

VARIOUS

BIRDS, ILLUSTRATED BY
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY,
VOL. 2, NO. 4

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BIRDS IN CAPTIVITY

It was our intention in this article to give a number of instances of a pathetic nature concerning the sufferings of the various species of birds which it has been, and still is, a habit with many people to keep confined in cages totally inadequate for any other purpose than that of cruelty. The argument that man has no moral right to deprive an innocent creature of liberty will always be met with indifference by the majority of people, and an appeal to their intelligence and humanity will rarely prove effective. To capture singing birds for any purpose is, in many states, prohibited by statute. But the law is violated. Occasionally an example is made of one or more transgressors, but as a rule the officers of the law, whose business it should be to prevent it, manifest no interest whatever in its execution. The bird trappers as well know that it is against the law, but so long as they are unmolested by the police, they will continue the wholesale trapping. A contemporary recently said: "It seems strange that this bird-catching industry should increase so largely simultaneously with the founding of the Illinois Audubon Society. The good that that society has done in checking the habit of wearing birds in bonnets, seems to have been fairly counterbalanced by the increase in the number of songsters captured for cage purposes. These trappers choose the nesting season as most favorable for their work, and every pair of birds they catch means the loss of an entire family in the shape of a set of eggs or a nestful of young left to perish slowly by starvation."

This is the way the trappers proceed. They are nearly all Germans. Bird snaring is a favorite occupation in Germany and the fondness for the cruel work was not left behind by the emigrants. More's the pity. These fellows fairly swarm with their bird limes and traps among the suburbs, having an eye only to the birds of brightest plumage and sweetest song. "They use one of the innocents as a bait to lure the others to a prison." "Two of the trappers," says one who watched them, "took their station at the edge of an open field, skirted by a growth of willows. Each had two cage traps. The device was divided into two parts by wires running horizontally and parallel to the plane of the floor. In the lower half of each cage was a male American Goldfinch. In the roof of the traps were two little hinged doors, which turned backward and upward, leaving an opening. Inside the upper compartment of the trap, and accessible through the doorway in the roof, was a swinging perch. The traps were placed on stumps among the growth of thistles and dock weed, while the trappers hid behind the trees. The Goldfinches confined in the lower sections of the traps had been the victims of the trappers earlier in the season, and the sight of their familiar haunts, the sunlight, the breeze, and the swaying willow branches, where so often they had perched and sung, caused them to flutter about and to utter pathetically the call note of their days of freedom. It is upon this yearning for liberty and its manifestation that the bird trappers depend to secure more victims. No sooner does the piping call go forth from the golden throats of the little prisoners, than a reply comes from the thistle tops, far down the field. A moment more and the traps are surrounded with the black and yellow beauties. The fact that one of their own kind is within the curious little house which confronts them seems to send all their timidity to the winds and they fairly fall over one another in their endeavor to see what it all means. Finally one finds the doorway in the roof and drops upon the perch within. Instantly the doors close and a Goldfinch is a prisoner."

Laurence Sterne alone, of sentimental writers, has put in adequate language something of the feeling that should stir the heart of the sympathetic, at least, on seeing the unjust confinement of

innocent birds. The Starling, which is the subject of his elevated sentiment, will appear in an early number of *Birds*. Sterne had just been soliloquizing somewhat favorably of the Bastille, when a voice, which he took to be that of a child, complained “it could not get out.” “I looked up and down the passage, and seeing neither man, woman, nor child, I went out without further attention. In my return back through the passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over, and looking up, I saw it was a Starling hung in a little cage. ‘I can’t get out, I can’t get out,’ said the Starling. I stood looking at the Bird, and to every person who came through the passage, it ran fluttering to the side, towards which they approached it, with the same lamentation of its captivity. ‘I can’t get out,’ said the Starling. ‘God help thee!’ said I, ‘but I’ll let thee out, cost what it will;’ so I turned about the cage to get the door. It was twisted and double-twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces. I took both hands to it. The bird flew to the place where I was attempting its deliverance, and thrusting his head through the trellis, pressed his breast against it as if impatient. ‘I fear, poor creature,’ said I, ‘I can’t set thee at liberty.’ ‘No,’ said the Starling, ‘I can’t get out,’ ‘I can’t get out,’ said the Starling. I vow I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; or do I remember an incident in my life where the dissipated spirits, to which my reason had been a bubble, were so suddenly called home. Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to Nature were they chanted, that disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, ‘Slavery,’ said I, ‘still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account. No, thou thrice sweet and gracious goddess liberty, whose taste is grateful, and ever will be so, till nature herself shall change; no tint of woods can spot thy snowy mantle.’”

The bird in his cage pursued Sterne into his room, where he composed his apostrophe to liberty. It would be well indeed, if a sentiment could be aroused which would prohibit absolutely the caging of birds, as well as their wanton destruction, and if the children are taught that “tenderness which is the charm of youth,” another generation will see it accomplished.

– *C. C. Marble.*

THE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER

IF the children had had the naming of birds we venture to say that it would have been more appropriately done, and “Blackburnian,” as many other names of Warblers, would have had no place in literature. There are about seventy-five well known Warblers, nearly all with common names indicating the most characteristic colors or habits, or partly descriptive of the bird itself. The common names of this beautiful Warbler are Orange-throated Warbler and Hemlock Warbler. Some one has suggested that it should be called the Torch Bird, for “half a dozen of them as they flash about in the pines, raising their wings and jerking their tails, make the darkest shadows seem breaking into little tongues of flame.”

The Orange-throat is only migratory in Illinois, passing through in spring and fall, its summer home being chiefly if not wholly, to the northward, while it passes the winter in Central America and northern South America. It is found in New York and in portions of Massachusetts, frequenting the coniferous forests, and building its nest in bushes or small trees a few feet above the ground. Dr. C. Hart Merriam found a pair of these birds nesting in a grove of large white pines in Lewis County, New York. In the latter part of May the female was observed building, and on the second of June the nest contained four fresh eggs of the Warbler and one of the Cow bird. The nest was saddled on the horizontal limb about eight feet from the ground and about ten feet from the trunk. Nests have been found in pine trees in Southern Michigan at an elevation of forty feet. In all cases the nests are placed high in hemlocks or pines, which are the bird’s favorite resorts. From all accounts the nests of this species are elegantly and compactly made, consisting of a densely woven mass of spruce twigs, soft vegetable down, rootlets, and fine shreds of bark. The lining is often intermixed with horse hairs and feathers. Four eggs of greenish-white or very pale bluish-green, speckled or spotted, have usually been found in the nests.

The autumnal male Warblers resemble the female. They have two white bands instead of one; the black stripes on the side are larger; under parts yellowish; the throat yellowish, passing into purer yellow behind. Few of our birds are more beautiful than the full plumaged male of this lovely bird, whose glowing orange throat renders it a conspicuous object among the budding and blossoming branches of the hemlocks. Chapman says, coming in May, before the woods are fully clad, he seems like some bright plumaged tropical bird who has lost his way and wandered to northern climes. The summer is passed among the higher branches in coniferous forests, and in the early fall the bird returns to surroundings which seem more in keeping with its attire.

Mr. Minot describes the Blackburnian Warbler’s summer song as resembling the syllables *wee-see-wee-see*, while in the spring its notes may be likened to *wee-see-wee-see, tsee, tsee, tsee*, repeated, the latter syllables being on ascending scale, the very last shrill and fine.

THE LOST MATE

Shine! Shine! Shine!
Pour down your warmth, great Sun!
While we bask – we two together.

Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
If we two but keep together.

Till of a sudden,
May be killed, unknown to her mate,
One forenoon the she-bird crouched not on the nest,
Nor returned that afternoon, nor the next,
Nor ever appeared again.

And thence forward, all summer, in the sound of the sea,
And at night, under the full of moon, in calmer weather,
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from briar to briar by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals, the remaining one.

Blow! blow! blow!
Blow up, sea-winds, along Paumanok's shore!
I wait and I wait, till you blow my mate to me.

– *Walt Whitman.*

THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

“Look, Mamma, look!” cried a little boy, as one day late in June my mate and I alighted on a thistle already going to seed. “Such a lovely bird! How jolly he looks, with that black velvet hat drawn over his eyes!”

“That’s a Goldfinch,” replied his mamma; “sometimes called the Jolly Bird, the Thistle Bird, the Wild Canary, and the Yellow Bird. He belongs to the family of Weed Warriors, and is very useful.”

“He sings like a Canary,” said Bobbie. “Just hear him talking to that little brown bird alongside of him.”

That was my mate, you see, who *is* rather plain looking, so to please him I sang my best song, “*Per-chic-o-ree, per-chic-o-ree.*”

“That sounds a great deal better,” said Bobbie; “because it’s not sung by a little prisoner behind cage bars, I guess.”

“It certainly is wilder and more joyous,” said his mamma. “He is very happy just now, for he and his mate are preparing for housekeeping. Later on, he will shed his lemon-yellow coat, and then you won’t be able to tell him from his mate and little ones.”

“How they are gobbling up that thistle-down,” cried Bobbie. “Just look!”

“Yes,” said his mamma, “the fluff carries the seed, like a sail to which the seed is fastened. By eating the seed, which otherwise would be carried by the wind all over the place, these birds do a great amount of good. The down they will use to line their nests.”

“How I should like to peep into their nest,” said Bobbie; “just to peep, you know; not to rob it of its eggs, as boys do who are not well brought up.”

My mate and I were so pleased at that, we flew off a little way, chirping and chattering as we went.

“Up and down, up and down,” said Bobbie; “how prettily they fly.”

“Yes,” said his mamma; “that is the way you can always tell a Goldfinch when in the air. A dip and a jerk, singing as he flies.”

“What other seeds do they eat, mamma?” presently asked Bobbie.

“The seeds of the dandelion, the sunflower, and wild grasses generally. In the winter, when these are not to be had, the poor little fellows have a very hard time. People with kind hearts, scatter canary seed over their lawns to the merry birds for their summer songs, and for keeping down the weeds.”

THE GOLDFINCH

ACCORDING to one intelligent observer, the Finches are, in Nature's economy, entrusted with the task of keeping the weeds in subjection, and the gay and elegant little Goldfinch is probably one of the most useful, for its food is found to consist, for the greater part, of seeds most hurtful to the works of man. "The charlock that so often chokes his cereal crops is partly kept in bounds by his vigilance, and the dock, whose rank vegetation would, if allowed to cast all its seeds, spread barrenness around, is also one of his store houses, and the rank grasses, at their seeding time, are his chief support." Another writer, whose study of this bird has been made with care, calls our American Goldfinch one of the loveliest of birds. With his elegant plumage, his rhythmical, undulatory flight, his beautiful song, and his more beautiful soul, he ought to be one of the best beloved, if not one of the most famous; but he has never yet had half his deserts. He is like the Chickadee, and yet different. He is not so extremely confiding, nor should I call him merry. But he is always cheerful, in spite of his so-called plaintive note, from which he gets one of his names, and always amiable. So far as I know, he never utters a harsh sound; even the young ones asking for food, use only smooth, musical tones. During the pairing season, his delight often becomes rapturous. To see him then, hovering and singing, – or, better still, to see the devoted pair hovering together, billing and singing, – is enough to do even a cynic good. The happy lovers! They have never read it in a book, but it is written on their hearts:

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