about in the evening until it has found a mate and is ready to lay eggs.

Louise Jamison.

INCIDENTS ABOUT BIRDS

There is much to be learned about the habits of birds, even in a casual observation of them as we meet them from time to time.

It is well known that the English sparrow is not friendly toward other birds, often driving them from their nests and even going so far as to destroy both these and their young.

Upon one occasion a sparrow took possession of the partially completed nest of a pair of martins, in process of construction, beneath the eaves of a farmhouse. When the martins returned with their load of mud for its walls, the sparrow, intrenched within, drove them away with scolding cries and fluttering wings, resisting all their attempts at dislodging him. Time after time the attack was renewed, all to no avail. There he was and there he proposed to remain.

But the plucky martins were not so easily vanquished. They retired for a season, only to renew the attack with increased vigor, waging a battle long and fierce. Finally, however, they seemed to understand that their enemy had the better of them, and bent their energies toward vengeance. Carrying mud in their beaks, they built a wall about the sparrow as he sat in possession of their home, surrounding him so completely that he was made a prisoner in the very place where he had taken forcible possession. And there they left him to his fate.

A pair of robins selected a nesting place in the fork of a maple, standing quite near a house, the chamber windows of which looked down directly into it. No sooner had they begun to carry sticks for the foundation, than a pair of crow black birds, with malicious intent, pounced upon it and scattered the sticks in every direction, taking advantage of the absence of the owners of the nest to carry out their mischief. Time after time did the robins repair the damage and begin afresh their work of construction. No sooner were they out of sight than the black birds tore the material out of the tree, seemingly working in great haste to complete their depredation before the robins' return.

Stormy encounters, amounting to pitched battles sometimes, ensued when the marauders were caught by the irate home makers in the very act of tearing to fragments the work they were toiling so painfully to complete. Not one day only, but several elapsed, and still the battle continued, the interested spectators though sympathetic were powerless to help the rightful owners of the home. The black birds seemingly did not want the nest for themselves. They merely objected to the robins building there. At last, to the great relief of the red-breasts, their enemies gave up the fight and allowed them to build the nest. This they did, laying their eggs and rearing their young without further annoyance.

Many a fat angle worm does the robin get in the spring of the year, pulling them out of the ground where the bright eyes spy them close to the surface, or partly protruding therefrom. A full-grown robin has been seen to thus capture and swallow a round dozen of earth worms inside of ten minutes.

One day a fledgling was hopping across the lawn, the mother bird alert and watchful, not far away. She had been feeding it, but evidently its hunger had not yet been appeased, for it hopped to her side and began to make the coaxing noise heard when in the nest as the parent approaches with food. The mother bird paused a moment, looked about her, then hopping to one side a short distance, she planted her feet squarely upon the ground, caught one end of a worm in her beak and commenced to pull. The worm, which was a large one, was not easily dislodged and tug as hard as she could, she could not complete her capture. Evidently the worm was too long. She fairly tipped over backward in her effort, yet without avail. All at once, and as quick as a flash, so as to give it no chance to get away, she let go her hold and seizing the worm farther down, drew it triumphantly forth and gave it to her expectant offspring.

E. E. Rockwood.

THE CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW (*Antrostomus carolinensis*.)

In the wooded ravines and timbered swamps of the southern states, the Chuck-will's-widow tells of its presence by frequently calling its own name. It, with the whip-poor-will and the night hawk, belongs to the family of goatsuckers and is closely related to the swifts. The family includes about eighty-five species of these peculiar birds, nearly all being natives of the tropics, though nearly every part of the world has representatives. The range of the Chuck-will's-widow is quite limited. It includes the states from Virginia and southern Illinois southward to the Gulf of Mexico, and through Mexico into Central America. It is also found in Cuba.

Chuck-will's-widow is a bird of the twilight and night hours. Silent during the daylight hours, its penetrating voice, which is remarkably strong, may be continuously heard in the regions that it inhabits during the evening hours and for a time preceding the returning light of day. It is said that on a still evening its call may be heard for more than one mile. In its large eyes and head, its loose and somber colored plumage, its quiet flight and nocturnal habits it resembles the owls. Its short bill and the shape of the wings, permitting rapid flight, give it a close relationship to the swifts. Its mouth is peculiarly fitted for the capture of insects. The gape is enormous, and when the mouth is fully open, will measure nearly two inches from side to side. It is also aided in ensnaring insects by the long, bristle-like whiskers at the base of the mouth. It will catch and swallow the largest of the night-flying moths, and though it seems almost incredible small birds not infrequently form a part of its diet. An observer found in the stomach of one "among an indistinguishable mass of brownish matter, a small bone, about half an inch long." In another stomach he found the remains of a hummingbird only partially digested and well enough preserved for him to identify the species. Dr. F. W. Langdon states that he examined the stomach of a female Chuck-will's-widow that "contained the partially digested body, entire, of a swamp sparrow, intermingled with the feathers of which were numerous remains of insects, chiefly small beetles."

While hunting for food the Chuck-will's-widow flies low, often but a few feet above the surface of the ground. In this habit it differs from the night-hawk, which, like the swifts, seeks its food high in the air. Now and then it rests, perching on old logs or fences, from which it will launch forth in pursuit of prey which its keen eyes have sighted. During the day it roosts in hollow trees or upon a large limb in some densely shaded spot.

It does not attempt to build a nest. The two dull white eggs are laid upon the ground or upon leaves in some secluded place in woods or thickets. It is said that this bird, when disturbed at its nest, will remove either its eggs or the young, as the case may be, to a place of safety by carrying them in its mouth.

Mr. Audubon relates the following incident which came under his observation: "When the Chuck-will's-widow, either male or female (for each sits alternately), has discovered that the eggs have been touched, it ruffles its feathers and appears extremely dejected for a minute or two, after which it emits a low, murmuring cry, scarcely audible to me as I lay concealed at a distance not more than eighteen or twenty yards. At this time I had seen the other parent reach the spot, flying so low over the ground that I thought its little feet must have touched it as it skimmed along, and after a few low notes and some gesticulations, all indicative of great distress, take an egg in its large mouth, the other bird doing the same, when they would fly off together, skimming closely over the ground, until they disappeared among the branches and trees." Because of its night-flying habit, its somber colors and its peculiar penetrating notes the Chuck-will's-widow, as well as the whip-poor-will, was considered by the Indians a bird of ill omen.

AN AMATEUR CIRCUS

A True Story

We were not like ordinary children – in fact as I look back on our younger days it comes to me ever more strongly how very unlike we were. There was Harvey, my older brother, who never did anything that other children did and was always perpetrating some most extraordinary thing which certainly no one else ever would have thought of. However, in spite of this trait, or possibly in consequence of it, he afterwards became famous. But that is neither here nor there – we were all what the neighbors termed “unexpected,” if they were kindly disposed, otherwise it was some word to the same effect though less mild.

It was always a great blessing to us and one which we received with thankful hearts, that our father was a man of science, and his line of work made him the recipient of a varied assortment of animals which he would bring home alive and keep until he was ready to work upon them. It was only natural that we children should become fond of these creatures and beg that they might be spared the eternal sleep and left to us to play with. This was often granted.

So it happened at one time that we were the proud possessors of twenty-five different kinds of birds, animals and reptiles and the envy of all the children for blocks around.

It is so long now since the time of which I write that I may not be able to recall them all, but I give them as I remember them and by their rank – for they had rank as well as names, the highest in intelligence always going first – as they did at our funerals; for when any one of the little colony died we would give it a burial in accordance with its station in life.

First beside the grave would stand Rex, my beautiful dog, whose knowledge was so great it seemed almost human; then would come “Daisy,” Harvey’s little Mexican pony; then “Lorita,” the parrot, whose intelligence was really remarkable; after her came “Jackie,” the monkey, and so on down. The cat, the crow, with his one white tail feather; then the smaller birds; two love-birds, a brown thrush, a blue jay and the canary. Three baby foxes followed the birds and then came the squirrels, gray, red, and flying squirrels; next to these stood the rabbits, a dozen or more of all kinds and colors: Belgian hares, pure yellows, angoras, whites and blacks, they came, a motley crew. The weasel and muskrat were next, and now the reptiles were beginning; the turtles, a hellbender and the snakes; black snakes, garter snakes, green snakes, a puffing adder and last of all came two boa constrictors.

I have reserved a special place for my own dear, stupid, little hedge hog, Billy. It used to grieve me to always see poor Billy straggling off at the end of the animals – ahead of the reptiles, to be sure – a pathetic little figure of stupidity, but Harvey insisted he deserved no better place. Possibly it was because he seemed so lonely and despised by the others, but at any rate, Billy was an especial pet of mine, and in order to disprove Harvey’s statement that, “it was impossible to teach it anything,” I spent much time and pains on Billy, and at last succeeded in teaching him to utter a little grunt when I would scratch his back and ask, “Want your supper, Billy?” But the thing that made me the proudest was when he at last could go up stairs. It was nearly three years before Billy could accomplish the entire flight, and even then it was a long and weary pilgrimage; but the patience I had expended upon him had not been in vain. It was comical to watch his efforts – the little short forelegs trying to reach up to the next stair, where he knew a lump of sugar would be his reward.

But I am digressing. One day father and mother having gone out of town to a funeral, we children were left to ourselves. It was an opportunity not to be neglected, and our brains were at work trying to plan some new game, when Harvey arrived in our midst triumphantly waving a huge sheet of paper – a “bill-poster” he called it – upon which, in large letters, were the headlines, “Grand Circus,” and then followed an account of the animals that would take part and the tricks they would perform. Harvey assigned us our posts – he himself being ring-master, by right of his seniority and

having thought of the game. Alice was the “fat lady,” while I, Paul, being the youngest, was nothing but a “feeder of animals” and tent shifter.

Under the direction of the Circus Master we assembled the menagerie in cages, or loose as the case might be, up in Mother’s bed-room. It took a good deal of time to get them all together. Polly was of a roving disposition and had to be coaxed down from the top of a tall tree, where she had perched, a square or so away; the crow was up on the roof; the rabbits and hares were scampering all over the garden – in fact, nothing but the caged animals seemed to be at hand. But the task was finally accomplished and all were ranged around the room waiting for Harvey, who had disappeared mysteriously some little time before.

Suddenly there was a most terrific clatter and noise, coming ever nearer and nearer. We looked at each other open-mouthed with surprise, when, with a flourish of lariat and a wild Indian war-whoop, that rose above the deafening noise, in dashed Harvey upon “Daisy,” a triumphant figure – having accomplished the difficult feat of making the pony carry him up stairs. He dismounted with a jump. “Ladies and Gentlemen,” he began, “the first act on the programme will be by this wonderful horse – Daisy, down on your haunches!” The lariat swept the air in true ring-master fashion, and Daisy obediently sat back on her haunches.

“Shake hands, Daisy.”

The hoof came up – but here Rex interfered. He realized the pony had no business there and felt the responsibility which rested upon him. Good dog that he was, he started toward her, barking sharply, as though to say, “Go away – you know you have no business here.”

Then, as if his bark had been a signal, all the other animals lifted up their voices, and for a while it was pandemonium let loose – screeches from Polly, calls of “Mamma” from the crow (which it could say as plainly as any parrot, though its tongue had never been slit), grunts and squeals mingled in utter confusion. In the midst of it all who should walk in but Uncle Charles.

Now, we all knew that Uncle was not disposed to pass over lightly even the least of our offenses, and what he would say, and what was more, do now, we dared not think. But Harvey was equal to the occasion. He knew Uncle’s weak point, and went towards him nonchalantly swinging the snakes who stuck out their heads as they swayed back and forth.

Now, to us children the snakes were just as nice and pretty as any of the animals, but they were quite the opposite to Uncle Charles. The great, writhing things, swaying to and fro as they twisted in Harvey’s hands and stuck out their heads, in which the eyes dully gleamed, filled him with loathing and disgust, not unmingled with terror.

All that Uncle Charles had meant to say vanished from his mind as he saw Harvey advancing upon him with the boa-constrictors, and he began to retreat more and more rapidly, but with ever decreasing dignity. Harvey still pursued.

“Why, Uncle,” we heard him say, “what’s the matter?” There was no response – Uncle Charles had gone home. But the circus was broken up.

I think it is better to draw a veil over the consequences of our circus. No circus is complete without a side-show – and ours was no exception. We never had another one – at least not in mother’s room.

Paul Brenton Eliot.

THE GRAY-CROWNED LEUCOSTICTE (*Leucosticte tephrocotis.*)

The Gray-crowned Leucosticte or Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, as it is often called, is a resident of the interior of British America during the warmer months. In the winter it passes southward, frequenting the Rocky Mountain region of the United States, where it is quite common on the eastern slopes. So far as known, within the border of the United States, it only nests in the Sierra Nevada in California. While on the slopes of the mountains this Finch is usually seen in flocks. During the most severe weather it will frequent settled districts, becoming quite tame, and it has been known to seek the sheltering cover of the nests of cliff swallows under the eaves of buildings. When in the fields it is a restless bird and quite shy.

Dr. R. W. Shufeldt, while stationed at Fort Fetterman, Wyoming, had an excellent opportunity to study the habits of this handsome bird. He captured eight, including both males and females, which he placed in a cage especially prepared for them. "In a few days they not only became accustomed to their quarters, but apparently thoroughly satisfied and happy. Flocks of their companions passing over were certain to be called down, to alight on the fences, the ground, and in fact, everything in the neighborhood of the cage, to even the cage itself." The birds were given canary and flax seeds, cracked wheat and finally lettuce and other tender leaves, all of which they seemed to relish. Dr. Shufeldt also says:

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