

VARIOUS

BIRDS, ILLUSTRATED BY
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY,
VOL. 2, NO. 6

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Birds, Illustrated by Color Photography, Vol. 2, No. 6 / December, 1897

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS

WE had the pleasure of attending the Fifteenth Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union, which met and held its three days annual session in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, November 9-11, 1897. Dr. C. Hart Merriam, of the Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C., presided, and there were present about one hundred and fifty of the members, resident in nearly all the states of the Union.

The first paper read was one prepared by J. C. Merrill, entitled "In Memoriam: Charles Emil Bendire." The character, accomplishments, and achievements of the deceased, whose valuable work in biographizing American birds is so well known to those interested in ornithology, were referred to in so appropriate a manner that the paper, though not elaborate as it is to be hoped it may ultimately be made, will no doubt be published for general circulation. Major Bendire's services to American ornithology are of indisputable value, and his untimely death eclipsed to some extent, possibly wholly, the conclusion of a series of bird biographies which, so far as they had appeared, were deemed to be adequate, if not perfect.

Mr. Frank M. Chapman, the well known authority on birds, and whose recent books are valuable additions to our literature, had, it may be presumed, a paper to read on the "Experiences of an Ornithologist in Mexico," though he did not read it. He made, on the contrary, what seemed to be an extemporaneous talk, exceedingly entertaining and sufficiently instructive to warrant a permanent place for it in the *Auk*, of which he is associate editor. We had the pleasure of examining the advance sheets of a new book from his pen, elaborately illustrated in color, and shortly to be published. Mr. Chapman is a comparatively young man, an enthusiastic student and observer, and destined to be recognized as one of our most scientific thinkers, as many of his published pamphlets already indicate. Our limited space precludes even a reference to them now. His remarks were made the more attractive by the beautiful stuffed specimens with which he illustrated them.

Prof. Elliott Coues, in an address, "Auduboniana, and Other Matters of Present Interest," engaged the delighted attention of the Congress on the morning of the second day's session. His audience was large. In a biographical sketch of Audubon the Man, interspersed with anecdote, he said so many interesting things that we regret we omitted to make any notes that would enable us to indicate at least something of his characterization. No doubt just what he said will appear in an appropriate place. Audubon's portfolio, in which his precious manuscripts and drawings were so long religiously kept, which he had carried with him to London to exhibit to possible publishers, a book so large that two men were required to carry it, though the great naturalist had used it as an indispensable and convenient companion for so many years, was slowly and we thought reverently divested by Dr. Coues of its wrappings and held up to the surprised and grateful gaze of the spectators. It was dramatic. Dr. Coues is an actor. And then came the comedy. He could not resist the inclination to talk a little – not disparagingly, but truthfully, reading a letter never before published, of Swainson to Audubon declining to associate his name with that of Audubon "under the circumstances." All of which, we apprehend, will duly find a place on the shelves of public libraries.

We would ourself like to say something of Audubon as a man. To us his life and character have a special charm. His was a beautiful youth, like that of Goethe. His love of nature, for which he was willing to make, and did make, sacrifices, will always be inspiring to the youth of noble and

gentle proclivities; his personal beauty, his humanity, his love-life, his domestic virtues, enthrall the ingenuous mind; and his appreciation – shown in his beautiful compositions – of the valleys of the great river, *La Belle Rivière*, through which its waters, shadowed by the magnificent forests of Ohio and Kentucky, wandered – all of these things have from youth up shed a sweet fragrance over his memory and added greatly to our admiration of and appreciation for the man.

So many subjects came before the Congress that we cannot hope to do more than mention the titles of a few of them. Mr. Sylvester D. Judd discussed the question of “Protective Adaptations of insects from an Ornithological Point of View;” Mr. William C. Rives talked of “Summer Birds of the West Virginia Spruce Belt;” Mr. John N. Clark read a paper entitled “Ten Days among the Birds of Northern New Hampshire;” Harry C. Oberholser talked extemporaneously of “Liberian Birds,” and in a most entertaining and instructive manner, every word he said being worthy of large print and liberal embellishment; Mr. J. A. Allen, editor of *The Auk*, said a great deal that was new and instructive about the “Origin of Bird Migration;” Mr. O. Widmann read an interesting paper on “The Great Roosts on Gabberet Island, opposite North St. Louis;” J. Harris Reed presented a paper on “The Terns of Gull Island, New York;” A. W. Anthony read of “The Petrels of Southern California,” and Mr. George H. Mackay talked interestingly of “The Terns of Penikese Island, Mass.”

There were other papers of interest and value. “A Naturalist’s Expedition to East Africa,” by D. G. Elliot, was, however, the *pièce de résistance* of the Congress. The lecture was delivered in the lecture hall of the Museum, on Wednesday at 8 p. m. It was illustrated by stereopticon views, and in the most remarkable manner. The pictures were thrown upon an immense canvas, were marvellously realistic, and were so much admired by the great audience, which overflowed the large lecture hall, that the word demonstrative does not describe their enthusiasm. But the lecture! Description, experience, suffering, adventure, courage, torrid heat, wild beasts, poisonous insects, venomous serpents, half-civilized peoples, thirst, – almost enough of torture to justify the use of Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner in illustration, – and yet a perpetual, quiet, rollicking, jubilant humor, all-pervading, and, at the close, on the lecturer’s return once more to the beginning of civilization, the eloquent picture of the Cross, “full high advanced,” all combined, made this lecture, to us, one of the very few platform addresses entirely worthy of the significance of unfading portraiture.

C. C. Marble.

THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

IN an early number of *Birds* we presented a picture of the common Bluebird, which has been much admired. The mountain Bluebird, whose beauty is thought to excel that of his cousin, is probably known to few of our readers who live east of the Rocky Mountain region, though he is a common winter sojourner in the western part of Kansas, beginning to arrive there the last of September, and leaving in March and April. The habits of these birds of the central regions are very similar to those of the eastern, but more wary and silent. Even their love song is said to be less loud and musical. It is a rather feeble, plaintive, monotonous warble, and their chirp and twittering notes are weak. They subsist upon the cedar berries, seeds of plants, grasshoppers, beetles, and the like, which they pick up largely upon the ground, and occasionally scratch for among the leaves. During the fall and winter they visit the plains and valleys, and are usually met with in small flocks, until the mating season.

Nests of the Mountain Bluebird have been found in New Mexico and Colorado, from the foothills to near timber line, usually in deserted Woodpecker holes, natural cavities in trees, fissures in the sides of steep rocky cliffs, and, in the settlements, in suitable locations about and in the adobe buildings. In settled portions of the west it nests in the cornice of buildings, under the eaves of porches, in the nooks and corners of barns and outhouses, and in boxes provided for its occupation. Prof. Ridgway found the Rocky Mountain Bluebird nesting in Virginia City, Nevada, in June. The nests were composed almost entirely of dry grass. In some sections, however, the inner bark of the cedar enters largely into their composition. The eggs are usually five, of a pale greenish-blue.

The females of this species are distinguished by a greener blue color and longer wings, and this bird is often called the Arctic Bluebird. It is emphatically a bird of the mountains, its visits to the lower portions of the country being mainly during winter.

Heaped in the hollows of the grove, the autumn leaves lie dead;
They rustle to the eddying gust, and to the rabbits' tread.
The Robin and the Wren are flown, and from the shrubs the Jay,
And from the wood-top calls the Crow all through the gloomy day.

— *Bryant*.

THE ENGLISH SPARROW

“Oh, it’s just a common Sparrow,” I hear Bobbie say to his mamma, “why, I see lots of them on the street every day.”

Of course you do, but for all that you know very little about me I guess. Some people call me “Hoodlum,” and “Pest,” and even “Rat of the Air.” I hope you don’t. It is only the folks who don’t like me that call me ugly names.

Why don’t they like me?

Well, in the first place the city people, who like fine feathers, you know, say I am not pretty; then the farmers, who are not grateful for the insects I eat, say I devour the young buds and vines as well as the ripened grain. Then the folks who like birds with fine feathers, and that can sing like angels, such as the Martin and the Bluebird and a host of others, say I drive them away, back to the forests where they came from.

Do I do all these things?

I’m afraid I do. I like to have my own way. Maybe you know something about that yourself, Bobbie. When I choose a particular tree or place for myself and family to live in, I am going to have it if I have to fight for it. I do chase the other birds away then, to be sure.

Oh, no, I don’t always succeed. Once I remember a Robin got the better of me, so did a Catbird, and another time a Baltimore Oriole. When I can’t whip a bird myself I generally give a call and a whole troop of Sparrows will come to my aid. My, how we do enjoy a fuss like that!

A bully? Well, yes, if by that you mean I rule around my own house, then I *am* a bully. My mate has to do just as I say, and the little Sparrows have to mind their papa, too.

“Don’t hurt the little darlings, papa,” says their mother, when it comes time for them to fly, and I hop about the nest, scolding them at the top of my voice. Then I scold her for daring to talk to me, and sometimes make her fly away while I teach the young ones a thing or two. Once in a while a little fellow among them will “talk back.” I don’t mind that though, if he is a Cock Sparrow and looks like his papa.

No, we do not sing. We leave that for the Song Sparrows. We talk a great deal, though. In the morning when we get up, and at night when we go to bed we chatter a great deal. Indeed there are people shabby enough to say that we are great nuisances about that time.

THE ENGLISH SPARROW

THE English Sparrow was first introduced into the United States at Brooklyn, New York, in the years 1851 and '52. The trees in our parks were at that time infested with a canker-worm, which wrought them great injury, and to rid the trees of these worms was the mission of the English Sparrow.

In his native country this bird, though of a seed-eating family (Finch), was a great insect eater. The few which were brought over performed, at first, the duty required of them; they devoured the worms and stayed near the cities. With the change of climate, however, came a change in their taste for insects. They made their home in the country as well as the cities, and became seed and vegetable eaters, devouring the young buds on vines and trees, grass-seed, oats, rye, and other grains.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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