

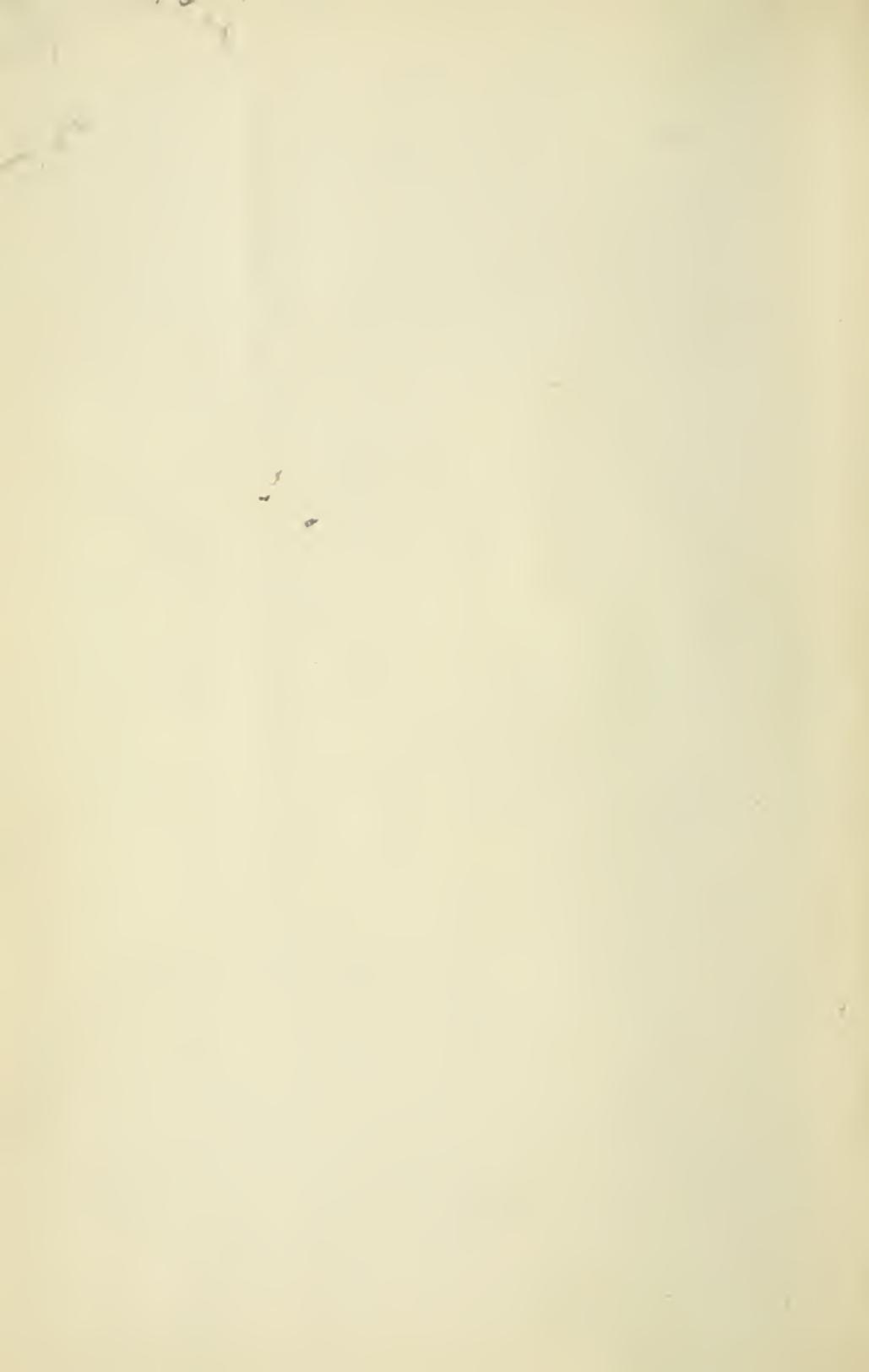


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H. P. Shannon, Jr.

January 1894.



**BIRDS I HAVE KEPT.**







THE PRAIRIE OWL.





TO HIS CHILDREN,  
MINNIE, LISA, BERTIE, TONY AND CHARLIE,

THIS LITTLE WORK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.



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# BIRDS I HAVE KEPT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE JAY.

EVER since I was quite a small boy I have kept birds of one sort or another, sometimes a single one, sometimes a number of them, in doors, and out of doors, British and foreign, large and small, birds brought up by hand from the nest, or captured or bought when full grown; I have tamed them, or failing to reconcile them to captivity, have let them go again. I have read a great many books on birds in English, some in French, and a few in German, and plunge, without further apology, in *medias res*, premising that the fullest particulars will be given for its successful management in the chapter devoted to each bird described; for I have very little faith in "general directions" which I never read, and strongly suspect that very few people do.

Contrary to the general practice of fanciers, who commence to ride their hobby with a Canary, I started mine with a Jay, which the farmer's boy had taken, along with three or four of its brothers and sisters from their comfortable nest in a pollard oak. I had broken bounds that day, for I was not permitted to associate with the children of the peasant who occupied the farm-house belonging to the *château* where my father resided. I was very lonely by myself, which must be my excuse, and frequently crept to the great *porte-cochère* to

exchange a whisper through the key-hole with Jean Marie on the other side. On the ever-memorable day when I first became the owner of a bird, I ventured further than I had ever done before, irresistably attracted by the seductive promise: "*Viens, et je te montrerai un geai.*" I not only climbed to the top of the dividing wall, but descended into the farm-yard on the other side, and was immediately taken captive, not by the beauty of the bird which the young farmer held in his hand, for it was as ugly a little beast as can well be imagined, but by an intense desire to become its possessor.

"*Veux-tu le vendre?*" We were very democratic in those days, Jean Marie and I—children usually are, until education steps in and blunts the finer feelings of their nature, converting them into fiery radicals and haughty aristocrats. "*Veux-tu le vendre?*" Jean Marie was only too willing, but alas! I had no money of my own.

To once more climb the wall, run into the house, and tear upstairs to the nursery where my mother was sitting with the baby, was but the work of a few seconds; while to rush into her presence, hot and panting from my exertion, and blurt out: "Mamma, may I buy a Jay?" occupied less time than it has taken me to write this sentence. For a moment my mother did not answer, indeed I think had scarcely heard, or at least apprehended the meaning of what I said, for her thoughts were often far away in those days, in the distant land of her youth, perhaps, but when I repeated my request, she readily agreed to it, adding: "How much does he want for the bird?" I had told her that it belonged to Jean Marie.

How much did he want for it? I could not tell, and was sent down to inquire. On the way, I deliberated with myself how much I was to give for the coveted prize, and decided that it must not be more than five francs. Five francs: I had no very definite idea of the value of money then, but I knew that "*une pièce de cent sous*" was a respectable coin, and more than that I was not prepared to give. If Jean Marie would

not part with his bird for that, he must keep it, I could not give him more: but that sum I had quite settled in my own mind it was to be, so that I was not a little disappointed when the boy asked just "*quatre sous*," and thought a great deal less of the poor Jay, as I returned with it to my mother's room, than I had done a few minutes previously.

The wide-mouthed, gaping, half-naked, screeching little brute was placed in a basket with some hay by way of a beginning, and with the assistance of Marie, Virginie, Pépée, or Julie, I quite forget the name of the *demoiselle* who condescended to occupy our kitchen at that time, the voracious appetite of the creature was duly satisfied, when it tucked its head under its wing, and went peacefully to sleep in the straw, without, apparently, bestowing a thought on the mother and brethren it was fated nevermore to see.

My Jay throve, *à merveille*, as Mlle. Virginie, I am almost sure it *was* Virginie who lived with us then, used to say; and my father one day, when he was in an unusually good humour, bought me a wicker cage. After a while, however, the poor bird rubbed the ends off his tail and wing feathers, and the remainder of his plumage got clogged or glued together in a manner that was sufficiently distressing to behold, and must have been exceedingly disagreeable and uncomfortable for the poor thing itself.

I regret to say that my interest in my purchase declined from the moment it became my very own for the preposterously insignificant sum of four sous, or twopence sterling, so that although he lived long enough to feed himself, instead of gaping to have the food thrust down his throat, and to hop about the kitchen, and on the terrace, his career was not a long one; and I quite forget what became of him at last, whether Virginie trod on him by accident, whether "Lucie", the cat, made a meal of his not over plump carcase, or whether my father mercifully put the poor thing out of his misery. No: I am not quite sure what became of my "pet", as it

was called in the house, but was, on the whole, rather glad when it disappeared, asking no questions about it, for it was not by any means an interesting, or prepossessing-looking bird, but was noisy and dirty, and not particularly tame.

So much by way of preface about *Corvus glandarius*, *le geai*, called *Holzeher* by Bechstein, which is nevertheless a really nice bird, easily kept, teachable and amusing; it is an excellent mimic, if not much of a linguist; and may, with a little trouble, be taught to go out and return at the word of command.

The Jay is about the size of a small pigeon, and is one of the handsomest of our English birds. Purplish grey is the predominant colour of its plumage, which is soft and silky; the throat and rump are white, and the eyes reddish blue; the large wing coverts have the outer side of the feathers ornamented with narrow but deeply tinted alternate bands of bluish white, light blue, and bluish black, which melt one into the other, and are a great set-off to the bird, which has the power of raising the head feathers into a crest, which adds considerably to the attractiveness of its appearance. The female bears a general resemblance to her mate, but the reddish or purplish grey of her throat is fainter than his.

The Jay is naturally a shy, wood-loving bird, feeding on insects, berries, acorns, etc., and now and then taking a fancy to a nestful of eggs or young birds. In the house it may be kept in a large roomy cage, or allowed to roam about the garden with one wing cut. It is no favourite with gardeners, owing to the havoc it makes among stone fruit and peas, and in their anger at the bird's depredations, they are apt to lose sight of the benefits really conferred on them by the destruction of grubs and insects of all kinds, to which the Jay is very partial: so they call it "vermin", and use all the means in their power to exterminate the race, which has, of late years, become greatly reduced in numbers in this country.

The Jay is fond of building its nest of sticks, lined with

hair, in dense masses of foliage, as for instance, against the trunk of a pollard oak or ash, or towards the top of a fir tree, preferring, however, the former situation. Its eggs are grey, spotted with brown, and four or five in number; there are usually two broods in the season; and if the young are intended to be brought up by hand, they must be taken from the nest when the tail and wing feathers are about an inch long; they are easily reared on meat, raw or cooked, bread crumbs and yolk of egg, or, preferably, the flesh of small birds and insects, especially caterpillars: when full grown they will eat, and thrive on, anything that comes to table. Hand-reared Jays often become very tame, while those captured when full-grown always retain their wildness.

As the Jay is a great eater, the utmost care and attention and a large cage are necessary to keep its beautiful plumage in good order; for this is, after all, its chief attraction, for it rarely learns to speak more than a word or two, and cannot be safely trusted at large among other birds.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE WOOD LARK.

IN the early part of the winter following the purchase and premature death of my poor Jay, our gardener, on her way to work one morning, picked up in the snow a little half-dead bird with a broken wing, the still-living proof of some bumpkin's unskilful gunnery, and brought it on to our house as a present for me.

I was yet in bed when she arrived, but the news that Marie Baudoin was down stairs with a live bird, acted like a charm, so that I was up and dressed in a much shorter space of time than had ever happened to me before.

“Poor little thing! How did you catch it?” and a hundred

other questions were poured forth with childish volubility, and answered, *seriatim*, with much patience, if a little bantering, by Marie; who was, as I have said, our gardener, according to the custom then in vogue in that part of the world, where the women did all the work of the garden and farm, even to ploughing and shoeing horses, haymaking and threshing corn on the bare ground with wooden flails.

I would put it in Jacco's (the Jay) wooden cage; but the little thing hopped out between the bars as easily as if no impediment whatever had been in its way; so it, too, was temporarily placed in a basket, until further arrangements for its accommodation could be made.

When my mother appeared on the scene, which she soon afterwards did, she greatly shocked my youthful sense of the fitness of things by advising the immediate destruction of the poor suffering bird; "putting it out of its pain," she said: but I cried lustily, and leave was given me to keep it, if I could.

I had not the least doubt that I could, and successfully too, and at once ran off to the nursery with my prize, in order to show it to Victoire, the nursemaid, who had had a good deal of experience in similar matters, and, as soon as she had seen it, authoritatively pronounced that the bird would do very well. "Where was I to put it?" "Why, in the alcove bed, of course." Said alcove bed being a recess in the wall, opposite the window, where I used to play sometimes, for with us it was never put to the use intended for it by the ancient builders of the house.

What a good idea! it could not fly out of that, and would have plenty of light, and room to run about: so seed and water were given to it, and crumbs of bread, and I was told to "leave it alone for the present."

When my father had finished his breakfast, he went up to the nursery to look at the captive, and with a sharp penknife cut off the broken pinion of its wing, which only hung on

by a little bit of skin. The poor bird seemed relieved by the operation, he said, and ate some bread crumbs and drank some water as soon as he let it out of his hand; but next morning we found it dead: possibly from the effects of the injury it had sustained, possibly from not having been supplied with appropriate food, for *L'Alouette des bois*, *die Waldlerche*, as the French and Germans respectively, call the Wood Lark, is, in a great measure, an insectivorous bird.

It is about a third smaller than its relative the Sky Lark, which, however, it much resembles in appearance and gait. The top of the head is reddish brown, with four dark lines upon it; the bird has the power of raising the long head feathers into a crest, which is surrounded by a greyish white line, that extends from eye to eye. The female is much lighter in colour than her mate, and her breast more spotted, while her crest is more prominent, and the line round the cheeks more distinct than in his case; so that she is altogether a handsomer bird.

When wild the Wood Lark subsists almost entirely on insects, except during the winter, when it swallows blades of grass or corn, and such seeds as it may find lying about, together with small snails and the eggs of moths: in the house it had better be fed on a mixture of bread-crumbs, grated carrot, hard-boiled egg, the yolk only, and minced meat, such as veal, and soaked poppy or maw seed: in addition to which it must be supplied with young mealworms, black beetles, and gentles in the pupæ stage, or ants' eggs, that is to say the larvæ of the wood ant in their cocoons.

With every care, however, these beautiful birds do not generally live long in the house, though they become very tame, and apparently much attached to the person who feeds them. Sometimes, however, they live very well in captivity, as Bechstein relates: "I once saw two Wood Larks that had been kept in a cage for eight years, very healthy and gay, with their feet quite free from disease, and singing perfectly."

“Their food,” continues the same author, “consisted of crumb of white bread, enough for the day, soaked in milk, which was poured boiling over it every morning, and some ants’ eggs given two or three times a day for a treat. The bottom of the cage was covered with sand, which, together with the water, was changed regularly every day. They were always kept, in summer, outside the window, exposed to the free air, screening them from the sun by covering the top of the cage with a sheet of paper, or piece of linen by way of parasol. The cage was furnished with two perches, for the Wood Lark, unlike its relative the Sky Lark, sits on the branches of the trees in the woods where, or near to which, it is found.”

The Wood Lark, like all the other members of the family to which it belongs, builds its nest on the ground, among tall grass, and generally in the vicinity of a wood or copse. The nest itself is made of grass and moss, lined with wool and hair: the eggs are variegated with light grey and brownish violet on a white ground; the young are best reared, if attempted to be brought up by hand, on bread and milk, and ants’ eggs; the more of the latter the better.

The Wood Lark’s weak point are its legs, which are extremely brittle and easily broken; so that the bird requires plenty of water to bathe in, and great cleanliness in its surroundings, to prevent any dirt from adhering to them. Although it does not bathe when wild, it will do so freely in a cage, and should always have the opportunity of doing so if it pleases. When wild it is continually running through long damp grass, which renders any other washing unnecessary, and keeps its legs and plumage in order: in the house it is not unapt to become infested with vermin.

Of all the Lark family the Wood Lark has by far the sweetest song; its clear flute-like voice is particularly fascinating, and no better teacher for a cage full of young Canaries, not even excepting the Nightingale, can be found. When wild these birds sing from March to July, and in the house from





THE CANARY.





February to August. They have been known to breed in a large, well-planted garden aviary, where they had a good range, good shelter, and an abundance of insect food: which is decidedly the best way of keeping these beautiful birds and most delightful songsters.

The female Wood Lark sings almost as well as the male, though her strains are shorter and less sustained than his, as obtains among all species of birds of which the female sings. When singing, the Wood Lark rises from the tops of the trees so high into the air that the eye can scarce discern it, and then remains stationary, with expanded wings and tail, warbling its sweet music uninterruptedly for an hour at a time. It also frequently sings when perched in a tree, and in the house pours forth the different modulations of its beautiful voice from a retired corner, where it stands tranquil and motionless by the hour together.

I cannot approve of the plan, recommended by some authors of note, of trapping the Wood Lark when full grown; they are not then easily reconciled to captivity, and too frequently die: the young are easily reared, if treated as already recommended, and none others ought to be kept in a cage.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE CANARY.

I WAS inconsolable for the loss of my Wood Lark, so my father, after a time, bought me a pair of Canaries, the first of these birds I had ever seen. I was delighted, charmed! and never weary—for at least two hours—of contemplating the bright jonque dress of the male, and the mealy, or pale primrose costume of his wife.

It was spring time when they were given to me, on my birthday if I remember rightly, and the cage was hung up in

the *Mansarde* window of the nursery. How splendidly that bird sang to be sure! The Nightingales in the little beechen copse at the foot of the garden, were as nothing compared to him in my estimation; and very likely he sang louder than they did, if he had the Sky Lark note, but I cannot remember. After a time my mother put a little wicker basket, lined with flannel, into the cage, and in a few days four or five little pale blue eggs speckled with brown were, much to my satisfaction, laid. The young were hatched in due course, to the great delight, I doubt not, of the parent birds, who stood together on the edge of the basket, attentively peering down at the ugly, helpless, pink little things below; which they probably thought the prettiest little Canaries in the world, for they talked together quite confidentially for a long time in a low key, until one of the little ones opened its beak, when they fed it, and the mother settled herself down again to keep them warm.

Those were my first Canaries: I wonder how many hundreds, not to say thousands, have passed through my hands since then. A bright yellow cock I once had paired with a green hen, produced a beautiful fawn or dove-coloured bird, of the kind now called cinnamon; and some others were vividly green, with black wings and tail and orange breasts: while others again were almost white.

The origin of the domesticated Canary is, unfortunately, lost in impenetrable obscurity, for in this iconoclastic age, the story that connects it with the shipwreck off the Island of Elba and the *Canaria* or Isles of Dogs in the Atlantic, is exploded, and voted by common consent altogether unworthy of belief, like many another venerable tradition; and we are compelled, in our inability to replace it by one more trustworthy, to confess our utter ignorance on the subject, and content ourselves therewith. However that may be, there are at the present day several distinct varieties of the Canary, which mostly breed true to colour and other characteristic

points; the most prominent among these being, perhaps, the Lizard, then the London Fancy, the Belgian, Scotch, Yorkshire, and Norwich, which each have a distinct individuality of their own, and their circle of enthusiastic admirers: while the rare Lancashire Cobby, in point of size and general appearance, takes precedence of them all as King of Canarydom: anything like a good specimen of this variety not being procurable for less than £20, while some specimens fetch twice that amount, and even more.

The Lizard branch of the family is subdivided into two varieties, the golden and the silver spangled; the former have a yellow, and the latter a mealy head, while their back and shoulder feathers are laced with a border of a darker colour than the tint of the body plumage, giving to the birds a scalloped or undulated appearance, supposed to recall the effect of the markings on the scaly coats of the little reptiles whose name they bear. Lizard Canaries are chiefly of small size, and scarcely as distinguished as songsters as some of their cousins. The Belgian Canary is a long slim bird, with his head sunk down between his high shoulders, and in my opinion is an unnatural looking creature, and no favourite of mine; though it is not without its admirers too, who give long prices for what they are pleased to call good birds.

As far as regards appearance, I prefer the Scotch to the Belgian Canary, though I believe the former to be simply a modification of the latter. The Scotch Canary is another long, slim bird, like the Belgian, but wants the high shoulders and depressed head of the latter; it holds itself rather erect, with the tail sweeping in under the perch, and the head bowing forward to meet it, so that as it stands it almost forms a segment of a circle: the Scotch Canary is a great singer, loud and indefatigable.

The Norwich is a short, dumpy bird, larger than the German, while the Yorkshire comes next to the Cobby in size and gracefulness of carriage. Some writers make distinct

varieties of the green, cinnamon, and crested Canaries; but when one comes to recollect that these "sports" are to be met with in all the different varieties, excepting the Lizards, it must, I think, be conceded, that they cannot be so distinguished.

The London Fancy Canary is generally a bright jonque-coloured bird, with black wings and tail; though a few mealy specimens with grey or grizzled tail and wings are occasionally met with: these birds, which have become rather scarce of late, are usually undersized.

So much for the different kinds of Canaries that are to be met with at present; they vary in song as much as they do in shape and colour, some having the Nightingale, others the Sky Lark, and others again the Wood Lark note; while yet others have a prolonged song of their own, consisting of inharmonious combinations of loud and harsh shrieks, that are simply appalling to listen to. A Canary, if taught while quite young, will generally pick up any air that is regularly whistled to it, or played on a flageolet or bird-organ; but the lesson must be frequently repeated, or the bird will forget part, and transpose other portions of the melody, producing an odd, but not by any means pleasing effect.

A common Canary I once owned actually spoke, repeating incessantly by way of song the words, "Pretty Dick, pretty Dick, pretty little Dick; kiss, kiss, kiss, pretty little Dickee." It had formerly belonged to an old lady, who had been in the habit of talking to it; and strange to say, when placed along with other birds, it forgot to speak, and learned to sing as they did.

Some people, fond of trying experiments, have mated the Canary with a number of our British Finches, with good results in the case of the Goldfinch, Linnet, Siskin, Greenfinch and Serin Finch, which last-named bird is not, by the bye, very often found in this country; while the results with the Redpole and Bullfinch have been indifferent, and those with

the Chaffinch, Yellow-hammer, and Bramble Finch, almost or altogether *nil*.

Various foreign birds, such as the Grey and Green Singing Finch, the Saffron Finch, the Blue or Indigo Finch, and the Nonpareil or Painted Finch—*le pape* of the French dealers—have also been paired with the Canary, with doubtful results, though the union with the three former are said, on the authority of Dr. Russ, of Berlin, a well-known ornithologist, to have been productive of mules.

The only crosses I ever attempted have been with the Brown Linnet and the Greenfinch, from which I obtained hybrids, and the Chaffinch and the Saffron Finch, from which I had no result. I am not an admirer of mules, for I think we can scarcely improve upon Nature's handiwork, and Nature has set her face against such intermeddling with her arrangements by stamping the offspring of these unnatural unions with uniform sterility.

Some Canaries are bad parents, and let brood after brood of helpless nestlings die of starvation in the midst of plenty; while others sit on the young ones so closely that they suffocate them. Some have even been stigmatised as cannibals, but I think unjustly, the fact being that the soft dead little bird tore asunder when the old one was trying to remove it from the nest. I believe that on the whole Canaries are far better parents than they are often given credit for being, and that a very large percentage of the failures that so mortify intending breeders of these birds, are due to the presence of insects, chiefly red mites, in the nest and cage, which by weakening the young render them incapable of holding up their heads to be fed, or so torment the old birds that they forsake the nest.

Prevention is always better than cure, so the intending breeder must see that his birds and cages are thoroughly clean and free from vermin, before he puts the former up; and, indeed, I think it is good economy to make, or buy, new cages

every season; do not use what is called the London breeding cage, but one that is open at the top, and hang it up in the light, out of the reach of mice, and so that the old birds can see to begin feeding the first thing in the morning; for which purpose they should always be supplied with fresh food over night; and every other day, or at farthest every three or four days, let the nest, eggs or young, taking care that the latter are not gaping at the time, be well sprinkled with Keating's Insect Powder, and I will guarantee that few Canaries will then be lost from the inattention of their parents, in cases, even, where every previous brood had been neglected. That this is the true explanation of the losses complained of by so many fanciers, is, I think, unquestionable, seeing that these people always can tell of their great success the first year they tried to breed Canaries, and their failure ever after.

The most elaborate receipts have been given for feeding Canaries while nesting, and when they have young; but simple soaked bread, with or without milk poured over it, and good sweet canary seed, and a little hemp, will form a diet that cannot be improved upon where it is desired to rear pale-coloured birds. Should the breeder desire jonques, he must give yolk of egg, the deeper coloured the better, and saffron: but should he be desirous of obtaining deep- or high-tinted birds, he must give bread-crumbs, egg, and cayenne pepper, the latter prepared as will be directed further on.

In the matter of green food authorities differ widely: some say, if you give it, you will have no luck, and confidently assert that it is "rank poison"; while others attribute all their success to its use. The fact being that both parties to the controversy are right. Green food must not be given in too large quantities at first, and it must be fresh and dry, not rank and overgrown, especially in regard to chickweed and groundsel, which is best gathered on the roadside, or at all events on poor soil: plantain makes a good change, but had better be given dry than green, as when unripe, it and millet

also is apt to bring on diarrhæa if eaten in any quantity. Watercress I consider too pungent, though many advocate its use; I much prefer dandelion, which is bitter and strengthening. Marigold blossoms and nasturtium blooms Canaries are very fond of, and they may be given to them freely, unless it be wished to keep them pale in colour. Saffron, as I have said, imparts to the birds fed on it a delicate lemon tint that is very attractive; but cayenne pepper alone has the power of producing that deep orange shade that provoked so much astonishment and controversy among fanciers when it was first made use of a few years ago.

It is not generally known that cayenne pepper (*Capsicum fastigiatum*), if kept in a damp place and well exposed to light and air, will, after a time, lose its pungency, while retaining its colour, and power of dyeing Canaries red, and it should never be used unless so prepared, which will take some months, during which time it will require to be stirred every other day, and must be spread out on an earthenware dish, or tray, as wood or cardboard are apt to absorb too much of the colouring ingredient it contains. It is to be given mixed with bread-crumbs, and moistened with milk, during the moulting season, to such birds as it is wished to colour; and if chiefly fed on it, they become more or less red, as those fed principally on green food, assume a distinctly greenish garb, and those that are dieted on bread and milk, become nearly white: it is pleasing to have a number of birds of different shades, and interesting to watch how the yellow plumage of the common Canary becomes, under the influence of the food given to it, as the case may be, either white, or red, or green, some being much more readily influenced than others by the nature of their diet.

The Canary is subject, as might be expected from its long domestication, to a variety of ailments, most of which are more easily prevented than cured: draughts kill more Canaries than anything else, and should be sedulously avoided. If a

bird catches cold, remove it at once to a warm and sheltered situation, give it a dose, one drop, of castor oil, feed on bread and milk sop, and canary seed, and if the treatment has been begun in time, Dicky, in a day or two, will be himself again.

In the matter of egg-binding, to which some hens are liable, the owner must give plenty of mortar-rubbish for the bird to peck at, and not put her up for breeding unless she is in perfect health and condition: should egg-binding nevertheless occur, a drop of oil administered internally, and another applied to the vent, on the point of a camel-hair pencil, will probably enable the bird to deposit her egg; if she seem exhausted after the egg is laid, or the complication recur on the following day, she is a weak bird, and it will be wisest not to attempt to breed from her for a time. Asthma is a troublesome complaint with which many parlour Canaries are afflicted; it is produced by the heated atmosphere of the room in which the cage is hung, fusty seed, and draughts, all of which faulty conditions may be avoided; should the complaint be of recent date, a few drops of lobelia tincture, or cubebs tincture, will relieve the most distressing symptoms; but cure is unattainable where the disorder has existed for any length of time. Diarrhæa is caused by dirty water, too much green succulent food, and sour sop; avoid such, and give the bird a little chalk in its drinking water.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BROWN LINNET.

AT the distance of about a mile from our house, on a little furze-covered eminence, stood an old windmill, whose long thin arms, wildly flung out in perpetual battle with the wind, so irresistably reminded me of stories I had heard of monstrous giants and ogres, who, besides defying Heaven, and doing all

kinds of naughty deeds, had a strong partiality for eating little boys *au naturel*, that it was always invested for me with a degree of fascination it might not otherwise have possessed: and in fact no greater treat could be afforded me, than to accompany Marie Baudoin, when she periodically paid a visit to the miller, for the purpose of having our corn ground. Sometimes a large sack of plump white wheat would be placed across the donkey's back—the same donkey that once threw me over a hedge and into a pond of water—and on this sack I was allowed to take my seat, much after the fashion of an organ grinder's monkey perched on the top of his musical instrument. Very frequently, however, she carried what was wanted for immediate consumption, a hundredweight or so, upon her shoulders in a bag, and on these occasions I trotted by her side.

What a queer old place that mill was to be sure! Two enormous flat stones kept continually groaning, as they turned round and round, one over the other, grinding to bran and flour the corn that dropped between them from a large box placed just over the axle whereon they revolved: how I wondered to see the miller pouring the wheat into that box, in order to reach which he had to climb up a ladder of many rungs; and how my wonder increased as I beheld the flour running down, white and soft, into the bag he had placed for its reception. With what awe I gazed upon the rude, gaudy representations of Saints and Virgins that were pasted on the walls, and the framework of the mill. Young as I was, about seven or eight, I had heard of Napoleon Buonaparte, and wondered how such a man could be a saint: yet there he was, on the walls of the old mill, in complete armour, with a halo round his head! While in another picture he was represented in military costume, seated on a cloud, holding out his hand to a miniature representation of himself that was kneeling, apparently on nothing, before him; and underneath I spelled the legend "*Napoléon recevant son fils en*

*Elysée.*" I never wearied of looking at all these things, and was always sorry when summoned to go home.

It was on the occasion of one of these periodical visits that Marie or I, or both of us, I forget exactly which, discovered in the furze a Linnet's nest: there were five young ones in it, just fit to be removed—and removed they accordingly were, without the faintest qualm of conscience, and carried in triumph home, while the bereaved parents were left to mourn in the furze.

My mother was very angry, and gave us a long lecture on our inhumanity: Marie defended our action, alleging that there was no cruelty in taking a bird's nest, for the old ones would immediately begin to build another. However, the deed was done, and was irremediable; for there was no use in replacing the nest as my mother wished, the parents would not go near it again, Marie declared: so I set to work to bring up the little orphans by hand, and, with my mother's help, succeeded, on a mixture of *blé noir* or buckwheat flour, moistened with milk, on which they thrived famously; though they can also be reared on bread and milk.

My Linnets grew up to be fine healthy strong birds, three cocks and two hens, and in the following summer the two latter made nests in their large cage, and laid a number of eggs, but the incessant quarrels of the party ended disastrously for the success of the attempt to bring up a family. One of the cocks was subsequently mated with a pale yellow hen Canary, and became the father of a numerous progeny of mules. He lived for ten years, and was a most amiable bird, when separated from his brothers and sisters, and an indefatigable songster: he had acquired the Canary note, and rendered it sweetly in a lower key than his teacher, which was no inconsiderable advantage.

The Linnet, *Fringilla cannabina* of Linnæus, *la Linotte* of French authors, and *der Lanning* of the Germans, is a pretty little bird, rather more than five inches in length, of which

the tail measures two inches and a half. The beak of this bird is dusky blue in summer, and whitish grey, with a brown tip, in winter; the iris is dark brown, and the feet and legs black. The general colour of the plumage is brown, but the forehead and breast of the adult male are red: until they are a year old they resemble their mothers, but never assume the red cap and waistcoat in the house.

The female Linnet is rather smaller than the male, and has the upper part of her body streaked with dusky brown, and yellowish white spots, which increase in number on the breast, and the wing coverts are a dusky chesnut. In the nest the females can be distinguished from their brothers by the greyiness of their backs, and the number of spots on their breasts, which resemble that of a Lark.

When wild the Linnet subsists on grass and other seeds, such as thistle, and those of the different kinds of *Polygonum* and *Chenopodium*. In the house they are usually fed on Canary and German rape, to which a little hemp seed may be occasionally added.

The eggs of the Linnet are from four to six in number, and resemble those of the Canary; there are usually two broods in the season, but sometimes three. Although it has been asserted that these birds will not breed in captivity, they certainly will do so, freely, in cage and aviary, providing they have been brought up by hand, and are quite tame. They will also pair and produce mules with the Canary, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, and Bullfinch; and in the case of the Canary, if the latter be a pale or mealy bird, the offspring will be almost entirely white; while as regards the other Finches, the hybrids will combine the colours of both parents, and are not attractive-looking birds.

The natural song of the Linnet is agreeable and flute-like; it consists of several strains succeeding each other very prettily, and is only interrupted for a short time, while the bird is moulting. The Linnet will also learn the notes of other birds,

such as the Wood Lark, Canary, Blackcap, and in part that of the Nightingale. It may also be taught a number of little tricks, and to go and come at command.

The most common disorders of the domesticated Linnet are constipation, from the use of too much dry seed, and fits from the accumulation of fat on the internal organs: it is a hardy little bird on the whole, and generally lives from ten to twelve years in the house; although instances are not wanting of individuals having attained a much more advanced age.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHAFFINCH.

AT the right hand furthest corner of our garden, looking from the house, stood an immense cherry-laurel tree, whose long, strong branches spread out horizontally to a distance of many feet all around; so that we could, and very often did, sit beneath its shade. It was so large that generally every year a Magpie built its nest on one of its great boughs that overhung the large pond, or little lake, that bounded our domains to the south: while just over the rustic seat upon which my mother often sat and worked in summer time, a Chaffinch usually made her nest, and reared a brood or two.

I well remember how anxiously I waited for the little ones to be hatched, in the first nest I had discovered in the laurel tree; and how, one day, while I was playing in the shade beside my mother, the old Chaffinch, who never seemed to mind us in the least, suddenly flew off her nest with a twitter, and darted into some bushes opposite.

“I believe the young ones have come out!” exclaimed my mother. “Oh! do look,” I entreated: so she gently lowered the bough upon which the nest was fixed, and peeped in:

“There is a little one”, she said, carefully returning the branch to its usual position. “Let me see, please?” so she lifted me up. “What a little black thing!” I cried; but the old bird had returned, and was hopping about with a small caterpillar in her beak, apparently afraid to approach while we were near her treasure: so we retired, my mother and I, and left her to her labour of love, in which she was presently joined by the happy husband and father.

These young Chaffinches grew apace for some days; but one morning we found, to our great grief, the nest deserted, and the little birds gone: some cat, or owl, had made its supper off them: “What a pity! and they were growing so nicely, too.”

The parents, however, nothing daunted, and attached, apparently, to the site, made a new nest not very far off, using a portion of the first to construct the second nest, which was finished in due course: and this time my father took one of the pale bluish grey eggs, thickly spotted with brown, and placed it under the Canary, which happened to be sitting. She hatched the egg very carefully; but directly the dark stranger made its appearance, she perceived that her good-nature had been imposed upon, and straightway held a consultation with her mate, the result of which was that the poor little hungry gaping Chaffinch, instead of being fed and cared for like one of their own offspring, was lifted out of the nest, and thrown down upon the floor of the cage. Once or twice my mother replaced it, but it was thrown out again, and died.

Some time after this I became possessed, I forget exactly in what manner, of a half-fledged Chaffinch, which I reared successfully on *blénoir* and milk, as I had done the Linnets, and which proved to be a hen. She was placed with a fine yellow Canary, and became great friends with him, so much so that in the following spring they made a match of it, and she building a nest in the cage, laid four eggs, upon which she sat with praiseworthy patience; when, lo and behold! a

day or two before we expected them to be hatched, a stray cat got into the house, and knocked down the cage, killing the two birds, and destroying the eggs.

Since then I have possessed other Chaffinches, both male and female, but have never succeeded in getting them to pair, either among themselves or with Canaries or other birds; so that I the more regret the accident that marred what appeared to be success when just at the culminating point.

Although it has long been an immense favourite with fanciers on the continent, it is only of late years that the Chaffinch, *Fringilla cœlebs* of Linnæus, *le Pinson* of the French, and *der Buchfink* of the Germans, has grown into favour and been caged in England; and yet it is a very beautiful bird, hardy, and tameable, and by no means a despicable songster.

The male Chaffinch is six inches and three quarters in length, of which the tail measures two and a half. The forehead is black, the top of the head and nape of the neck greyish blue, deep blue in very old males; the breast is a bright reddish brown, and the wing coverts are white; the tail is bluish black, of a very dark shade, and the bird has the power of erecting the head feathers into a crest. The beak is conical, pointed, and in winter white; while in summer it changes to a deep blue. The eye is chesnut brown, and the feet and legs dusky.

The female is rather smaller than her mate; her head, neck, and the upper part of her body are greyish brown, and all the under parts dusky white, with a faint reddish tinge on the breast. The beak, in spring, is greyish brown, and whitish grey in winter.

The Chaffinch is naturally a frequenter of woods and orchards, and is partially, at least in northern countries, a bird of passage; though the females are of a more unsettled disposition in this respect than the males, whom they leave behind them at the end of autumn, whilst they themselves emigrate *en masse*. It is owing to this disposition of the sexes to separate as soon as the breeding season is over, that the name *Fringilla cœlebs*,

the bachelor Finch, has been bestowed upon the Chaffinch, few of the females remaining with us in the winter, while the males congregate together in large flocks.

There are few birds, certainly none of our European species, that make so beautiful a nest as the Chaffinch. It is the shape of a half-globe flattened on the upper part, and so perfectly rounded that it has the appearance of having been turned out of a lathe. Cobwebs and wool fasten it to the branch, bits of moss with small twigs entwined form the ground-work; while the lining is composed of small feathers, thistle-down, the hair of horses and other animals, and the outer covering is formed of the different lichens that grow on the tree on which it is placed. This last finishing touch is probably designed to deceive an enemy's eye; and indeed it is extremely difficult to distinguish the nest from the bark of the branch upon which it is fastened.

There are commonly two broods during the season, rarely three; and the eggs, which have been already described, are usually five in number. The young resemble their mother until after the first moult; but experienced fanciers can tell which are the females in the nest. If it be desired to bring up Chaffinches by hand, which if a more troublesome, is decidedly a more satisfactory method of becoming possessed of these birds, than taking them when full-grown, in which case they seldom get over their natural shyness and become tame, they had better be taken from the nest as soon as their feathers begin to sprout. They can be very readily reared on bread-crumbs soaked in milk, or buckwheat flour and egg, to which had better be added small mealworms and gentles.

Chaffinches thus reared become very tame, and attached to their owners, and will sometimes breed, not only in a garden aviary, but even in a cage, though the young ones are not always successfully reared.

In Germany these birds are very much sought after and admired, and the greatest pains bestowed upon their education:

enthusiastic fanciers going so far as to distinguish some twenty distinct varieties of song, or "melodies", such as the double trill of the Hartz; the Bräutigam, or bridegroom's, and the Reiterzong, or rider's song.

The Chaffinch is quick at learning, and will repeat part of the Canary's and even of the Nightingale's song, but is always interpolating, often at the wrong point, its own sharp note "pink, pink." It is a hardy bird, and providing it is occasionally supplied with flies and other insects, will live for many years in the house: instances are given of its having survived for eighteen or twenty years in a cage.

The chief affections to which this bird is subject in a state of captivity are the pip, an obstruction of the rump-gland, from insufficient opportunities for bathing: this complication will be readily diagnosed by the bird continually turning round to peck itself just above the insertion of the tail feathers, when the obstructed gland must be relieved by fomenting it with hot water, piercing the little yellowish tumour with a fine needle, and gently pressing out its contents of inspissated oil. Diarrhæa is occasionally brought on by allowing the bird to drink impure water, or to eat too much succulent green food, such as rank chickweed: in which case a pinch of chalk, or better still, of aromatic confection in its water will effect a speedy cure. Should the diarrhæa, however, be a symptom of consumption, induced by confining the bird to a poor diet, the disease and its most prominent symptom may be relieved, and often cured by a regimen of insects; but should the disorder have existed for any length of time, there is no cure, the case is hopeless.

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THE BULLFINCH.





## CHAPTER VI.

## THE BULLFINCH.

MY mother having had occasion, as sometimes happened, to pay a short visit to her native country, looked about for some present for me when the time came for her to return home again; and rightly judging that nothing would please me better than a bird, made choice of a Bullfinch, which was quite a *rara avis* in our part of the world. I had heard, it is true, and read about such a bird in my Natural History books, but had never seen one, nor do I think there were any to be met with in our neighbourhood wild.

The reader will therefore understand the boyish delight with which I contemplated the strange "English Bird", as Perrine, our maid, called my mother's present. We were never tired of looking at it, and admiring its black head, red breast, and grey back: then its song! what an extraordinary, and yet what a sweet, note! and how tame and familiar it was! I was charmed, and my mother equally so to see me pleased.

Poor dear Bully! his was a sad and a tragic end. He was so tame, that we let him hop about the room occasionally, and on one of these occasions I, inadvertently, put my great clumsy foot upon him—you may, kind reader, imagine the rest—after all these years I cannot bear to think about it.

Many years afterwards I purchased a piping German, a charming bird, that would eat seed from my fingers, or from between my lips: he had learned to say "Hip, hip, hurrah!" bowing, and spreading out his wings and tail as he repeated the words, which, doubtless, had some meaning for him; also to say his own name "Peter", for which he was always rewarded with a grain of hemp: he was almost as nice a bird as my first dear Bully was.

I bought him a wife one day, and turned the pair into a large empty room we had at the top of the house. I scarcely know whether Peter appreciated the lady's society as well as he did that of his human friends, at all events he taught her the words he knew, and she soon called "Peter", and said "Hip, hip, hurrah!" as well as he did. After a time she made a nest among some boughs I had placed in the room, and laid five eggs, upon which she sat devotedly for a fortnight, but they came to nothing. Peter, poor fellow, got into a habit of sitting on the window sill, looking out into the garden to watch the Sparrows, that often peeped at him through the window-panes, but the draught that came up between the two sashes gave him cold, and he died.

Since that melancholy event I have had many more Bullfinches, but not one as nice as the two I have named; and scarcely expect I ever shall, although *Le bouvreuil* of the French, *der Gimpel* of German authors, *Loxia pyrrhula* of Linnæus, is always a charming bird, which it is quite a mistake to term "clumsy" as some writers have done; he is broad built for his length, measuring six inches and three quarters from beak to tail; the tail is two and a half inches long; the beak but six lines, thick and black; the eye is chesnut; the feet and legs black; the top of the head, a circle round the beak, and the chin are a deep velvety black; the back of the neck, back, and shoulders are bluish grey; the throat, breast, and belly a lovely shade of reddish pink, and the rump pure white; the wings and tail are black, shining with metallic lustre, and the former are crossed about their middle by a narrow band of grey.

The female Bullfinch can be readily distinguished from her mate, for what in him is red, is reddish grey in her; while her back is brownish grey, and she is, moreover, perceptibly smaller than he is.

There is a variety about half as large again as the ordinary Bullfinch, from which it differs in nothing but size: these

giants are called Russian, or Siberian Bullfinches by the dealers, and are not natives of this country: they are said to breed freely in the aviary, a statement, however, which I am unable to confirm, or refute, not having tried the experiment.

The ordinary Bullfinch is pretty generally distributed over Europe, existing in great numbers in the mountainous forests of Germany: the male and female keep together all the year round. In their wild state these birds feed on all manner of seeds, and are particularly fond of the buds of trees, for which reason they are execrated by gardeners and horticulturists, who have succeeded in extirpating them from several localities, and rendering them very scarce in many others. In the house they are usually fed on summer rape seed, which may be advantageously soaked in cold water for a couple of hours before being given to the birds: they will also eat canary seed, and are very fond of hemp, which should only be allowed as a great treat now and then, and only a few seeds at a time, as it is very fattening, and if permitted, the Bullfinch would eat of it to repletion. A regular supply of fresh wholesome green food is necessary to maintain these birds in health, and they are particularly fond of apple pips.

As the Bullfinch is a very shy bird, it naturally hides away its nest in a thick bush, or a quickset hedge, where it is well screened from observation. The nest is made of roots and small twigs and moss, and is lined with hair; there are two broods in the year, of four or five each time: the eggs are bluish white, spotted with violet or brown at the large end.

When it is wished to bring up Bullfinches by hand, the young must be removed from the nest as soon as their feathers begin to sprout; when they are easily reared on bread-crumbs and soaked rape seed. At first the young resemble their mother, but the red breast soon marks the male; however, as the females are almost as good singers as their brothers, it is best to take them all together, especially as the old ones are

very apt to desert the nest, if they perceive that it has been tampered with.

It is stated in different books that mules have been bred between the Bullfinch and the Canary, but if so, the union must be rarely fruitful, for I have never seen a specimen of the cross, though I have attended the large Bird Shows for years. However, mules between the Goldfinch and Bullfinch are comparatively common, and are usually the offspring of a female of the latter, and a male of the former species; the eggs being hatched, and the young reared by Canaries.

Bullfinches vary as much as children do in their capacity for receiving instruction; some individuals learning an air thoroughly after a few lessons, while others take months and are not then proficient; while others again seem unable to learn at all, and remain mere chatterers all their lives. Bird organs are not to be recommended for teaching Bullfinches to pipe, as they are rarely accurate in tone, and the birds repeating exactly what they hear, the result is often far from pleasing. The best instructor is a man who has the knack of whistling correctly; or failing such a phenomenon, a flageolet.

It is a great pity that so pretty, intelligent, and interesting a bird should be so delicate: but so it is. My experience of Bullfinches, whether reared from the nest, or caught when full grown, and the latter are considered to be the healthiest by the German fanciers, is that they rarely live for more than two years in the house, and many of them not more than half that time. They suffer severely in moulting, and are frequently troubled with constipation and diarrhæa, as well as epileptic fits. They are also very passionate, and frequently injure themselves by dashing about wildly in what can only be called a paroxysm of rage, or temper.

The best way to preserve them in health, is to rigorously confine them to a rape seed diet, upon which they will live longer than when pampered with all the delicacies an attached,

but injudicious, owner can bestow. A few grains of hemp daily, about twelve, will keep them in good humour, while green food and clean water must not be forgotten. The floor of the cage must be covered with river sand, which should be renewed every other day, and the bird will pick up little pebbles that will materially assist its digestion.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE GREENFINCH.

ONE of the most common birds in our neighbourhood was the Greenfinch, or Green Bird, called by the local name of *le Tarin*, by Buffon *le Verdier*, and by Linnæus and the Germans *Loxia chloris* and *der Grünling*, respectively.

It is rather a pretty bird, and I have a strong suspicion that in some way or other it has had something to do with founding the domesticated race of Canaries, which are supposed to derive their origin from the Fortunate Isles. My reasons for this belief being that the call of the Greenfinch can scarcely be distinguished from that of the Canary, while the nests of both birds greatly resemble each other, and the eggs only differ in being a trifle paler in the case of the green bird, and even this dissimilarity is not constant.

This bird is about the same length as the Chaffinch, but is of stouter build, and has a shorter tail. The prevailing colour of its plumage is yellowish green, lighter on the lower part of the body, and still more so on the breast and rump; while many of the flight feathers of the wings are bright yellow.

The female, which is rather smaller than her mate, is greenish brown on the upper, and grey with a slight shade of green on the lower parts of her body. The young are at

first of a greenish grey; some yellow tints, however, may already be seen in the male.

The Greenfinch is a very familiar bird, congregating round the house in winter with the Sparrows and Robins, and fearlessly building in the garden, even close up to the windows. In the playground of the school I attended there were a number of young lime-trees (*tilleul*), the tops of which had been cut off during the winter, and in several of these, as soon as the young branches had sprouted out in spring, some Greenfinches built their nests, with misplaced confidence, however, for the boys invariably stole the eggs and sucked them.

The Greenfinch has usually two, sometimes three, broods in the season; the eggs, which are bluish white spotted with violet and brown, chiefly at the larger end, are four or five in number, and as I have already stated, can scarcely be distinguished from those of a Canary; with which bird the Greenfinch will very readily pair, producing fine strong, healthy and handsome birds, partaking of the appearance of both parents: these hybrids are said to be capable of reproducing their kind, a statement which I have not tried to verify.

Hand-reared Greenfinches will breed in an aviary, or even in a cage, among themselves and with all the other Finches.

When wild these birds feed on all sorts of seeds, and should the supply of this, their natural diet, get short, they will eat the buds of many kinds of trees, as well as the tender sprouting corn. In the house they are not more particular, no seed, even hemp, seeming to come amiss to them, or to do them any harm.

The young are easily reared on bread-crumbs, or buckwheat flour, and soon get very tame. Bechstein gives the following directions for teaching them to fly out and return:—

“After having taken the young from the nest, they must be put in a cage, and placed at the foot of the tree in which the nest is built, in a place dug for the purpose, and on the cage a tit as a decoy. When left there, the old birds come

to feed their young, and are caught in the snare. As soon as they are taken, they must all be brought into the house, where the old and young must be put together in any aviary, or large cage, till the latter can fly: the window may then be opened for them to go out, but hunger will soon bring them back. As soon as they have exercised their wings, the old birds should be placed on the table in the window to call them back. In time, they become so familiar that they will accompany one in a walk, and there is no fear of their flying away. If they are not taken thus, it is necessary to wait for winter and snow to let them go out, and if they profit by the permission, to call them back by some of their own species placed in a cage in the window. If you wish to be quite sure of success, you have only to put a board in the window, on which two females, with their wings cut, can run about, go out, and return."

The above directions are plain and simple enough; but what the tit on the top of the cage is supposed to do, is a mystery I am unable to solve.

Greenfinches are seldom troubled with disease of any kind, and with the commonest attention will live for ten or fifteen years in the house.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HEDGE ACCENTOR, OR SPARROW.

THIS familiar bird, almost as well known as the Robin Redbreast, is also called the Dunnock, and used to be a great favourite of mine when I was a schoolboy: its scientific name is *Accentor modularis*, I quite forget what we used to call it in Brittany, but its name according to Buffon is *la Fauvette d'Hiver*, or *Traine Buisson*, while the Germans call it *der Braunelle*, which sounds uncommonly like broad Scotch:

and a braw wee birdie it is, very confiding, lively, and merry in winter time, though uncommonly shy in summer.

Not one of our wild birds lays such an egg, such a turquoise gem rather, the much coveted prize of that variety of the genus known as the country schoolboy. Dear me! what dozens, scores, nay, hundreds of them I have taken in my time, blown and strung upon a piece of twine! all unknown to my excellent mother, who always discountenanced bird-nesting; wisely as now I know, but very arbitrarily as I thought in those far away days.

The length of the Hedge Accentor is five inches and a half, of which the tail measures rather more than two. The head, which is somewhat narrow, is, together with the neck, of a dark ash colour, marked with very dark brown spots; the breast is a deep slate colour.

The female is lighter, and has more brown spots on the head than her mate; but it nevertheless takes some acquaintance with these birds to readily distinguish the sexes from each other.

This bird is found in all parts of Europe, frequenting every hedgerow and copse, and even large gardens in the suburbs of London: it forms a link between insect and seed-eating birds, and partakes indiscriminately of either food, so that it can be very readily kept in the house; where, however, unless very tame, it has a mouse-like habit of hiding itself away in holes and corners.

The Hedge Accentor makes a beautiful nest of moss and roots, lined with wool and hair, usually selecting a thick quickset hedge to build in, or a bushy shrub, such as an *arbor vita*, or a clump of box. The nest is never far from the ground, and usually contains from four to six eggs of a beautiful turquoise blue. The young leave the nest early, often before they can fly: there are two or three broods in the year. The Hedge Accentor is more usually selected as a foster-parent for its young than any other bird by the Cuckoo.

The young Accentors are very easily reared on soaked bread and poppy seed moistened with milk, or buckwheat flour made into a paste. The plumage of the young brood is very different from that of their parents; the breast being spotted with grey and yellow, and the back with brown and black, while the nostrils and angles of the mouth are rose-coloured.

There is, perhaps, not one of our native birds that breeds so freely in the aviary as this: the solitary female will lay eggs or pair with a cock Robin, and bring up a family of mules.

I once caught an adult female, one of whose wings had been injured, and she soon, without any particular notice on my part, became so tame, that when I turned her out after her recovery from the effects of her accident, I could not drive her away from the house: finding she would not go away, I let her do as she pleased, and she remained in the garden for some months, coming to the kitchen window every morning to be fed: she disappeared at last, whether killed by a cat, or impelled by the desire to make a nest, I cannot say: I never saw her again.

In the matter of diseases I do not know of any incidental to this species; those I have kept at different times always seemed very strong and healthy. Bechstein, however, asserts that they are, even when wild, subject to a pustular disorder resembling small-pox! If so, I have not met with an instance of such a complaint among them.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LONG-TAILED TIT.

THIS pretty little bird, which some writers on ornithology class with the Wrens, is not very common in England, but is sufficiently so in wooded districts, especially pine woods,

though from being of a particularly shy and retiring disposition it is not very often seen, except by those who are accustomed to keep a look out for strange birds.

In the centre of our old Brittany garden rose a stately fir tree, I am not quite sure to what species it belonged, but it was a very handsome specimen, rising in true conical form to what then appeared to me to be an extraordinary altitude, but which subsequent experience has taught me was at least a very respectable height. In summer time this great tree was yearly tenanted by a pair of Magpies, of which bird three couples usually built their nests in the garden, one, as I have already stated, in the great cherry-laurel tree, another in a huge pink thorn, and the third in this fir, at its very summit; where one year they injured the terminal shoot, in some way or other, so that it died, and was replaced by two, which grew up and somewhat marred ever after the perfect symmetry of its shape.

Many other birds, beside the Magpie, were in the habit of using the fir as a nesting place, Chaffinches especially, which found plenty of lichens close at hand among its branches to cover their nests with; and one summer I found a ball of moss, about the size of a cocoa-nut, hanging from the extremity of one of its lower branches, at a distance of between four and five feet from the ground. It was a perfect ball, as round as possible, and was suspended by a few hairs, or threads; a close scrutiny discovered a very small aperture on one side, into which I inserted my finger, and amongst a mass of soft warm feathers felt a number of tiny eggs, one of which I gently rolled to the opening, and saw that it was pinky white; I then replaced it, and hastened to inform my mother of the discovery I had made, after effacing, as well as I could, the marks of my rude intrusion into the little domicile.

After examining the nest carefully, my mother confessed her inability to tell me to what kind of bird it belonged; nor was Marie Baudoin, when summoned from the potato patch to assist

in our deliberations, in any way more qualified to enlighten me: when suddenly the owners, irritated probably by our continued presence so close to their abode, made their appearance, chirping a little angry remonstrance, hopping among the adjoining fir branches, and once or twice they almost brushed our faces with their wings.

We then perceived that they were Long-tailed Tits, sweetly pretty little things, with tails longer than their bodies, and a coat of purplish grey, with white markings on the wings. They are among the smallest of our native birds, being scarcely, if at all, bigger than the Golden-crested Wren, though their long tails make them appear rather larger.

We retired hastily, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing, from a distance, the tiny couple enter their nest, and remain there, so that they had evidently taken no offence at my inspection. In process of time we were enabled to ascertain, by their constant passing in and out of the nest all day, that the old birds had a young family to attend to; and by and bye a grasshopper-like chirping within the nest, and a perceptible bulging of its sides, showed pretty plainly that the youngsters were getting big, and would soon be able to come out and cater for themselves. But alas! one morning, after a terrible night of wind and rain, I found the nest lying, drenched and flattened on the ground, while not a trace of the birds was to be seen anywhere about.

“*Ah! la! la! quel dommage!*” was my involuntary exclamation, as I ran to pick it up, when lo! a movement, and I felt that there was life within: so I ran hastily indoors, and found my mother in the kitchen, intent on making jam. We carefully examined the nest, and found no less than seven little birds in it, warm and dry among their feathers, and very nearly fledged. What was to be done? they were too old to gape to any one but their parents, though we tenderly chucked their little chins, chirruping as well as we could in imitation of the old birds, as we proffered various dainties,

but in vain: our attempts to feed the little ones only resulted in driving them from the shelter of their nest, to set them hopping about, in a tottering uncertain manner, all over the table, whence one or two of the biggest fluttered on to the floor.

There chanced to be an old cage in the house, and fortunately the bars were very close together; so taking up the nest, and spreading it out carefully, my mother placed it on the bottom of the cage, and put the little birds into it again: there they soon settled themselves down, with their heads all turned one way.

“Perhaps they will let us feed them by and bye, when they get hungry?” said my mother, stepping outside on to the terrace as she spoke, where she perceived the old birds in a tree opposite the kitchen window, and a happy thought struck her that if she put the cage there, the parents would feed the little ones until they were able to fly. No sooner said than done: her surmise proved to be correct, for the parents immediately began to feed their hungry brood, and continued to do so assiduously for more than a week, when the latter refused their attentions, and by incessantly pecking at the nest, the bars of the cage, and each other, showed plainly that they considered themselves capable of providing for their own wants.

As they could not get food for themselves, and would not take what was offered to them, either by their parents, or by us, we had no alternative but to open their door and let them fly away, for we could not see them starve. They very soon availed themselves of the permission given them to escape, and it was a pretty sight to see them, one after the other, hop out of the cage among the branches of the lime tree, where their father and mother were anxiously awaiting them, and then to see the party of nine fly off in single file into the woods, from whence not one of them ever returned to thank us for our hospitality.

I have since found that the position chosen by the pair alluded to above, is that selected by the species generally, showing an amount of discrimination that is really wonderful on the part of so small a bird, for it renders the nest almost unassailable by bird or beast of prey.

The Long-tailed Tit in its wild state subsists exclusively on insects, flies, gnats, small caterpillars, spiders, and especially green flies (*aphides*): it is, consequently, no easy task to keep it alive all the year round in the house: but even this may be accomplished by means of small mealworms, black beetles, and aphides reared for the purpose in a frame: and as it is an exceedingly amusing little bird, full of the funniest ways and tricks, it would be worth the while of amateurs gifted with leisure and patience, to make the attempt: should they do so and succeed, they will, I have no doubt, be well rewarded for their pains.

These birds are very susceptible to cold, and should have the room in which they are kept well warmed during the winter. They should also be supplied with a cocoa-nut husk and some nice soft feathers to make themselves a nest, for, like the Wrens, they alway sleep in some warm nook or crevice, out of reach of wind or rain, and a number of them usually congregate together to keep out the frost by their mutual warmth.

Not having kept the Long-tailed Tit for any length of time, nor heard of any one else who did, I cannot say how long they would live in a cage, or to what ailments they are subject. Intending keepers, however, must bear in mind that these birds will only exist on an exclusively insect diet, of which ants' eggs may form the largest part in winter, when however it is not difficult to have gentles, which have been kept during the summer in a cool cellar, or some similar place. Fur-moths, too, are a readily procurable article of diet for insectivorous birds, and a good stock of them may be kept up by means of a couple of rabbit skins in a loosely covered box.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SKYLARK.

THIS famous songster, *Alauda arvensis* of Linnæus, is *L'Alouette* of the French, and *die Feldlerche* of the Germans, and is no less well known than universally esteemed—esteemed, alas! as a *bonne bouche* on the table by epicures, as well as by aviarists as one of their most cherished pets.

It is a pretty and graceful bird, seven inches in length, of which the tail measures three. The long straight beak terminates in a sharp point, and has the upper mandible black and the lower greyish white. The height of the shanks, which are yellow, is nearly an inch, and the hind claw is much longer than the toe from which it springs.

The female Lark can be distinguished from her mate by the number of spots on her breast, which is tawny yellow, with very few spots in the male, changing to white on the lower breast and belly: the shoulders are brown spotted with darker shades of the same colour. White Larks are occasionally met with, black ones now and then, but the cinnamon is perhaps the most uncommon variety of all.

The male Lark shows a white line above his eye, which is surrounded by a dark circle, both of which distinctive marks are wanting in the female. In their wild state these birds are found all over Europe, and Northern Africa, frequenting fields and meadows, and especially plains of large extent. It is partly a migratory bird; the presence or absence of suitable food in a particular locality regulating its movements, as well as those of other kinds of birds.

The Lark is not a very suitable bird for a garden aviary, for in such a situation it soon becomes very wild, even if hand-reared, and is apt to injure itself by banging about in

unreasoning fits of panic: it is, moreover, so defenceless and timid that its stronger-billed companions are apt to break its legs: in a cage, however, it will thrive admirably if properly attended to.

The female Lark sings, not as well as the male, it is true, but much better than most birds of her sex who indulge themselves in minstrelsy; so much so, indeed, that one or two females I have known were taken for cock birds by their owners, so perfect was their song, until an egg deposited in a corner of the cage one day, revealed the bird's true sex beyond dispute.

The best kind of Lark's cage is a wooden one about eighteen or twenty inches long, nine or ten inches wide, and some fifteen inches high. The bottom of the cage should be fitted with a drawer, capable of holding fine dry sand to the depth of a couple of inches, for the birds like to dust themselves, and unless they are enabled to do so are very apt to become infested with vermin. The front of the cage should be bowed, and so contrived as to rise above the level of the back portion; a sod of grass should be always provided, as it conduces much to keep the bird in health. The top of the cage must be of wood, and unless the bird is exceedingly tame, should have a piece of calico or baize stretched tightly an inch below it, so that the Lark, in rising, may not hurt its head. When wild these birds never go near water, as they find enough moisture on the grass amongst which they live to suffice them for drinking and washing purposes, which is also the reason why they never bathe.

When at liberty in its native fields, the Lark, during the summer and autumn, lives chiefly on insects; in the spring it eats grass, and the tender blades of growing corn, as well as all kinds of seeds, especially if sprouting. In winter it will eat anything it can find, from turnip tops to the odds and ends of a farm-yard, to which in severe weather it frequently resorts. In the house it may be given bread crumbs,

poppy seed, canary and millet, and a little crushed hemp, suet finely chopped, yolk of egg and ants' eggs and mealworms: some people add "German paste", an abomination, the basis of which is pea-meal. A few oats, soaked in rain water until they begin to sprout, are a favourite addition to the Lark's bill of fare, which should include an abundant supply of green food, and a few insects, mealworms, gentles, or blackbeetles every day. A Lark thus fed will sing nearly all the year round, unless perhaps when moulting.

These birds have, usually, two broods during the season, sometimes three, laying each time from three to five eggs of a whitish grey, spotted with a darker shade of the same colour. They incubate for fourteen days, and the young often leave the nest before they can fly. The nest is generally placed on the ground, in a little natural hollow, and is inartistically made of grass, lined with wool and hair.

When it is desired to bring up young Larks by hand, they must be taken from the nest before they can see, when they are easily reared on bread-crumbs, or buckwheat flour, poppy seed, ants' eggs, and a little lean meat minced very fine. The males can be readily distinguished from the females, even in the nest, by their yellowish colour and the few marks upon their breasts.

There are instances on record of these birds having bred in a large garden aviary, and some females are of so benevolent a disposition that they readily adopt and bring up the young of other birds that are placed with them, as if they were their own. And "this instinct", says Buffon, "appears very early, even before that which disposes them to become mothers. In the month of May a young Lark was brought to me which could not feed itself; I fed it, and it could hardly peck up, when a brood of four young ones of the same species was brought to me from another place. She exhibited a singular affection for these new comers, which were not much younger than herself; she nursed them night and day, warmed them

under her wings, and pushed the food into their mouths with her beak; nothing could distract her from those interesting duties. If she was removed from the young ones, she flew back to them as soon as she was free, without ever thinking of escaping, as she might have done a hundred times. Her affection increased so much that she literally forgot to eat and drink; and she lived only on the food which was given to her as well as to her adopted young, and she died at length, consumed by this sort of maternal passion. None of the young survived her, they died one after the other, so necessary had her maternal cares become to them." So ended as pretty a little avian romance as I have ever heard of; though to my mind it ought not to have had so tragic a termination, had the persons who had the care of these unhappy little birds, possessed an ordinary amount of feeling.

The charming song of the Lark consists of several strains, trills and flourishes, with an occasional loud whistling. To my taste it is quite too noisy for the house, where it never sounds as well as when the little musician is poised on buoyant wings high up in the air, and almost out of sight. It is very susceptible of education, and will learn not only the notes of any other bird near which it is placed when young, but tunes played to it on a bird-organ or flageolet. When wild it sings from the first fine days of Spring to July, when the cares of its family demand its whole time and attention; but in the house, if properly fed and cared for, it will sing on nearly all the year.

Larks in confinement often suffer from bad feet; which is as much owing to their inability to wash them as to anything else; for when wild they keep them in order by continually running among wet grass. The owner should therefore imitate Nature for their benefit as nearly as possible, and place a good sod of wet long grass every other day in their cage, and he will be rewarded for his thoughtful attention by witnessing the pleasure conferred on the little captive, who stamps

with delight on the soft herbage, expressing the while his joy by his exquisite strains. Unless a Lark has sand, or road-sweepings to dust itself in, it is very apt to become infested with a kind of lice, that torment the poor birds so sadly, that they pluck out their feathers, making themselves nearly bare; in which state, of course, it is preposterous to expect that they will sing.

The best remedy for all the disorders of these birds, is to see that they are supplied with good food, and if well attended to they will live for a long time; instances being on record of their having survived for thirty years in the house.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE ROBIN REDBREAST.

THIS delightful little bird, to which so many charming nursery legends belong, is, as he deserves to be, a universal favourite, and in this country, until very recent years, it would have been considered almost a sacrilege to keep him in a cage. *Autre temps, autres mœurs*, however; he has now become a recognised "Cage-bird" in England, as he has long been on the continent, where he is also looked upon as a legitimate object for *la chasse*, and is not unfrequently served up as an article of food upon the table, upon which, with us, he would only make his appearance to pick up the crumbs.

The Robin Redbreast, *Motacilla rubecula* of Linnæus, *le Rouge gorge* of the French, and *das Rothkelchen* of the Germans, is a bold and fearless bird in winter, when it approaches and often enters the abode of man; where, in England at least, it was until lately sure of a hearty welcome, and free to come and go at pleasure. It measures five and three quarter inches in length, two and a quarter of which belong to the







THE ROBIN REDBREAST.



tail. The forehead, cheeks, and breast are orange red, and the upper part of the body, and the tail and wings are dingy olive green.

The female is smaller, has less of the orange colour on her forehead, and has a paler breast: her legs are a purplish brown, while those of her mate are darker in colour. Unless when very old she also lacks the yellow spot on the wing coverts, which is so conspicuous in the male.

The young, when first hatched, are covered with yellow down, then they become grey, and their breast feathers are fringed with dusky yellow, which gives them a mottled appearance, as unlike that of their parents as possible; nor do they assume the adult plumage until the second moult.

Charmingly familiar in winter, the Robin is excessively shy in summer, when the male retires with his partner to the most solitary and out-of-the-way place he can find, to rear his little family. The nest, inartistically built of leaves and moss, lined with hair and a few small feathers, is variously placed; sometimes on the ground amongst brambles, against the trunk of a tree, in a hole in a wall, or some natural crevice in a rock, and occasionally in the most unlikely places, such as an old watering-can, or a flower-pot on a shelf in a garden outhouse, or the thatch of a barn or cottage: and one instance has come under my observation of a pair of these birds having made their nest on the curtain-pole, among the curtains in a lady's bedroom, the window of which was considerably left partly open night and day, to enable them to cater for the young brood, which they successfully reared in this novel situation. The old birds never seemed to take the least notice of the inmates of the house, or of the visitors who were introduced for the purpose of seeing the strange sight, but would fearlessly alight on the table or the floor to pick up such crumbs and other food as were placed there on purpose for them, and with which they fed the nestlings as freely as if no eyes but their own beheld them.

Robins usually have two broods of young ones during the season, laying from five to seven eggs of a yellowish white colour, speckled with spots and lines of a brick red at the larger end. The young are hatched in about fourteen days, and are fed entirely on insects, grubs and caterpillars chiefly.

When wild these birds eat every kind of insect they can lay hold of, as well as earthworms, of which they devour vast numbers; a Robin thinking nothing of swallowing a great worm as long as himself, or longer. In autumn the Robin eats berries, and is especially fond of white currants, while in winter he will satisfy his hunger on any scraps he can find. In the house he will thrive on bread-crumbs, grated carrot, yolk of egg, and sponge-cake, all mixed up together lightly, but not wetted, as the grated carrot imparts sufficient moisture to the mass, which should be prepared fresh every morning: it is also advisable to add a few insects daily, mealworms, small garden worms, blackbeetles or gentles. Some writers recommend that crushed hempseed should form a considerable part of the Robin's food, which I think is a mistake; for the little particles of shell which it is impossible to separate from the bruised seed are very indigestible, and cause much suffering to those soft-billed birds that are compelled to swallow them. The Robin is fond of bathing, so fond, that I once caught one that had so thoroughly wetted itself that it could not fly away.

In my dear old Brittany home Robins were very numerous, and we usually offered an asylum during the winter to one of these birds, which would never permit another of the same species to share its retreat, so that the rest of the little company had to be fed out of doors. I once saw a Robin in the refreshment-room of a country railway-station, perched on a champagne bottle on the topmost shelf behind the bar; whence, as soon as the coast was clear, he descended to pick up the crumbs left upon the counter, returning, as soon as

he had satisfied his appetite, to his coign of vantage, whence he gaily warbled a cheerful little song of thanksgiving.

That was the second winter, the attendant said, that he had favoured them with his company. How did she know that it was the same bird? Oh! readily: the first time he came in he seemed quite at a loss where to settle down, flying hither and thither as if in search of a secure resting place; but when he came for the second season, he had disappeared in the spring, he perched directly on that very bottle, which he had finally selected as his perch, and sang as if he was glad to be at home again. Did any other Robins ever try to come in? Yes, lots of them, but Bobbie drove them all away, evidently thinking that possession was not only nine points but all the law.

Yes, the Robin is by no means an amiable, or a sociable bird, but fights so fiercely with his rival, as to become insensible to danger, not seldom falling a prey to marauding cats while engaged in battle with his foe. I once captured two of these birds, that were so intent upon the settlement of their dispute, that they never noticed me, until I had taken them both in my hand; and so deep was their hatred of each other, that they actually renewed the contest in the cage to which I had transferred them, but where I did not keep them long, as I loosed, first one, and then the other; when let out, they made it up, and became good friends again.

It is impossible to keep two of these birds in the same aviary, or indeed with any birds weaker than themselves, for they are exceedingly tyrannical and quarrelsome, fighting bitterly even with the females of the same species, except during the breeding season, when no bird could be a more devoted husband than Robin.

The song of the Robin Redbreast is very pleasing and agreeable, the more so that it is most frequently heard when other songsters are silent.

This bird requires a good deal of attention in the matter

of diet to keep it in good health in the house all the year round: otherwise it soon becomes afflicted with diarrhæa or atrophy, often with both these complaints together, and when such is the case, the best thing to do is to restore the bird to liberty, when natural diet and fresh air will bring him round if not too far gone. A Robin will sometimes cast up a number of little pellets, consisting of morsels of food, this is a sign of indigestion, and indicates that the food must be changed, if the bird is to live much longer.

The best way to keep a Robin Redbreast, is to let him have the run of the house during the winter, he will often voluntarily establish himself in the kitchen or parlour, if not frightened on his first entrance by attempts to catch him, which he, not unnaturally, resents, for they look like, and might be for anything he knows to the contrary, designs upon his life. No, let him alone, and he will soon become familiar, eating at the table with the rest of the family, and sleeping snugly at the top of the window curtains: should he fly away in spring, he will return, if alive, as soon as the cold weather sets in, and enliven the fireside with his pretty little song during the long dark winter evenings.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WRYNECK.

THE charming but not very well known species that forms the subject of the present chapter, is about one of the nicest birds I know to make a pet of. A year or two before I left *la Bretagne*, our gardener, an old soldier by the way, and the successor of Marie Baudoin, whom my mother had taken into the house as indoor servant, brought me a strange looking little bird, which he had picked up on the road one morning on his way to work.

It was about half grown, and had probably dropped out of its nest and crawled away some distance from it: its plumage was grey, or rather ash-coloured, spotted with rusty red and white: it had moreover a decided crest, a yellow mouth, and a very long tongue. At first I was quite puzzled to make out what kind of bird it could be, nor could Mendel, the gardener, enlighten me: he had never seen one like it before. Well, I turned over the pages of Cuvier, Bechstein, and an odd volume of natural history, of which the title-page had long disappeared, and at last identified the stranger as the *Yunx torquilla* of Linnæus, *le Torcol* of the French, and *der germeiner Wendehals* of the German author above mentioned.

I was a good deal from home at that time, attending some classes, and preparing for an examination, so the bird was handed over to Marguérite, our old cook, who was as great an enthusiast in the matter of birds as I was myself. I had attempted to feed the young thing with milk and blénoir, egg and bread-crumbs, but in vain, for it would not open its mouth, and I was obliged to leave it, scarcely expecting to find it alive on my return, as it was puffed out, kept its eyes shut, and was evidently very weak.

I thought a good deal about my bird during the day, and fear that M. le Professeur Bazin must have found me an inattentive listener to his learned exposition of a Greek Play, or some such important matter, for I could not recollect one word of the lesson afterwards.

“*Eh bien?*” I enquired on reaching home, “*et l’oiseau?*”

“Getting on beautifully”, replied the old woman, “*il a une grande antipathie pour les mouches.*”

“*Tiens!*” I exclaimed, “I should have imagined he would have liked them.” I had thought the matter over while I should have been attending to the Professor, and had come to the conclusion that my bird would require insect diet.

“*Au contraire*”, replied Marguérite, “he will not eat anything else.”

On flies we reared him, or rather old Margu rite did, to maturity, when he also condescended, now and then, to eat a little scraped raw meat. He was never kept in a cage, but usually took up his stand on the top of the kitchen dresser, darting down, every now and then, to pick up with his long tongue the flies that, for his especial benefit, were enticed to settle on the table by a well-sugared bait.

He was perfectly tame, never attempting to escape when the window was open, and taking flies and scraps of raw beef from our fingers. He frequently sat upon his old nurse's shoulders, singing his little song, and twisting his head about in all manner of queer attitudes, while she went about her work. Poor, poor fellow! never bird, I think, had a sadder fate than his. Careering round the kitchen one day, in pursuit of flies, he unhappily dashed himself into the dripping pan that was full of scalding fat, and was so terribly injured, that in a few seconds he expired. I am not ashamed to say that I cried heartily over the disfigured remains of the poor bird; while good old Margu rite was so inconsolable that I had to bring her home a nest of young Blackcaps I had not intended disturbing, thinking that to give her some fresh object upon which to bestow her affections and care, would be the best way to console her for the loss of our favourite.

I have never had an opportunity of keeping a second bird of this species, but if they are all, as I gather they are from the accounts given of them by various writers, like the individual whose brief history I have just related, few birds can be more desirable as pets.

The Wryneck is a bird of passage, and not very common in England, where the country people in some places call it the Cuckoo's Mate. It arrives among us in April, and leaves us again in September. In its wild state it subsists entirely on insect food, particularly ants and flies, to which it is very partial: its long cylindrical tongue, covered with adhesive saliva, standing it in good stead for capturing these pests.

Bechstein avers that it will eat berries, but this I greatly doubt, not having seen the statement confirmed by other and more recent writers. Mr. Swaysland recommends that in the house it should be fed on scraped beef and egg, soaked bread and hemp seed; to which latter recommendation I demur, for the reasons already given in the chapter on the Redbreast; namely, that the shell, which it is impossible altogether to separate from the kernel, is very indigestible, and unfit for insectivorous birds, whose stomach and intestines it soon deranges, giving rise to dyspepsia and its crowd of attendant evils. Mr. Swaysland continues, "it should also be given ants' eggs, mealworms, gentles, beetles, or other insects, either separately, or mixed with its other food."

The Wryneck is considered to be a member of the Woodpecker family, and like those birds climbs very nimbly up the trunks of trees, probing every little crevice in the bark with its long tongue, in search of insects. The arrangement of the Wryneck's toes is similar to that which obtains in the Parrot and Woodpecker families; namely, two of them are turned to the front and two behind.

The nest is made in a hollow branch, or trunk of a tree; the eggs are white, and seven or eight in number, and the young are reared on insects. All the writers I have seen who treat of these birds, assert that if taken from the nest while young, and fed on insects and scraped meat, they soon become very familiar. M. de Schauroth had two of these birds which learned to fly out into the garden and return when called by their master, to whom they seemed to be very much attached.

The plumage of the Wryneck is very pretty, and its movements and antics very amusing; to which qualifications as a home pet, if we add its tameness, it will be seen that few birds are more desirable in the house, especially in the country, where there would not be nearly as much difficulty in providing it with suitable food, as in a town.

If dieted on indigestible food, the Wryneck will not long survive; but if fed on suitable, that is to say natural food, it will live for several years, endearing itself to every one that comes in contact with it, by its numerous good qualities.

It requires to be warmly housed during the winter months, which it passes, when wild, in a far more genial climate than ours.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BLACKCAP.

FLORIAN, in one of the most charming of his delightful fables, narrates how the birds once met in conclave to decide upon the relative merits of the Blackcap and Nightingale, and their respective right to be considered queen, or rather king of song. "The judges," he proceeds to tell us, "were the Linnet, the Canary, the Robin Redbreast, and the Greenfinch: two old Goldfinches and two young Chaffinches were appointed to keep order in the lists; and the Blackbird with his sonorous notes was herald: he gave the signal for the contest to begin, and straightway the Blackcap began her sweetest strains: with consummate art she modulated the varied inflections of her soul-entrancing harmony, and ravished all hearts by the beauty of her song. The assembly applauded, and silence having been again obtained, the Nightingale commenced. . . . though her music filled the hearers with wonder and delight, the judges found themselves unable to decide: the Linnet and the Greenfinch, friends of the Blackcap, refused to give their opinion, nor could the others any more agree: but all at once an unlucky Jay decided the matter by calling out, 'Well done, Blackcap!' when the whole feathered Areopagus with one voice immediately pronounced for the Nightingale. Thus the commendation of a fool does frequently more harm than his rebuke."

I am not quite sure, however, that I should have voted with the majority on the interesting occasion alluded to by the poet, or that I should have permitted the untutored approbation of a boor to influence my judgment in a contrary direction. It is true, I have never attempted to keep a Nightingale, while I have had dozens of Blackcaps in my possession at various times, and regard the latter birds with the greatest favour, for I have found them easy to be reared, comparatively hardy when properly treated, teachable to an almost unlimited extent, singing frequently by night, as well as by day, and living for a number of years in the house in possession of perfect health; while it is, I believe, agreed upon at all hands that the Nightingale is delicate and difficult to keep, whether reared from the nest, or captured when full grown; a recent writer in a popular magazine having gone so far as to say that nine out every ten Nightingales, trapped in the spring or autumn, or taken from the nest, died within a week of their capture. Now if that statement is correct, and I have never seen it denied, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should see to it.

The first Blackcaps I ever reared were two females that were hatched in a barberry bush in our garden, and jumped out of their nest before they could fly, terrified by the sudden intrusion upon their privacy of my baby brother, who meant them no harm, but the poor little mites did not know that, and a few hours after I found two of them dead on the grass some little distance away from their birth-place, and the other two in *articulo mortis*, for it seems the old ones had not found them, or the poor little things were too much frightened to open their mouths to be fed: however I carried these survivors home, and brought them up on blénoir flour and milk, flies and ants' eggs, and, as I have already stated, they turned out to be hens: nevertheless they sang very prettily, and in the following spring made nests in their cage, and laid several eggs, which of course came to nothing. I have since then

frequently tried to get these birds to breed in an aviary, but have not succeeded, though one pair which was in my possession for a considerable time, appeared to be in as good feather and condition as if they had enjoyed full liberty in the adjoining wood.

I have heard one of these birds, belonging to an acquaintance, whistle the air of the patriotic song, "*Mourir pour la patrie, etc.*," right through; while another, owned by the same lady, had learned to repeat a few words: "*cher petit*", and some others which I now forget: accomplishments to which I have never heard of a Nightingale attaining.

The Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*, or *Motacilla atricapilla* of scientific writers, *la Fauvette* of the French, and *die schwarzköpfige Grasmücke* of the Germans, is a small bird, about five and a half inches in length, of which the tail measures more than two: the brownish blue beak is five lines long, with the edges of the lower mandible and the interior yellowish white; the eye is reddish brown, and the feet and legs slate-colour. The top of the head is a beautiful velvety black, the cheeks and neck are a pale ash hue, and the upper parts of the body, and the wing coverts olive grey; the under parts are light grey, changing to white on the breast and belly: the under wing and tail coverts are white, and the flight feathers and tail dark brown edged with olive grey.

The female somewhat resembles the male, but is a little paler in colour, and has her cap of a reddish brown, which gives her so different an appearance, that some writers have described her as a distinct variety, or even as a separate species.

The silky plumage of these birds is so frail and delicate that they require a large cage and very great care to keep them from disfiguring their wings and tail.

The Blackcap is found throughout Europe, frequenting gardens as well as woods and orchards. I have known instances of its building within a few feet of the windows of a common

sitting-room, and bringing up its young in that exposed situation.

The Blackcap is a bird of passage, arriving in this country in April, and taking its departure for a warmer climate in September. It is one of the marvels of Nature how so delicate a creature should be able to travel such vast distances over land and sea, as we know the Blackcap to accomplish: for its winter quarters are in Northern Africa, numbers of the species retiring to Madeira, where many of them remain all the year round. Caged specimens of the Blackcap are apt, in the migratory season, to become exceedingly restless at night, causing thereby much commotion among the other birds in the aviary: hence it is advisable to keep them separate until they have quieted down again, which they generally do in ten days or a fortnight.

When wild the Blackcap feeds on insects of all kinds, especially small caterpillars of the "looper" kind; but in autumn it will eat berries, such as currants, elderberries, and so on, and is particularly fond of a soft ripe pear. In the house it must be fed on bread-crumbs or sponge-cake, grated carrot, raw meat scraped, yolk of egg, and ants' eggs, adding such insects daily as are procurable. It is rather a large eater for its size, voiding in proportion; so that it becomes necessary to clean out the cage every day; and it is a good plan to cover its perches with baize.

This bird is exceedingly fond of bathing, and should be supplied with a bath, tepid in winter, suspended for a few minutes every morning at the door of its cage. The latter should have a piece of cotton or baize stretched below the top, as recommended for the Lark, so that in rising to sing, or when under the influence of the migratory impulse, it may not hurt its head, as it would do by bumping it against hard wood, or harder wire.

Specimens caught in the autumn can generally be reconciled to captivity by means of an abundant supply of mealworms,

for which these birds have a decided weakness; but they become much more familiar if taken from the nest, which it is absolutely necessary to do, if it be desired to teach them an air, or any other accomplishment. The female also sings, but her song is weaker, and not so well sustained as that of the male.

The Blackcap has one, sometimes two broods in the season, and lays four or five, rarely six, eggs of a yellowish white, mottled with yellow, and thickly spotted with brown. The nest is well and substantially built of grass, in a low bush generally, and is lined with hair. The young are fed chiefly on small caterpillars, and can be easily enough reared in the house on scraped meat and ants' eggs, or even bread and milk. They resemble their mother until after their first moult, and should not be taken until they are just ready to fly; when it is a good plan to place them with their nest in a cage suspended in a tree, near the spot where they were born, and the old ones will continue to feed them, until they are able to cater for themselves.

As Bechstein remarks, "it is perhaps a sufficient eulogium to say that this bird rivals the Nightingale, and many persons even give it the preference. If it has less volume, strength, and expression, it is more pure, easy, and flute-like in its tones, and its song is more varied, smooth, and delicate. It sings also for a much longer period, both when wild and when in confinement; its song being scarcely suspended through the year, by day, and prolonged, like that of the Nightingale, far into the night, though begun at dawn."

Desirable as it is in many respects as an inmate of the cage and aviary, no one but a person gifted with much patience, and a great love of birds, should attempt to keep a Blackcap in this cold climate of ours: all soft-billed birds are more or less trouble to keep, and the Blackcap more than all the rest, except perhaps the Nightingale. Feed him, however, as I have recommended, and keep him clean and warm, and he

will do very well, and reward his owner for all the care and attention bestowed upon him.

Unsuitable food, foremost among which is hemp seed, crushed or whole, will soon bring on decline; in which case the poor bird will not unfrequently fail and die with astonishing rapidity. With care, however, as I have already observed, the Blackcap may be kept in the house for a number of years; in Madeira it is almost the only bird so kept; but if not well attended to and fed, and guarded from cold, it will not survive its capture many months.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE WHITETHROAT.

THIS pretty and delicate little bird was one of the commonest residents in our old garden *en Bretagne*, where it rivalled the Sparrows in familiarity, and the Blackcap, not to mention the Nightingales that inhabited the beech copse at the end of our domain, in song.

Properly speaking, I ought not to include this bird in the present volume, for I cannot say that I have ever actually kept it. I have tried to do so more than once, but without success, and, at last, my mother peremptorily forbid me touching its nest any more; a prohibition which my ill-luck, on several occasions, inclined me the more readily to respect: for the Whitethroat is a much more delicate bird than its black bonneted relative, and even, I have been assured, than the Nightingale, which was held sacred in the grounds of the *château*, if not outside our walls.

The Whitethroat, *Sylvia hortensis* of Linnæus, *la Fauvette grise* of the French, and *die graüe Grasmücke* of German writers, is a bird of passage, arriving earlier, and departing later than the Blackcap. Like that bird it feeds on insects,

and in the autumn will eat fruit, being particularly fond of cherries and peaches, occasionally devouring, at one sitting, a small-sized specimen of the latter fruit to the stone.

This bird is about the same size as the Blackcap, if anything a trifle smaller; the upper part of its body is reddish grey, shaded with brownish olive; the under parts are light grey, and the belly white. The female differs from the male in being, generally, of a lighter colour. It is found all over Europe, and is essentially a garden bird. The nest is usually placed rather higher up in the bush it has selected for its abode than is that of its relation the Blackcap, and is built of grass stems, but very slenderly, and lined with hair. I remember once seeing one that was begun in the morning with an egg in it at night; said egg being quite visible from below through the flimsy structure in which it was placed.

The young are even more timid than those of the preceding species, and jump out of their nest the moment any one approaches it, long before they are fledged. The eggs are four or five in number, spotted with grey and brown on a white ground, but are not nearly as dark as those of the Blackcap, which they resemble in shape.

The Whitethroat is a very pretty and active bird, very lively, and singing incessantly, sometimes on the wing, sometimes when perched on the topmost bough of the bush in which its mate is sitting patiently upon her eggs. Its song is one of the first that is heard in the morning, and the last at night; however, it is not so sustained as that of the Blackcap, nor perhaps so sweet, as some harsh notes are invariably introduced, not unlike the hoarse purring of a cat that is labouring under a cold and sore throat.

As might be guessed from its exploits in the matter of peaches, the Whitethroat is a great eater, and in confinement, as often as not, dies from gorging itself: not that I ever got even to that stage of keeping, for I only tried to rear the nestlings, and failed in that, as I have said. However such





THE GOLDFINCH.





is the character given it by Bechstein, who says that it will not live more than two or three years in the house.

On the other hand, Mr. Swaysland says, "It will thrive in an aviary": if so, I imagine that its abode should be warmed during the winter, and that it would require to be fed on insects and fruit, and when the latter failed, grocers' currants soaked in warm water, and chopped figs might be substituted: but no one should attempt to keep a bird which all writers on the subject unite in describing as very delicate, unless he or she is gifted with the most exemplary patience, and has an abundance of leisure time to boot.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE GOLDFINCH.

THIS universal favourite, now becoming rather scarce in England, was but very rarely seen by me in the days of "auld lang syne" in Brittany, where, on one or two occasions it built in a large arbutus tree exactly opposite, and at no great distance from, our drawing-room window: but owing to some mischance or other never brought up a brood. My father, however, bought several males, at different times, at a bird-shop in the town, with a view to breeding mules between them and our Canaries, but without succeeding in his design: and once, during a fall of snow, or rather after the fall, and while the ground was deeply covered with snow, I caught one under a sieve, along with some Sparrows and Yellow-hammers, and kept it for some time, when it accidentally got one of its legs broken, and though my father set the limb, the poor thing never did much good afterwards.

I must confess that I never cared a great deal about these birds, nor very much admired them; certainly not to the extent that Buffon did, who says, "Beauty of plumage, softness of

voice, quickness of instinct, remarkable cleverness, proved docility, tender affection, are all united in this delightful little bird; and if it were rare, or if it came from a foreign country, it would then be valued as it deserves." However, it is fast fulfilling one of the conditions which the great naturalist considered necessary to its being appreciated, it is becoming rare.

The Goldfinch is rather a small bird, measuring five and three quarter inches in length, two of which belong to the tail. The beak is five lines long, very pointed, rather flattened at the sides, and of a whitish colour, with a brownish tip. The front of the head and a border round the beak are a fine reddish crimson; the back, shoulders, and sides of the neck are a rich brown; immediately round the beak is a narrow circle of black, which is also the colour of the wings and tail; the centre of the wings is marked by a patch of golden yellow, and the flight and tail feathers are tipped with white.

The female is a trifle smaller, and is less brilliantly coloured than the male. Before moulting the young have grey heads, and are then known to dealers and bird-catchers as "grey-pates," of which thousands are annually caught soon after leaving the nest, often before they can feed themselves, with, as might be expected, the result that nine of these helpless little creatures die in a few days, out of every ten that are caught.

Few birds of the same species, not even excepting the Bullfinch, vary as much as the Goldfinch does in size and colour: differences, however, which are not in themselves sufficient to constitute the birds so differing into separate species; for the large Goldfinch, and the small, the brilliantly coloured, and the dingy, the white-legged and the dark, and the chevril (one with a white streak from the base of the lower mandible down the breast) are all Goldfinches; just as a man of four foot and a half, and one of six foot four inches, and a dark and a fair man, are all men. Again, the distinction into "races," one of which is supposed to emigrate,

while the other remains with us all the year round, has little foundation in fact, and is not much more rational than that of "orchard" and "fir" Goldfinches insisted upon by some continental writers, while the "harbour" or "arbour" birds are much the same as the rest.

Difference in size is accounted for by the fact that the young which are first hatched are stronger and larger than their juniors in the same nest, and often carry off the food intended for the latter: again if there are two or three young in a nest it stands to reason that they fare better, and consequently grow larger than another brood of which there are five or six little ones: that this is the case I have proved with Canaries, having procured some unusually fine large birds, by leaving one only of a brood to be reared by the parents, when it monopolised the attentions that would have been divided among four, and thrived and grew accordingly.

When wild the Goldfinch is found all over the temperate regions of Europe; those that live in the south being larger and more brightly coloured than those which inhabit the north: thus the continental Goldfinches are larger and handsomer than our English birds, which again are superior to those found in Ireland, and these to the Scotch Goldfinches. Though a shy and restless bird, the Goldfinch is not migratory in its habits, and merely moves from place to place in search of food, never proceeding to any great distance, certainly never crossing the sea, as has been erroneously stated.

When wild the Goldfinch, *Fringilla carduelis* of Linnæus, *le Chardonneret* of Buffon, and *der Distelfink* of Bechstein, feeds on a variety of seeds, such as those of the thistle, different kinds of grass, groundsel, dandelion, plantain, and others: and in the house it will thrive better if supplied with the same food: in time, however, it can be weaned from this diet, and will do very well on canary, millet, and a little hemp seed, and summer rape. Once it has become accustomed to the latter regimen, it will live for a very long

time in a cage: one of these birds that belonged to a relative of mine was known to be twenty years old when it passed into my possession, and I kept it for four years longer; nor was it until a few months before its death, in the twenty-fourth or fifth year of its age, that its powers began to fail; then it began to scatter its food, and could not shell the seed provided for it, appearing to lack the necessary strength, so the seed was regularly soaked for it over night, and it was also given bread and milk sop, upon which it subsisted for a time, together with a morsel of sponge-cake, continuing to sing up, almost to the very last.

Green food is indispensable to keep these birds in health, let some people say what they will to the contrary, but of course it must be administered judiciously, fresh and in small quantities until the birds have become re-accustomed to it.

The Goldfinch generally builds in orchards, and occasionally in gardens, as I have already stated. I once saw a nest of these birds in the top of a clump of mimosa in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, but cannot say whether the young were successfully reared; though as the Sparrow has become acclimatised at our Antipodes, as well as the Lark, it is not improbable that there are now Australian Goldfinches too. It makes the nicest nest, after the Chaffinch, of any of our English birds, selecting the very topmost branches of the tree for the purpose. The foundation of the little structure is moss, and fibres, it is covered outwardly with grey lichens and cobwebs, and lined with wool, hair, and the pappus of various seeds; the eggs are from four to six, and bear a general resemblance to those of the Canary, being spotted, especially at the larger end, with rusty red and brownish black on a bluish green ground.

If intended to be reared by hand, which is much better than taking them when full grown, the young Goldfinches must be removed when about ten days old, and fed on soaked stale bread, soaked summer rape, and finely crushed and sifted

hemp seed, to which some fanciers add hard-boiled egg, an addition that seems to me unnecessary, if not positively injurious, seeing that the Goldfinch is a seed-eating bird, and feeds its young from its own crop, and not on caterpillars, as was erroneously asserted by Buffon. The eggs of the Goldfinch may also be advantageously transferred to the care of a pair of good feeding Canaries, who will hatch them, and bring up the young, without a suspicion of the fraud that has been practised upon them. Bechstein says that a Goldfinch will also bring up young Canaries, but this, considering the shyness of the wild Goldfinch, and the readiness with which it forsakes its nest if tampered with, is, I think, at least doubtful; at the same time if its young ones are placed in their nest in a cage hung up in the tree where they were hatched, the old ones will continue to feed them through the bars, until they are able to provide for themselves, which is, where practicable, the most satisfactory way of obtaining these birds.

Goldfinches will breed in a garden aviary, or even in a cage, with Canaries and other Finches, as well as among themselves, and should they ever really seem about to become extinct in a wild state, the race might thus be preserved in a domesticated condition like the Canary.

Take him for all in all, the Goldfinch is a beautiful and lively bird, constantly in motion, turning and twisting about in a restless excitable manner that is almost bewildering to the onlooker, for he is never at rest, but is a veritable miniature Jem Crow. He sings, too, very agreeably, and readily learns the notes of other birds, or even an air that has been played to him on a bird-organ, or a flageolet, or whistled to him by his owner. He is also capable of learning a number of little tricks, such as drawing up his seed and water, flying out and returning at command, etc.

In the house the Goldfinch suffers from a variety of complaints, diarrhæa and decline being the most dangerous and

frequent; both are caused by errors in diet, and are easier to prevent than to cure: but if fed as recommended, he will live healthily as long as most birds, and a great deal longer than some that are considered to be enduring. The Goldfinch is occasionally subject to fits, which are the result of constipation, from lack of green food, and a continued diet of hard, dry, often musty, seed; the remedy is obvious, soaked bread, watercress or lettuce, and soaked seed, treated properly he is very healthy, and scarcely any trouble.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE YELLOW BUNTING.

THE Yellow Bunting, or Yellow-hammer, is a common, but at the same time an exceedingly beautiful bird, that is not often successfully kept, in consequence of the ignorance of its custodians as to the treatment proper for preserving it, not only in health, but in life.

It is about six and a half inches in length, of which the forked tail measures three. There is considerable variation of plumage among these birds, as the older they grow the more showy does the dress of the male become. The head of the adult male Yellow-hammer is a fine golden yellow, marked with streaks of olive which get less in number every year and finally disappear altogether when the bird is about three years old, at which time he may be considered to have attained his maximum of beauty. The upper part of the neck is olive; the back is black, with markings of reddish grey; the rump is red; the throat and the under part of the neck, as well as the belly, are yellow, more or less golden according to the age of the bird; the sides, and the tail coverts are streaked with yellow and red.

The female of this species is rather smaller than the male, and the yellow of her plumage is so covered up with red that it is scarcely seen. The young bear a general resemblance to their mother, but, even in the nest, the males have a little yellow on the head.

Like all the rest of the Bunting family, the Yellow-hammer, or ammer, *le Bruant* of the French, *der Goldammer* of the Germans, and *Emberiza citrinella* of Linnæus, lives, in its wild state, almost entirely on insects, scarcely ever touching seeds as long as it can find anything else; but in winter, for it stays with us all the year round, it will eat anything it comes across, even wheat and oats, and consequently during a severe and inclement season it is as common a visitant of the farm-yard as the Sparrow.

The young of these birds are brought up exclusively on insects, chiefly caterpillars, of which vast numbers are consumed every year during the breeding season, so that the Yellow-hammers are very good friends indeed to the farmer, who ought not, in consideration of the services thus rendered, grudge them the few grains of corn they pilfer from his stacks, when the severity of the weather renders it impossible for them to find any of their favourite food.

In the house the Yellow-hammer will not endure for long on an exclusively seed diet, which should be varied by the addition of yolk of hard-boiled egg, mealworms, ants' eggs, and any kind of insects that are procurable, and the seed supplied is rendered more easy of digestion by being soaked in cold water for some hours before being given to the little prisoner; it is better, however, to keep it in a large garden aviary than in a cage, for in addition to the fact that it will thrive better in the former situation, it will frequently breed there, and its quaint little song, resembling the words "A little bit of bread and no cheese", will be heard more frequently and to much greater advantage in the aviary than in the cage, where it will also more perfectly maintain the

beauty of its coat, which is apt to grow dingy and brown in the house.

The Yellow-hammer bathes freely, and should be afforded the opportunity of doing so every day.

This bird generally has three broods in the year, laying each time from three to five eggs of a dirty white colour, marked with brown spots and zigzag lines resembling not a little the angular handwriting lately so fashionable with ladies. I have found the nest, with eggs in it, as late as the middle of September, and as early as the first week in March, when I lived in Brittany.

The young are by no means difficult to rear on bread and milk, or blénoir, and ants' eggs, lean meat scraped, and hard-boiled yolk of egg. When thus brought up from the nest, the young Yellow-hammers will learn to partially imitate the songs of other birds, especially that of the Chaffinch.

Attempts have been made to pair these birds with Canaries, but without success, so far as I am aware; with the American Buntings, however, the Blue Bunting or Indigo Finch, and the Painted Bunting or Nonpareil, the union ought not to be so difficult, seeing the near relationship that exists between all these birds, but it is not within my knowledge that the experiment has been tried. Mules, however, have been obtained between the Yellow-hammer and the Bramble Finch, which are said to have proved fertile *inter se*: a statement, by the way, in which I do not place much credence, and merely give the story here for what it is worth, for it is a well ascertained fact in Natural History that hybrids are incapable of reproducing their kind, and the stories to the contrary, which from time to time have found their way into print, are altogether unsupported by evidence of any reliable kind, the narrators reporting them on hearsay only.

Decline, or consumption, is the usual end of these birds in the house, whether reared from the nest, or captured when adult, and is caused by an insufficiently nutritious diet. The

fancier who desires to see these handsome birds in his aviary in the full enjoyment of health, and in all the brilliance of their feathering, must recollect that their natural diet, during at least nine months of the year, is exclusively composed of insects, and act accordingly; and he will then find that there are not many more attractive birds than the Yellow-hammer.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE HOUSE SPARROW.

THIS really handsome bird is not often seen to advantage in our gloomy and grimy metropolis, where he is among the "common objects" of the streets.

We used to make pies of him in France, and I believe such is his occasional destination even here, where at all events his *opima spolia* figure, in borrowed tints, on the hats and bonnets of our wives and daughters, "our cousins, our sisters and our aunts."

The House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*, *le Moineau* of the French and *der Haussperling* of the Germans, is a stout thick-set bird, five and three quarter inches in length, whose plumage is of a dark, almost chesnut, shade of brown and ashen grey, very prettily intermixed with black on the head, and yellowish white on the wings; the beak, which is short and thick, is of a bluish black colour, and the feet and legs are greyish brown.

The female is greyish red on the upper part of the body, spotted with black on the back: her breast and belly are greyish white.

The young males at first resemble their mothers, but soon develop the black marks on the face.

In London, except for a very brief period after moulting, these birds are of a dingy greyish brown colour, and occa-

sionally almost black. A white variety is sometimes met with, and pied specimens are not particularly rare.

Although so bold and familiar a bird that in the crowded street it will, when in search of food amongst the refuse, allow a man to come within a foot or two of it before it flies away, I have found the Sparrow practically untamable; specimens that were taken from the nest, and kept in an aviary among a number of perfectly tame birds, foreign and British, remained as wild, at the end of two years, as they were when first introduced. Other aviarists, however, have succeeded in taming them, and praise them for their docility, so I suppose there must have been a screw loose in my management somewhere.

Buffon relates that a soldier owned one of these birds that followed him wherever he went, and recognised him in the midst of the regiment: and Bechstein writes, "The Sparrow may be easily taught to go and come at command, by choosing winter as the time to effect it. It is necessary first to keep it a month near the window in a large cage supplied with the best food, such as millet, meal or white bread soaked in milk. It will even go there to deposit its eggs if a small box is placed in the cage, with an opening for it to enter at. Finally, no bird becomes more familiar, or testifies more attachment to its master."

I have frequently tried to bring Sparrows up by hand, but invariably failed, and the only way I have succeeded in introducing them into my collection, has been by taking them when fully fledged, putting them into a cage, hung out of a window, where the old ones came and fed them, until they were able to take care of themselves.

The song of the Sparrow is a monotonous, not to say disagreeable, twittering; but if taken when young, and placed in the company of other birds, it will pick up some of their notes; for instance, a cock Sparrow I kept in a garden aviary for a couple of years learned to imitate the warbling of the

Budgerigar, so perfectly that it was difficult, unless you saw the performer in the act of singing, to tell from which of the two birds the notes proceeded.

Sparrows will eat anything, but the young are chiefly brought up on insects, especially moths, of which a pair of these birds will destroy a vast number during the summer; that they do not entirely confine their broods to an insect diet I am persuaded, for I have seen a hen Sparrow hop into the Eagles' aviary at the "Zoo", when the royal birds were feeding, and picking up the scraps left by the Eagles, fly away with them to her nest in an adjoining tree, presumably to feed her little ones. Those I kept were fed on seeds and soaked bread, and never looked sick or sorry, though they were wild and frightened to the last, when I opened the door and they flew away, rejoicing doubtless at their recovered liberty.

Sparrows will build in any convenient nook or cranny, under the tiles or slates, in hollow trees, holes in a wall, and among the upper branches of tall trees, and even occasionally in bushes of no great altitude, such as lilac, red thorn, etc. In our old Breton chateau, they made their nests by the dozen in the *grénier* that ran the whole length of the house, and which was lighted by means of panes of glass inserted among, and instead of, the slates; and through one of these panes, accidentally broken, they obtained admission to the loft. Frequently, too, they build in chimneys, or in the pipes that conduct the rain from the roof. Bechstein asserts that they will breed in an aviary, or a room, which, however, I have been unable to induce them to do—certainly I never tried very much, which is, no doubt, the reason why I failed.

He also says that a male Sparrow will pair and produce mules with a hen Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*, "but a male Tree Sparrow with a hen Sparrow does not succeed."

In conclusion I do not think that I can recommend any-

one to take the trouble to keep these birds; their attractive qualities are about *nil*, in the aviary at all events; and if they are possessed of any, it is when hopping about the streets, but certainly not when swooping down in their hundreds from the house-top to pilfer the chickens' food.

The Sparrow has been recently introduced into Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, and has made himself so perfectly at home there, that he is now looked upon in the light of a nuisance in them all.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BLACKBIRD.

THE Blackbird was a common bird in Brittany, breeding everywhere about the place, and singing from early dawn to dewy eve; but I am obliged to say that he was not appreciated, as perhaps he deserved to be, for his unintermitting attention to our fruit and vegetable gardens made him some enemies in our household; my father, to wit, who, enraged by "blacky's" constant depredations, and especially by the loss of some choice peaches which he was reserving, specially, for a favoured visitor, set a price upon the poor bird's head, which, I regret to say, Marie Baudoin, and afterwards *le bonhomme* Mendel, were only too ready to earn: so that I cried over nest after nest of greenish blue eggs, thickly speckled and streaked with blackish brown, which, by some, to me, mysterious means were again and again spirited away, when I believed that they were known to none but myself and the parent birds.

The Blackbird, *Turdus merula* in Latin, *le Merle* in French, and *der Schwarzdrossel* in German, is a large bird, nine and a half inches in length, of which the broad tail measures nearly

four. The beak of the male is of a bright orange colour, and about an inch long; the eye is dark brown, and the eyelids orange, all the plumage is of a rich velvety black.

The female is rather larger than her mate, of a brownish black colour, redder on the breast and greyer on the belly; her throat is slightly spotted with different shades of brown.

Albino specimens of this bird are not very uncommon, pied still less so, and a cinnamon variety has also been met with.

Even in the nest the males are distinguishable from their sisters by their darker plumage, but do not assume their adult dress until the spring.

The Blackbird, like most of the Thrush family, is not a migratory, but a stationary bird, much attached to the locality, wood, copse, or garden where he was born; nothing but the most dire distress in very severe weather causing him to forsake his native place, to which he invariably hastens back as soon as the return of more genial weather permits him to do so.

The Blackbird is usually kept in solitary confinement; but a pair will occasionally, it is said, breed in a garden aviary. I recollect seeing a female of this species very busy making a nest in a box, hung up in the hope that she would use it, in a large aviary in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, but her mate seemed quite indifferent to her proceedings. Whether the same fate overtook him that is related of a similar ungallant husband of this species I cannot say; but it is said that the lady, in the latter case, enraged by her spouse's conduct, fell upon him one day, and being the stronger of the two, killed him outright.

There are usually three broods during the season, the female laying from four to six eggs each time. The young are easily reared on white bread or blénoir and milk, a little raw meat, and any insects that can be obtained: the best time to take them from the nest is when the quills are beginning to sprout; they have no idea then of their natural note, and may be

taught any tune or song; some of these birds have even learned to speak a few words.

The natural song of the Blackbird is melodious enough, but too loud for the house, though very pleasing when listened to from a distance in the woods. Though naturally timid and shy, the Blackbird is not difficult to tame, and may even be taught to go and come at the word of command, if his tuition in this respect is begun during the winter.

The nest is strong and well built of tough grass, roots and moss plastered together with mud; the inside is lined with fine hay, hair and wool. I have found it in all kinds of places: in a hole in a wall, among the branches of a pear-tree trained *en espalier* against the garden wall, in a vine, in a heap of faggots, on the centre beam of a shed, and the horizontal branch of a large oak that overhung a deep ravine, as well as on a bank, and a ledge of rock in a quarry; in a furze bush, and especially in thick clumps of ivy growing against an old wall.

When wild, the Blackbird lives on insects, snails, worms, fruit and berries, and is perhaps more of a friend than a foe to the gardener. We generally netted our cherry and peach trees, otherwise we should have had no fruit; as to peas, we found the Blackbird as fond of them as the Jays were, which is saying a good deal.

In the house the Blackbird is to be fed on bread and milk, boiled vegetables, and ripe fruit, not forgetting a few insects or snails when procurable. He drinks a good deal, and should always have a bath provided for his use. Like the Thrush he cracks the shell of the snails upon which he wishes to make a meal against a stone, or the top of a wall; and like the Starling and Robin Redbreast, he drives the worms up out of the ground by stamping sharply with his foot close to their burrows.

Though easily reared, the Blackbird is more delicate than the rest of the family, and will frequently die of decline

brought on by feeding him on insufficiently nutritious food: with care, however, he will live from twelve to fifteen years in a house, although Bechstein affirms that he will not endure for more than five or six.

The Blackbird requires a large cage, and great attention to cleanliness to keep his feet in good order, and to preserve intact his beautiful plumage, which is apt to turn a dull rusty black, if he is kept in a dark place and not allowed to bathe, when he is also frequently troubled with enlargement and obstruction of the rump gland.

The remedies are obvious: for in this, as in so many other cases, "prevention is better than cure."

I venture here to quote Lord Tennyson's beautiful lines on

THE BLACKBIRD.

O Blackbird! sing me something well:  
While all the neighbours shoot thee round,  
I keep smooth plats of fruitful ground,  
Where thou may'st warble, eat, and dwell.  
The espaliers and the standards all  
Are thine; the range of lawn and park:  
The unnetted black hearts ripen dark,  
All thine, against the garden wall.  
Yet, tho' I spared thee all the spring,  
Thy sole delight is, sitting still,  
With that gold dagger of thy bill  
To fret the summer jenneting.  
A golden bill! the silver tongue,  
Cold February loved, is dry:  
Plenty corrupts the melody  
That made thee famous once, when young;  
And in the sultry garden-squares,  
Now thy flute notes are changed to coarse,  
I hear thee not at all, or hoarse  
As when a hawker hawks his wares.  
Take warning! he that will not sing  
While yon sun prospers in the blue,  
Shall sing for want, ere leaves are new,  
Caught in the frozen palms of Spring.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE THRUSH.

THE subject of the present chapter is *the* Thrush, *par excellence*, though frequently called the Song Thrush, to distinguish it from its less gifted brethern, the Missel Thrush, Fieldfare, and Redwing. It was a much less frequent denizen of the old Breton garden where I spent my early days than its relative, whose biography I have sketched in the preceding chapter; than which it is also a smaller bird, measuring but eight inches in length, two and a half of which belong to the tail. The beak of the Thrush is shorter than that of the Blackbird, being but three quarters of an inch long; it is of a dark horn colour, the lower mandible somewhat lighter than the upper, and the inside of both is yellow. The eye is brown, and the legs and feet dingy lead-blue. The plumage on the upper part of the body is olive brown, the throat yellowish white, with a black line on each side; the sides of the neck and breast are reddish white, covered with a number of heart-shaped brown spots, and the white belly is similarly marked, but the spots are lighter in colour than those on the breast.

The female is generally lighter in colour than the male, and has smaller and rounder spots; but it takes a very experienced eye to detect these differences, especially when the birds are seen apart from each other.

The young are more speckled, especially on the back, than their parents.

The nest of the Thrush, *Turdus musica* in Latin, *la Grive* in French, and *der Singdrossel* in German, is usually built on the branch of a tree, near water, and not very far from the ground; but it also builds in ivy, and many other situ-

ations, often the most unlikely, as for instance, the broken-in hat of a "scarecrow" in a turnip-field. There are usually three broods in the season, of from three to six young ones each time, the first brood being ready to fly in April. The eggs are greenish blue, speckled lightly with brown and violet; but occasionally without a spot of any kind, and bearing a strong resemblance in all but size to those of the Hedge Accentor.

The young are easily reared on bread and milk, and may be taken, as in the case of the Blackbird, as soon as the quills are beginning to sprout, especially if it be desired to teach them a tune.

When wild the Thrush feeds chiefly on insects, but it also has recourse to fruit and berries when its favourite food begins to fail. In the house it will eat and thrive on almost anything, even bran and water, with an occasional mealworm, or blackbeetle: in fact it is almost impossible to starve a Thrush, and yet thousands of these birds, as well as their dark-plumaged relatives, the Blackbirds, die every winter, when the snow has lain upon the ground for any length of time, or a prolonged frost has cut off from them the ordinary sources of food supply.

With common care a Thrush will live in a cage for fifteen or twenty years, but its domicile must be roomy, and the utmost attention to cleanliness is indispensable in order to prevent its feathers from being broken and spoiled.

Bechstein, in writing of this bird, says, "The Song Thrush is the great charm of our woods, which it enlivens by the beauty of its song. The rival of the Nightingale, it announces in varied accents the return of spring, and continues its delightful notes during all the summer months, particularly at morning and evening twilight: and it is to procure this gratification in his dwelling that the bird-fancier rears it, and deprives it of its liberty, and he thus enjoys the pleasures of the woods in the midst of the city."

In Germany the Thrush is a bird of passage, departing in October, and returning early in March; but in Britain he remains all the year round, approaching our houses in the winter, where he would soon become as familiar as the Robin Redbreast, were it not for those implacable foes of all kinds of birds, boys and cats.

When wild the Thrush sings from spring to autumn only, but in the house will continue his flute-like notes all the year round, except for a brief period while moulting.

As I have quoted the testimony of one poet in favour of the Blackbird, I can scarcely do less for the Thrush.

#### TO A CAPTIVE THRUSH.

Speckled, mellow-throated Thrush,  
While thy partner patient sets  
On her blue eggs in the bush,  
Forgetful thou of traps and nets  
Pourest forth thy wondrous song,  
All day long.

All day long thou pourest forth  
Mellow notes in cadence rare;  
Be the wind or south or north,  
Thou carolest and dost not care,  
Scarcely taking time to eat—  
Sweet, O sweet.

Was it not a sin, a crime,  
To capture and to pen thee in  
A narrow cage for all thy time,  
Lodge thee 'mid the city's din,  
Far from love and liberty.  
Dear to thee?

Were I in thy place, I'd die;  
Yes, I'd die before I'd sing  
To a jailor; nay, not I,  
I would eat the food they'd bring,  
Just, my vocal friend, as thou  
Eatest now.

Life is dear to slave or free,  
Life than liberty's more dear;  
Shall I then find fault with thee  
For partaking of the cheer  
That thy masters to thee bring?

No; I'd sing—

I'd sing, as thou art doing now,  
Perhaps not quite so merrily,  
But as well as I know how,  
For alas! I am not free.  
Freedom ne'er shall I know more.

Ah! Lenore!

Ah! Lenore! thou fickle maid!  
Thou my heart hast captive ta'en,  
And prisoned it in utter shade,  
Where it must for aye remain,  
If thou wilt not set it free,

By loving me.

This bird has always been a favourite with the poets, and if I were to collect all that they have written about him, I should fill a good-sized volume: I cannot, however, refrain from one more quotation, a sonnet by the village poet Clare.

#### THE THRUSH'S NEST.

Within a thick and spreading hawthorn bush,  
That overhung a mole-hill large and round,  
I heard from morn to morn a merry Thrush  
Sing hymns of rapture, while I drank the sound  
With joy; and oft, an unintruding guest,  
I watched her secret toils from day to day,  
How true she wrapped the moss to form her nest,  
And modelled it within with wool and clay.  
And by and bye, like heath-bells gilt with dew,  
There lay her shining eggs as bright as flowers,  
Ink-spotted over, shells of green and blue;  
And there I witnessed in the summer hours,  
A brood of nature's minstrels chirp and fly,  
Glad as the sunshine and the laughing sky.

CLARE.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE MAGPIE.

I SUPPOSE there are few of my readers unacquainted with the bold, not to say saucy, bird that forms the subject of the present chapter; but if any are so unfortunate, let them hasten, with what speed they may, to form his acquaintance; and when they have done so, I think they will agree with me, that a more charming, a more delightful, and a more mischievous bird does not exist.

Clad in black and white, but such black and white! each perfect in its way, the Magpie, *Corvus pica* (the Crow Pie) in Latin, *la Pie* in French, and *die Elster* in German, is one of the most conspicuous denizens of our woods and fields; essentially a country bird, he is nevertheless extremely fond of human society, but seldom comes near a town, opining wisely, that the smoke and dirt incidental to such a situation would soon mar the purity of his snow-white breast and wing coverts; while the metallic lustre of his head, back and tail would run a great risk of rapidly fading away.

The length of this bird is about eighteen inches, of which the tail measures ten. It makes a nest of sticks plastered together with mud, and domed over with thorns, reserving two round apertures in the structure opposite each other for entrance and exit; it is usually built in the tops of tall trees, but I have seen the nest in a six-foot high bush, when no better accommodation was to be had; it is lined with roots and grass. The Magpie has generally two broods in the season, laying each time from five to seven or eight bluish green eggs spotted with grey and brown, but the more common number is six, one of which I have invariably found to be barren.

When wild the Magpie feeds on insects of all kinds, snails, small frogs, and, I regret to say, young birds, including young Pheasants and Partridges, and even farm-yard chickens and fruit, so that it is seldom at a loss for provender.

In the house it will eat anything that comes to table; and if supplied with more food than it can directly consume, it will hide the remainder away for another time.

Although by nature extremely suspicious and shy, the Magpie is readily tamed, and can be taught to come and go, perhaps, more easily than most other birds, nesting close to the house of its protector, and seeking food for its young ones at his table.

This bird is proverbially fond of small glittering objects, such as rings, small silver spoons, etc.: and doubtless the history of the Maid and the Magpie is familiar to most of my readers; but if not, it is this. A maid-servant in a country wayside inn, a pretty, and yet strange to say, friendless girl, was suspected of having appropriated to her own use sundry valuables belonging to her master and mistress: in vain she protested her innocence, she was not believed, but was sent for trial, convicted, and in due course, such was the barbarous custom of the time, executed for the theft, protesting her innocence with her last breath. A few days after this lamentable tragedy had taken place, one of the customers of the place dropped a small silver coin in the taproom, and was astonished to see a pet Magpie that was present, hop down from its perch, pick up the coin, and fly off with it through the window, before the owner could interfere. The bird was seen to settle on the thatched roof of the inn, so a ladder was procured, and a boy sent up to look for the coin, which he found in a hole in the thatch, and along with it the jewellery and silver, for stealing which the unfortunate "maid" had been so recently done to death. Deep, of course, was the regret, not to say remorse, of the host and hostess, but that was of small avail to the unhappy girl, whose sad

history is yet found recorded in the name of more than one country inn.

The breeding time of the Magpie commences very early in the spring, and Bishop Mant describes its mode and place of building in the following lines:—

“On turf-reared platform, intermixt,  
 With clay and cross-laid sticks betwixt,  
 'Mid hawthorn, fir, or elm-tree slung,  
 Is piled for the expected young,  
 A soft and neatly woven home;  
 Above of tangled thorns a dome,  
 Forms a sharp fence the nest about,  
 To keep all rash intruders out.  
 So, like a robber in his hold,  
 Or some marauding baron bold,  
 On coasted cliff in olden time,  
 They sit unblenched in state sublime,  
 And fortress intricately planned;  
 As if they felt that they whose hand  
 Is aimed at others, rightly deem  
 The hand of others aimed at them.  
 So there they dwell, man's dwelling nigh,  
 But not in man's society:  
 Arabian-like: and little share  
 His love, nor for his hatred care.”

I have often heard my father relate that when he was a boy, it used to be the custom, in Ireland, to place a cock-egg, that is to say a long narrow egg, of the game-fowl, painted to resemble those of the Magpie, into a nest of these birds; and, as the Magpie incubates a fortnight only, and the fowl three weeks, the eggs of the unconscious foster-mother were pricked with a fine needle to prevent them hatching, or the fowl's egg was introduced into the pie's nest after its own mother had sat upon it for a week: though the former plan, he said, was the one he had always seen pursued. Of course, when the young game-cock was hatched, it was removed from the nest and brought up by hand indoors.

In reply to my query as to what good the cock was sup-

posed to derive from its aerial hatching, my father said that birds so brought into existence were popularly credited with the possession of greater courage, and more indomitable spirit than their brethren hatched in the ordinary way. "What if the chicken turned out to be a hen?" I asked. "In that case", returned my father, "there was nothing to be done but wait until the following spring; but experienced cock-fighters seldom made a mistake in their choice of the egg that was to be hatched by the Magpie."

These birds commit sad havoc among the cherries, as we used to find to our cost at Launay, where, as I have already said, two or three pairs, generally three, made their nests every year: contenting themselves, however, with repairing the old one when not blown down by the winter winds, or removed by the hand of the gardener. And in this connection I must mention what cannot fail to appear a very remarkable circumstance, when one considers that the Magpie makes no sort of scruple of dining off a nestful of young birds when he can find one; namely, that a pair of Sparrows, sometimes two, made a practice of building their nest just below that of the Magpies that dwelt in our tall fir tree.

One summer, irritated beyond measure by their depredations among the cherries, my father fired at and killed the mother Magpie of the fir tree, shortly after her first brood was hatched: the bereaved husband made such a to-do, and seemed so thoroughly overcome by his grief, that "the Governor" had not the heart to shoot him also, and really regretted that he had deprived the poor fellow of his wife; after a while, however, Mr. Mag bethought him that his young progeny required his attention, and recommenced his onslaught on our cherries as boldly as if nothing had happened, flying to and from the nest to the cherry trees a score of times, or more, in an hour.

The strangest part of the tale, however, is to follow: the next morning we were surprised to see *two* Magpies hard at

work feeding the young ones in the fir tree. Had the deceased come to life again? No, for her corpse was in the kitchen, waiting to be skinned and stuffed. Had her ghost come back? Not at all, there was nothing ghostly about the "caw" of the new mother, as she thrust the cherries into the gaping mouths of the youngsters. Perhaps, though, one of the other Magpies, from the thorn, or from the cherry-laurel, had taken pity on the poor widower, and was lending him a helping hand. Not so, for they were all at their posts: the widower had found another wife. "Where?" asked my mother, and Echo answered, as her custom is, by repeating the inquiry. The stepmother reared the young brood successfully, and then brought up a family of her own.

The tamed Magpie is very hardy, and will live for a number of years, if he has his liberty, without forsaking those who are kind to him: but a Magpie in a cage is a poor-looking thing, bedraggled and dirty, and when hopping about with his wing cut, he presents a more forlorn appearance still. MORAL: keep silver spoons and jewellery out of his reach.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE JACKDAW.

ONCE had a Jackdaw, but only for a very short time, and, indeed, there is some doubt whether he was really mine at all, so I cannot say a great deal about the bird, except that it is even more easily and more perfectly tamed than the Magpie; though far from being as handsome a bird, it is a general favourite with schoolboys, learning to say a few words, and to come and go at command.

Apropos of this bird I recollect reading somewhere a rather curious story. Two boys determined to rob the nest of a Jackdaw that had built upon some projection outside the highest







THE JACKDAW.



part of a church tower, and in order to reach it, one of them had to walk on a plank thrust out of the window, and supported by his companion inside.

The nest was reached, and the young birds, five in number, were placed in the breast of the youthful adventurer, who was about to return, when the other boy said that he must have three of them. "No," replied he on the plank; "I'll give you two." "If you don't give me three, I'll drop you." "I shan't." Whereupon the young rascal actually let go the plank, and the boy with the birds fell to the ground, a distance of some sixty feet, unhurt, and on reaching *terrá firmá*, ran away shouting: "Now I shall keep them all!"

He wore a stout smock frock, and the wind getting under it, converted it into a parachute, and so saved his life.

*Corvus monedula*, the latter term supposed to be from *monere*, to advise, in consequence of these birds being looked upon as of bad omen in the science of augury, the Jackdaw, *le Chocas* of Buffon, *die Dobie* of Bechstein, has been celebrated by many poets, among others Cowper, Thomas Ingoldsby, and Thomas Hood, whose well-known lines I refrain from quoting here. He is a stoutly built bird, some thirteen or fourteen inches in length, with a light grey head that imparts to him a venerable appearance, which his well-known character but too certainly belies.

He builds a nest of sticks in old buildings, the steeples of country churches, and even in chimneys in the midst of towns, where he shares with the semi-domesticated Pigeons such coigns of vantage as the basso-relievos on the façades of public buildings, not scrupling, when opportunity offers, to make a meal off the young ones or eggs of his companions. His own eggs, or I should say those of his wife, are of a greenish blue colour, spotted with greyish brown, some specimens being more thickly covered than others.

This bird often flies in company with the Rooks, whose deserted nests it not unfrequently appropriates to its own use.

“One circumstance connected with its nidification,” says an old writer, “is the immense quantity of material it collects, and many anecdotes are related of the ingenuity it manifests in getting it into the desired position; often through narrow loopholes and up winding staircases it contrives to convey long sticks and pieces of wood in a manner truly surprising: and the way in which it piles up the light fabric upon joists and beams, or window sills, and makes all firm and stable, is no less so.”

Occasionally the Jackdaw chooses less lofty stations for its nest, and descends, as Bishop Mant, the laureate of the birds, relates, when nature

“Prompts them in the waste to roam,  
And seek a subterranean home,  
The burrowing rabbit’s haunt, and there  
Of sticks and matted wool prepare  
Their dwelling, and produce their race  
In that unlikely dwelling-place.”

Jackdaws have been known to live a long time in captivity, but like their relative the Magpie, look better, and are far happier when they can enjoy their liberty, than when closely prisoned in a cage.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE PARTRIDGE.

WHEN I was a boy, a friend made me a present of a pair of Partridges, which, with a number of others, he had reared under a common barn-door fowl. These birds were full grown when given to me, and quite tame: I kept them for some time in, for want of a more suitable situation, the fire-place of one of our upstairs rooms!

In France, be it understood, at that time wood was the

most usual fuel, and a fireplace was quite a room within a room. To this novel domicile they were confined by a wire screen placed in front, while the aperture of the flue was stopped up with a bag full of straw, in order to keep out the draught; and as the chimney was placed opposite a large window, they did not want for light. I fed them on canary and hemp seed, French rape seed, bread, chopped cabbage, and fresh grass, and a few scraps of meat now and then: a diet upon which they seemed to thrive perfectly well, and soon became exceedingly tame and gentle.

After I had kept them for some time, they disappeared one day; how? no one could tell me; and I never suspected that the *perdrix aux choux*, upon which I partially made my dinner a day or two afterwards, were anything but relations of my pets, and not their identical selves. When I did find out the truth, it was too late to prevent the mischief. I quite forget now for what reason they had been sacrificed, or whether Nanon Magat, our then cook, had perpetrated the deed, almost of sacrilege, on her own responsibility, or at the request of some higher authority.

“*Que voulez-vous, Monsieur*”: was the only answer I succeeded in getting to my passionate demands, rather than entreaties, for an explanation of the cruel act. “*Que voulez-vous? ce n'est pas ma faute.*”

The Partridge, *la Perdrix grise* in French, *das gemeine Rebhuhn* in German, *Tetrao perdrix* of Linnæus, is a plump round bird, measuring twelve or thirteen inches in length, and sparsely covered with reddish brown feathers. The forehead, a streak above the eyes, and the throat are chesnut brown; the neck and breast are ash grey, marked with fine black lines; on the middle of the breast is a horse-shoe-shaped mark of dark chesnut, which is almost wanting in the female. The wing feathers are dusky, with red cross bars. The tail, which is very short, is reddish brown.

The Grey Partridge is common to most European countries,

but in some places has been superseded by a larger red-legged species. When wild it feeds on all kinds of grain and seeds, small field snails and other insects, blades of grass and corn, turnip-tops, etc., and in the house can be maintained in health on the simple diet already mentioned.

It is useless attempting to tame a Partridge taken when full grown: but if reared in the house, or in an aviary, under a common barn-door fowl, or preferably a bantam, they soon become quite familiar, and are as readily reared as Pheasants, and upon the same food, namely, eggs, chopped very fine, oatmeal, and ants' eggs: and birds thus reared will, it is said, breed in a garden aviary where long grass, or oats, have been grown, providing they have the place to themselves, and are not disturbed by rats or mice.

The female Partridge lays from ten to sixteen, or even more, pale olive brown eggs, upon which she sits for twenty-eight days, from the date of laying the last egg of the clutch. The young run about directly they are hatched, frequently with a portion of the shell sticking to their backs. There is but one brood in the year, and the whole party keep together until the spring, when they covey, as it is called, separates into pairs, which never more part, "as long as they both do live": for unlike the generality of poultry, Partridges are models of conjugal fidelity.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE LESSER REDPOLL.

**T**HIS pretty little bird, which is a miniature Linnæus, is a great favourite with the humbler class of workpeople, whom sedentary occupations confine indoors for the greater part of the week. I have known as many as twenty Redpolls, each in a tiny little cage about four inches square, hung round

a shoemaker's shop, while a couple more were chained to little stands, and had learned to open a small box containing their seed, and pull up a tiny pail full of water, whenever they wanted to eat or drink.

I never met with any of these birds in that part of France where I was brought up, and where I lived until I arrived at what are usually supposed to be "years of discretion"; when many changes having taken place in our family and surroundings, I quitted *la belle France*, for good as I verily believe: and it was shortly afterwards, while making a few months' stay in Dublin, that I first saw a Redpoll and found its nest, which was built in a thick bush in Glasnevin Botanical Gardens. There were four young ones, nearly fledged in the nest, and these, undeterred by the sacredness of the place, I popped into my pocket, and carried safely home, where I was successful in rearing three of them on bread-crumbs and crushed hemp.

In plumage the Redpoll resembles the common Linnet, but in size, activity, and figure more nearly approaches the Siskin; for which reason, I suppose, it is usually classed with that little bird at Shows. It measures about five inches in length, of which two and a quarter inches belong to the tail. The sharp yellow little beak is four lines long, and the black legs eight lines high. The top of the Redpoll's head is, as the name implies, of a rich crimson colour; the upper part of the body is dark brown, spotted with white and reddish yellow, the rump is rose, the throat black, and the under part of the neck and breast bright red, with a fine white margin to each feather. The rest of the under part of the body is white. When confined in a cage, the males lose their bright colour after the first moult, and hand-reared specimens never acquire it in the house.

The female is lighter in colour than her mate, and lacks his showy red breast; the upper part of her body is spotted with white and deep brown, and the breast speckled with

the same colours, which serves to distinguish her from the young males that have not yet acquired the rose tint, but are of the same dark colour on the back as their father.

In its wild state the Lesser Redpoll has its home in the north, abounding in Scotland, Sweden, Norway, Lapland, and Greenland, from whence vast flocks migrate south about the end of October, returning north again in March or April, a few stragglers remaining, here and there, to breed.

When wild it feeds on many kinds of seeds, preferring, however, that of the alder-tree to any other. In the house it may be kept on rape, poppy, canary, and hemp seed.

The Redpoll is a poor singer, its natural song consisting of little more than a continual clicking sound. It is very easily tamed, and can be taught a number of little tricks, besides working for its living—to fire off a miniature cannon for instance, feign death, and so on. It will occasionally breed in the aviary, and mules have frequently been obtained between it and the Canary, Brown Linnet, and Goldfinch.

In disposition it is very confiding and affectionate, and even when taken full grown, commences to eat the minute it is placed in a cage. If a pair of these birds are kept in the same aviary, they spend the greater portion of their time in preening each other's plumage and the exchange of caresses. So attached to each other are they, that I have known a wild female voluntarily share the captivity of a male that was chained to a stand usually kept outside the window of a shoemaker in one of our London suburbs.

The Redpoll is not by any means a delicate bird, and with common care will live for several years in the house.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE CUCKOO.

I ONCE kept a Cuckoo, and for a considerable longer period than I did the only Jackdaw I ever possessed, for some months in fact, but I should not care to keep another. Yet the Cuckoo is a handsome bird, and vastly intelligent, if lazy, but I would not be paid a great deal to keep another, and in the course of the present chapter I will tell you why.

Of course, every one knows that the female Cuckoo, like the fine lady of the present day, cannot be troubled with the care of her children, for whom, to do her justice, she invariably selects a fitting and trustworthy nurse, which is more than can always be said for her human prototype: and the reason why she acts in the apparently unnatural manner common to her race, has long been, and still is, a puzzle to ornithologists. One of the explanations given being, that owing to the peculiar formation of the breast-bone, she is naturally incapacitated from performing her maternal duties: and fifty other conjectures, as unreasonable and as devoid of foundation in fact, have been advanced to explain what can, after all, not be accounted for upon any other supposition than that, long since given by Dr. Watts in another connection,

“It is her nature to”,

or “too”, for there is some doubt whether it was the preposition or the adverb that the Doctor really used. Be that as it may, however, the Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus* in scientific phrase, *le Coucou* in French, and *der gemeine Kuckuk* in German, is a strange bird, concerning which very much has been surmised, and exceedingly little is really known.

The length of the Cuckoo is about fourteen inches, seven

of which belong to the tail, which is more than half covered by the folded wings. The head, upper part of the neck, shoulders and back are of a dark ash colour, with a greenish tinge, mottled and barred with a delicate shade of brown. The tail is spotted and edged with white.

The female is rather smaller than her mate; the upper part of her body is brown, with whitish grey spots; the belly is greyish white, thickly marked with dark transverse lines.

The young have red and olive brown bars on their backs and shoulders, darker in the case of the young males than in that of their sisters.

The legs of the Cuckoo are very short, and the feathers of the thigh project backwards for about an inch: the toes are directed, as in the case of the Parrots, two forwards, and two backwards, and are of unequal length: hence the term *Zygodactylous* applied to these birds.

The Cuckoo is a bird of passage, arriving, as an old rhyme says, in April.

“In April, come he will:  
In May, he sings all day:  
In June, he’s out of tune:  
In July, he prepares to fly:  
In August, go he must.”

Nevertheless, many of these birds remain with us until the middle or even the end of September.

Having selected the nest in which to deposit her small greyish white egg, covered with rusty brown spots, though occasionally it is quite white, without any markings whatever, it is a great mystery how the mother Cuckoo accomplishes her purpose, as sometimes the nest chosen is situated in a hole, in a wall for instance, into which it would be impossible for the Cuckoo to enter, and occasionally, when hatched, the young interloper is unable to get out, like Sterne’s poor Starling, of which more in a subsequent chapter.

It is not often, however, that the Cuckoo makes such a

blunder as that, for she generally chooses the Hedge Accentor, or the Yellow-hammer, to be the foster-parent of her child that is to be: and here again mystery surrounds the bird from its very birth, for soon after it is hatched the young inmates proper disappear from the nest, and the big ugly changeling is left alone to benefit by the foster-parents' care.

What becomes of the young Accentors, or Yellow-hammers, as the case may be? Some writers have given a most graphic account of the mode in which the two-day-old Cuckoo takes up the helpless birdies on his back, and pitches them out of the nest, to die of cold and hunger on the ground below; averring that Nature has considerably provided him with a hollow back, the better to accomplish his nefarious purpose: to which I reply that, in my opinion, the force of imagination could scarcely further go; and after all the matter is simple enough.

When hatched, the young Cuckoo is fully twice the size of its foster-brothers and sisters, and generally gets a day's start of them, sometimes two; it grows very fast, is very strong, and so voracious that it grabs all the food intended for the whole family, so that the other poor little mites are starved, and possibly smothered, too, by their huge foster-brother, and when dead are thrown out of the nest by their parents, as is customary with all birds; or else they are pressed down to the bottom, trampled, in fact, by the Cuckoo, and as the little frames are not much more than skin and bone, they soon dry up and disappear. This, I think, is the true explanation of the fact, that out of a whole nestful of young birds, the changeling Cuckoo is the only one that is reared.

When wild, these birds feed almost entirely on insects, chiefly caterpillars, hairy caterpillars some writers say, but these were the death of my Cuckoo, as I shall presently relate.

Everyone is acquainted with the note of this bird, which has given it its name in almost every language: thus the Romans called it *Cuculus*, the English Cuckoo, the Germans *Kuckuk*

(Koo-kook), the French Coucou, etc. This peculiar note is only uttered by the male, and is by him seldom repeated after the middle of June; his voice then changes, and becomes as harsh and disagreeable as that of a stripling of fourteen.

A good many years ago I went to live for a short time in the north of Ireland, not far from Belfast, and found that the country round literally swarmed with these birds, whose loud and sonorous notes, never monotonous, though consisting of the repetition merely of a single word, resounded from every tree, and struck me as so pleasing, that I became possessed with the desire to rear a young Cuckoo. With this object in view, I spoke to one of the village lads one day, and promised him a shilling if he would find me one, which in a day or two he did, a fine half-grown specimen which he had taken, he said, from the nest of a Yellow-hammer. A shilling seemed a large sum of money to those poor boys, whose fathers worked on the farms for nine shillings a week, and their mothers for five, so that in a short time no less than fourteen young Cuckoos were brought to me by different lads, who thought, no doubt, that they would each receive a similar reward.

Fancy! fifteen Cuckoos to feed and provide for! I had already found that one was quite as much as I wanted, if not more, so I declined them all, and can but imagine the end of the others to have been an untimely one.

After consulting such books as I had by me, I began by feeding my young Cuckoo on raw meat, chopped fine; he took it, of course, as he would anything I had put into his ever-open beak, but he did not seem to thrive upon his changed diet: he got thin, puffed out his feathers, or bristles rather, screamed incessantly, and made an awful mess, and I thought, not regretfully, that he was going to die: but he had no such intention, then at all events.

Going into the garden of the house where I was staying, I found one day that a large bed of cabbages was infested

with caterpillars, and remembering that I had read somewhere that these nasty insects were the natural food of the Cuckoo, I collected a handful of them, and carried them indoors to the young changeling, who speedily disposed of the lot, and seemed so delighted and invigorated by the repast, that I fed him on no other food as long as the supply lasted, which was for a few weeks: they failed at last, however, and I had to fall back upon raw meat, which the Cuckoo took without apparent inconvenience—I suppose his digestion was stronger then. Whenever I went out, I examined the hedges and collected all the caterpillars for my bird, in whom I was beginning to take a good deal of interest; for he had grown a fine fellow, and could, when he liked, feed himself; though, like a fat Chinese Mandarin, he much preferred having the food crammed down his throat.

One day, quite late in the autumn, towards the beginning of November, as well as I recollect, I was driving home, and espied some black hairy caterpillars feeding on some groundsel by the road-side. To jump down and pop them into a small tin-box I usually carried about with me, and which was called "the Cuckoo's larder", was the work of a few seconds. On reaching home, I gave them to the Cuckoo, who devoured them with much gusto, and in about an hour afterwards I found him dead!

I must confess that, all things considered, I was not inconsolable for his loss, for he was, if handsome, and apparently healthy, terribly dirty in his habits, extremely noisy, unsociable and wild; and moreover I had doubts as to the possibility of keeping him over the winter.

The following season several boys brought me more youthful Cuckoos, but I declined having anything to say to them.

Herr Von Schauroth and other amateurs give the Cuckoo a bad character as a pet, and say that he is seldom kept through the cold season successfully. I do not, for my part, intend to make the attempt again.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE QUAIL.

**B**ECHSTEIN considered the Quail a very charming bird, and never liked to be without some of them in his aviary. Well, tastes differ, and no doubt it is very wisely arranged that this should be so, for if every one were of the same mind, the world, I fancy, would soon come to an end.

However that may be, my advice to any one who is thinking of keeping these birds, is that given long since by a facetious public character to persons about to marry: "Don't"—advice which I repeat with regard to keeping Quails, for really, *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*.

A pretty bird, and a neatly made little bird, the Quail is nevertheless an extremely undesirable bird to introduce into a mixed aviary, for it has a nasty habit of bouncing about, especially during the night in the migratory season, without looking, or seeing, where it is going, banging violently against everything that happens to be in its way, often injuring itself seriously, generally knocking all the feathers, and sometimes the skin, off the top of its own head, and setting the whole place in an uproar. The Quail is hardy, and not difficult to keep as regards feeding.

*Tetrao coturnix*, *la Caille*, in French, *die Wachtel*, in German, is about seven or eight inches in length, plump and round, with close lying feathers, and a quick bright eye of a dark olive brown; the upper part of the body is covered with dark and rusty red spots, and white streaks and lines, on a pale chesnut ground. The throat is dusky, surrounded with chesnut-coloured bands; the front of the neck and the breast are light rusty red, with long dark streaks; the belly is greyish white, the thighs reddish grey: the wing feathers

are dark grey, crossed by many red bars; and the short tail is brown, barred with red lines.

In the female the throat is white, and her breast, paler than that of the male, is covered with black spots.

In Europe the Quail is migratory, arriving in England in May, and departing in September: it usually frequents corn-fields, and lives on all kinds of grain, insects, small slugs and worms, and green grass.

In the house it will do very well on seed, with the addition of green food, soaked bread, and as many insects as are obtainable, particularly ants' eggs, to which it is extremely partial. It is very fond of drinking, and should always have an abundant supply of fresh clean water. It does not bathe, but rolls itself in the sand, like the common poultry, to which family it belongs.

The Quail usually nests in July, laying from seven to fourteen eggs, of a bluish white colour, with large brown spots. Incubation lasts about three weeks from the laying of the last egg: the young run about directly they come out of the shell, and grow so rapidly that they are able to take their departure to a warmer country with their parents in the autumn.

The Quail will occasionally breed in the aviary, but usually the female, though laying an immense number of eggs, never attempts to sit. During the first year of their lives, the young ones all resemble their mother; and if it is desired to bring them up in the house, they must be fed on hard-boiled yolk of egg, crumbled up fine, the crumb of white bread, and grated carrot, mixed with ants' eggs; they will be more likely to be successfully reared if the eggs are placed under, and hatched by, a very tame bantam hen.

Bechstein vaunts the "song" of the Quail, which he thus describes: "The song of this bird is no slight recommendation to the amateur: in the breeding season the male commences by repeating softly, tones resembling '*verra, verra*', followed

by the word *pieverrie*, uttered in a bold tone, with the neck raised, the eyes shut, and the head inclined to one side. Those that repeat the last syllable ten or twelve times are the most admired. The song of the female only consists of the words '*verra, verra, pupu, pupu*', the two last syllables being those by which the male and the female attract each other's attention: when alarmed or angry, their cry resembles '*guillah!*' but at other times it is only a murmur, resembling the purring of a cat."

Quails are found in all parts of the world, and differ little from one another in size or plumage, with the exception of the Californian, which has a tuft on the top of its head. I have never kept any of the foreign varieties. In Australia Quails are very abundant; they are rather smaller than those which frequent these islands, and of a paler colour, and I have frequently obtained a number of them, by the device of sending a dog into a field of standing corn frequented by these birds, which, terrified by the intrusion into their peaceful haunts, would dash themselves blindly against the wire fence surrounding the field, and with such violence that they often killed themselves by fracturing their neck or breastbone. These birds are also frequently killed by flying, during the migratory season, against telegraph wires, and the lanterns of lighthouses. The reason of this apparent stupidity on the part of an otherwise intelligent bird is that their eyes are placed so far back in the head that they cannot see anything that is directly in front of them without turning the head, so that when frightened, or in a hurry, they are apt to come with the full force of their extremely powerful flight against any and every obstacle that lies in their way.

This chapter would scarcely be complete without some reference to the enormous flights of these birds that served to feed the wandering Israelites in the desert of Sinai, where, even in the present day, they are met with in large flocks during their passage from Africa to a milder climate for the





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breeding season, as well as when returning home again. When settled down into their summer locations, these birds divide off into little companies of one male and two or three females, though sometimes they pair male and female together: during this period the cocks fight fiercely among themselves, and not a seraglio is formed without a pitched battle or two taking place among the rival suitors.

In China and India advantage is taken of the pugnacious disposition of these birds during the breeding season, to train them for fighting matches, as was formerly done in England with game cocks; and large sums of money are not unfrequently staked upon the issue of an encounter; which is arranged as follows:—a number of people match their own Quails against an equal number of these birds belonging to others of their acquaintance; the victors in this preliminary contest are then made to fight among themselves, and so on, until only one bird is left, which is pronounced the winner, and the fortunate owner of this bird pockets the stakes.

It is unnecessary for me to protest against the barbarity of the practice, and I am glad to think that if it ever existed in this country, Quail fighting, as an amusement (!) for human lookers on, has ceased as entirely as cock-fighting, which was once an every-day pastime for high and low, but is now put down by the strong arm of the law, as a practice unworthy of a civilized community.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE STARLING.

**T**HIS is another bird I have not cared to keep for any length of time. I have never attempted to bring it up by hand from the nest, but once caught one that had fallen

down the chimney, and fluttered through the register of the grate into the room where it was found. It was so wild and restless that I could not find it in my heart to keep the poor thing a captive, so after trying for a short time what could be done in the way of taming it, and not succeeding to my satisfaction, I opened the window and let it fly away; which it did right joyfully I have no doubt, for settling on a garden wall a few doors off, it commenced to preen its plumage, which had not only been dirtied by the soot that accompanied it in its fall down the chimney, but deranged and broken by its frantic endeavours to escape. As soon as it had finished its toilette, it uttered a loud note of triumph, and flew off to rejoin its companions in the adjoining trees.

Everybody remembers Sterne's Starling, I have no doubt, and its plaintive cry of "I can't get out! I can't get out!" How could I keep such a bird in a cage? its continual efforts to escape would have been a standing reproach to my humanity.

I was rather sorry, too, for when tame the Starling is a very nice bird, learning to whistle, speak, and imitate all kinds of domestic sounds. I remember once paying a visit to a friend, and wondering at the alternate, but sometimes confused, sounds of whistling, laughing, and sawing (as of a carpenter sawing a piece of wood) that proceeded from an adjoining room, and after a while could not help asking what it meant. "That's the bird", replied my friend. "What bird?" I asked. "My Starling." What a beauty he was! and clever as handsome: but he, too, looked as if he wanted sadly to "get out."

These birds make their nests of grass and leaves under the eaves of houses, in pigeon-cotes, holes of trees, and any convenient nook or crevice they can find, including the deserted nests of Rooks and Magpies, sharing the church towers and steeples with the Daws, and the groups of statuary on the fronts of public buildings with the Sparrows and Pigeons.

*Sturnus vulgaris* in Latin, the common, not "vulgar" Starling, *l'Etourneau* of the French, and *der gemeine Staar* of the Germans, is a handsome bird, measuring about nine inches in length, two and a half of which belong to the tail. The ground colour of the plumage is black, with a purple shading on the front, and a green tinge on the hinder parts of the body; many of the feathers are tipped with white, which gives to the bird a mottled appearance, that becomes less conspicuous as it grows older.

The female is rather smaller than the male, not so black, less glossy, and has more white spots.

The young are so thickly spotted that they seem to be almost grey. There are two broods in the season, consisting of from five to seven young ones each time: the eggs are of a delicate greenish blue colour, sometimes dotted over with small black spots, but more frequently quite plain. The young are hatched in about fourteen days, and are said to be easily reared on bread and milk.

"In Voightland", says Bechstein, "the peasants use the Starling like Domestic Pigeons, and eat the young, which they take before they can fly; by this means they obtain three broods in the season, but never touch the last, in order not to discourage the parents, as well as not to diminish so profitable a branch of industry."

When wild these birds feed on insects of all kinds, snails, worms, and fruit, also grain and seeds when they cannot find anything they like better: they are partly migratory, but numbers of them remain with us all the year round: their departure from our midst in spring being probably caused by the scarcity of suitable nesting places.

In confinement the Starling will eat, and thrive on, almost everything that is brought to its master's table, and evinces, says an old writer, a strong partiality for cheese: it drinks a good deal, and is fond of bathing, consequently it should not be left without free access to water.

“This bird”, says Bechstein, of whom it seems to have been a favourite, “becomes wonderfully familiar in the house; as docile and cunning as a dog, he is always gay, wakeful, soon knows all the inhabitants of the house, remarks their motions and air, and adapts himself to their humours. In his solemn tottering step, he appears to go stupidly forward; but nothing escapes his eye. He learns to pronounce words without having his tongue cut, which proves the uselessness of this cruel operation. He repeats correctly the airs which are taught him, as does also the female, imitates the cries of men and animals, and the songs of all the birds in the room with him. Not only are the young susceptible of these instructions, the oldest even show the most astonishing docility.”

Perhaps I did not persevere long enough in my endeavours to tame the individual an accident put temporarily into my possession; and very likely I may make another attempt.

“The Starling is a very hardy bird, and will live”, says the same authority, “for a number of years in the house.” It should, however, be always provided in its cage with a sod of grass to dig in; and if a few worms are hidden underneath it, the bird will derive much benefit and enjoyment from its attempts to root them out of their concealment. Without this precaution the beak of all the Starlings, foreign, as well as British, is apt to become long and deformed. The bottom of the cage must be covered with a thick layer of coarse sand in order to keep the claws of the feet from getting too long.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE TREE SPARROW.

I CANNOT help thinking, when I read of tame Sparrows, that the writers are referring to this bird, and not to *Passer domesticus*: there is a good deal of resemblance between the two species, with this remarkable difference, that the female of the bird under consideration cannot be distinguished from her mate, except by an internal, and consequently *post mortem* examination, so exactly alike are they in outward appearance.

The Tree, or Mountain Sparrow, for it is called indifferently by both names, is the *Passer montana* of Ray, *le Moineau des haies*, or *le Friquet* of Buffon, and *der Feldsperling* of Bechstein, and is an exceedingly pretty and interesting bird of some five and a half inches in length. The upper part of the head as far as the neck is reddish brown, the cheeks are white with a black spot on each, a white ring surrounds the neck, the back is spotted with red and black, the rump and the lower part of the back are greyish brown, the throat white and the breast ash-coloured; the belly is dusky white, the flight feathers of the wings and the tail dark brown, the lesser wing coverts rusty red, and the greater wing coverts black with red edges and white tips, which form two transverse bars on the wings; the beak is dusky, and the feet and legs bluish flesh-coloured.

The Tree Sparrow is a widely diffused, but nowhere a very common bird: unlike its congener it shuns the society of man, preferring woods and fields to the street and farm-yard, wherein the Common Sparrow is so much at home.

The nest of the Tree Sparrow is usually built in holes of trees, but when placed among the boughs, as it not unfre-

quently is, it is domed with grass stems: there are usually two broods of four or five, each season.

When wild this bird subsists upon seeds of all kinds, but brings up its young ones on insect food, of which the parents also partake during the breeding season. In the house it will thrive upon any kind of seed, but gives the preference to hemp and oats. It very soon becomes reconciled to captivity, and grows quite tame: so much so that it may be taught to go and come at command with the greatest facility.

A pair will nest and bring up their young in a garden aviary, where a male will mate with a common hen-Sparrow, and produce hybrids.

The Tree Sparrows are very hardy birds, and will live in the house for a number of years.

The sexes, as I have said, are undistinguishable while alive, so that a number of these birds must be procured, on the chance of there being a female among them, and when two are observed to be paired they must be separated from the rest, and given a large cage, or aviary, to themselves, when, if supplied with suitable building materials, they will begin to make a nest directly.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE BUDGERIGAR.

FOR years I longed to possess a pair of the bright green Love-birds, as all small Parrots used to be formerly called, which I had so often seen sporting in countless myriads in the bush, sucking the nectar from the blossoms of the gum-trees, but I longed in vain; for although the purser of the ship I returned to Europe in had invested in some hundreds of "Shell Parrots", which he hoped to dispose of at a premium on his arrival in Liverpool, I scrupled to pay some-







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thing about the weight of the birds in gold to gratify my fancy.

The birds, however, which my friend the purser brought over were not the bright green creatures I had seen in Victoria, but were natives of South Australia, where the settlers called them "Shell Parrots", or Parrakeets, and the aborigines "Budgerigars", which is now their popular designation in this country, although the Zoological Society, and the various "bird-shows" throughout the kingdom, persist in calling them "Undulated Grass Parrakeets." Although, as I have said, these birds are natives of the province of South Australia, I have nevertheless seen them in Victoria, two or three together, but suspect that these were stragglers from beyond their natural limits, or perhaps fortunate individuals who had made good their escape from captivity.

At one time these birds commanded as high a price as two or three pounds sterling a pair in the bird-market, while Dr. Russ, I know not on what authority, affirms that the first pair brought to England were immediately sold for £25: which reminds me that when, many years ago, I landed on the wharf, Raleigh's wharf in Melbourne, with a cage containing a pair of common Canaries in my hand, I had not proceeded half a dozen paces on my way when I was accosted by a man who offered me £10 for the lot, and on my declining his proposal, doubled his offer, which I was silly enough to refuse. But to resume, this first "pair" of Budgerigars were two males in all probability, for they made no attempt, that Dr. Russ ever heard of, to breed. After a while the price came down, and when it reached fifteen shillings a pair, I made my first investment: however, I have already related elsewhere my experience with these birds, and must not repeat myself.

The Budgerigar, Undulated, or Shell Parrot, or Parrakeet, *Melospittacus undulatus* in scientific parlance, *la Perruche ondulée* of the French, *der Wellensittich* of the Germans, is now almost as well known as the Canary, and as cheap, cheaper

in fact, and like the latter bird, has for some time past been bred of various colours; namely, pale green, with scarcely any sign of the characteristic undulations to which the bird is indebted for so many of its names; yellow, without a trace of markings of any kind, except the little patches on the throat and the sides of the face which are blue, and blue-black in the wild bird, but dead-white in the yellow domesticated variety. The latest and rarest "sport" is a blue Budgerigar, which I have not seen, but which, I am credibly informed, has been recently produced in Germany: while a variety has also been obtained, by careful selection, that rivals in size the Turquoise. In my own bird-room I have had some specimens scarcely larger than a Redpoll hatched by very juvenile parents.

The ordinary Budgerigar measures about seven inches in length, of which three and a half inches belong to the tail. The principal colour of the bird is bright green: the breast, back, and belly are of this hue, but the top of the head and the throat are primrose yellow; the cheeks are of the same colour, but each small feather is crossed by two or three fine circular lines of black, that impart a greyish appearance to the face: several small spots of blue are situated just below the cheeks, and the lower series are of such a deep tint, that, at first sight, they might be mistaken for black. The back of the head, the neck, shoulders, and wing coverts are yellow, marked with undulations similar to those on the face in regard to colour, but of larger size; the flight feathers are greenish black, edged with yellow on the outer aspect of each: the two long central tail feathers are deep blue, and the others, broadly barred with yellow, are greenish blue at their ends and tips. The beak is greyish white, and the feet and legs are grey.

In the male the cere, or bare place surrounding the nostrils, is bright blue; while in the female it is white, or whitish blue in young specimens, and brown in those that are mature.

The plumage of the young is greyer on the neck and shoulders, and less vividly green on the breast and back than in the case of their parents, while the undulations of the neck feathers are continued all over the head; a juvenile type which is sometimes simulated in very old specimens.

Some writers have had a great deal to say about "manipulated birds"; that is, males whose blue noses were turned brown by the application of lunar caustic to the cere, for the purpose of fraudulently palming them off on customers as females. If ever such a paltry fraud was really perpetrated, it certainly is more likely to have been done by unprincipled "amateurs", than by importers and dealers, who cannot afford to play fast and loose with their reputation: but I am inclined to think the notion had its rise in the imagination of an excessively suspicious person, and never had any foundation in fact, for the simple reason that it would not "pay."

On the other hand, it is extremely difficult at times to determine whether a given number of young Budgerigars are really cocks or hens; I have myself picked out a couple of what I thought to be males, from the bluish plum colour of their ceres, caged them by themselves, and after a few weeks found that they were undoubtedly hens, not only from the fact that their noses had become quite brown, but because they laid some eggs on the bottom of their cage.

Like most of the Parrot family, Budgerigars in their wild state bring up their young ones in holes in trees, making no nest, but laying their five or six white eggs on the bare wood. Although I have kept these birds for years, I cannot say with certainty how long they take to incubate, but the best authorities on the subject consider that the young are hatched in fifteen or sixteen days: the fact of the hen sometimes commencing to sit when she has laid her first egg, and sometimes not until several have been deposited, introduces a considerable element of uncertainty into the matter: it is, however, quite certain, in my opinion, that the Budgerigar

does not, as one writer has maintained, "lay over", that is, bring out a pair of young ones, then when these are a week or so old, lay again, and so on; thus accounting for the fact of young birds of very different sizes being not unfrequently found in the same nest: but the fact of the incubation commencing with the first egg is quite sufficient to account for the eldest being much larger than the youngest in cases, not at all uncommon, where five, six, or even seven eggs have been laid.

The young Budgerigars do not gape, but the old ones take their beaks into their own, and the nestlings feed themselves on the half-digested seeds which the parents have the faculty of regurgitating for their benefit: the duration of the young birds' stay in the nest, as well as the rapidity, or slowness, of their growth, depends mainly on the weather; about six weeks is the average time in this country, though I have had young Budgerigars that left their birth-place both considerably before and after the time mentioned.

Budgerigars, it has been asserted, will not breed until they have been at least two years in this country: but this statement is decidedly incorrect: for I have had some of these birds that laid within a fortnight of my turning them into my bird-room, and when I bought them they were quite recently imported from Australia. Budgerigars are very precocious; some that were hatched in my aviary paired among themselves, laid, and brought up young ones before they had moulted their own nest feathers! but the young ones thus prematurely brought into the world, were undersized, weak, and dingy in colour.

A cocoa-nut husk is perhaps the best nest than can be provided for the Budgerigar: some specimens persistently refusing to breed in anything else. I have had brood after brood of five or six fine healthy young birds turn out of the same husk in a twelvemonth: still many of these birds are not at all particular, and will make themselves quite at

home in a small box, or a hollow log: and I have even known a pair that bred in an ordinary London-Canary-breeding cage. If a small box is given to them to nest in, it will be advisable to place a *small* quantity of sawdust on the bottom; otherwise the eggs are apt to roll about on the smooth surface and take cold; while if too much padding be used, the eggs will get buried in it, and not hatch at all: but the natural concavity of the cocoa-nut husk affords a capital receptacle for the eggs and young; the greatest drawback to its use being the harbour it provides for parasites, and if these increase to any extent there will be small likelihood of success in breeding: a husk that is found to be infested had better be burnt at once.

In their wild state the Budgerigars feed entirely on the seeds of indigenous Australian grasses, and in captivity live almost exclusively on canary and millet seed; but when they have young ones to feed, it is as well to supply them with a few oats, and a piece of stale bread soaked for a few minutes in boiling water, and then squeezed dry. A sod of grass should always be at their disposal; and, contrary to the directions given by a recent writer, it is unnecessary as well as undesirable to deprive them of this luxury during the winter: if, however, they have not been accustomed to it, it is better not to give them any green food until warm weather has set in.

Budgerigars will exist for a marvellously long time without drinking, but that is no reason why they should be kept continually without water, especially if their diet is dry seed, as I have seen recommended in a book: on the contrary this deprivation of drink induces many diseases, such as constipation, fits, and enlargement of the liver. I have noticed that Budgerigars kept in an out-door aviary, in which, perhaps, they succeed better than indoors, seldom drink or bathe, but are very fond of rolling themselves in the wet grass, after a shower of rain, or a heavy fall of dew; when I have also

seen them sip the drops of moisture that clung to the blades of grass, which I have no doubt is their custom in their native land, where, although rain may not fall for many months in summer, heavy dew at night is the natural order of things.

Budgerigars are very hardy birds, caring little or nothing for the severest weather in this changeable climate of ours, providing they have an abundant supply of wholesome food: they are, however, very subject to egg-binding, as well as to convulsions, or fits. The latter complication is caused by constipation, which is itself induced by continued feeding on dry, and too often stale, food; the obvious remedy being a change to a more succulent diet. I am utterly at a loss, however, to account for the former troublesome and most distressing malady; for I have known it to occur in young as well as in old birds, in aviary-bred as well as in imported specimens, in fat birds and lean birds, in summer and in winter, in cages and in aviaries, indoors and out: and I further believe that a bird once attacked is ever after useless for breeding purposes, and had better be at once destroyed, or, at all events, condemned to single blessedness for the remainder of her days; otherwise the complication will sooner or later recur, and the bird inevitably die. Relief may be afforded by the application of a drop or two of castor, or even olive oil to the egg-passage by means of a small brush, or a feather, while a drop may be administered internally at the same time; which can be readily done by holding the bird with its head on one side, and placing the drop of medicine on the beak, when it will be immediately swallowed; but as soon as the poor bird is relieved I would strongly advise that she be not permitted to go to nest again.

Budgerigars will exist on very plain food, such as an all the year round diet of millet or canary seed, but can scarcely be expected to successfully breed thereon. It is cruel to keep such extremely lively birds confined in a small cage, where

they have barely room to turn themselves round: but in a good-sized aviary or bird-room, where they have sufficient space to exercise their naturally active little wings, they are the gems of every collection.

Budgerigars are very restless, and not unfrequently seized by a panic at night, when they dash wildly about the aviary, disturbing the rest of the inmates, and causing the loss of many broods through frightening the mothers off their nests; so that it is preferable to keep them by themselves, and as they are eminently gregarious, as many scores, or hundreds, of them as there is room for may be located in the same enclosure, where they will live in perfect harmony together, providing that there is a sufficiency of nest-accommodation in the place, without which precaution the females will fight fiercely, aye, and kill each other sometimes, in a contest for a favourite site: but if a superabundance of nesting-places is provided for them, they will form a truly "happy family", the more the merrier, and charm their owner by their beautiful plumage, lively, vivacious ways, and wonderful fecundity.

The Budgerigar seldom gets very tame: never, unless kept in a small cage, and very much talked to and fussed over. In a large room, or out-door aviary, they are usually very wild; quite as much so, in fact, as their brethren in the bush: but that they are happier and healthier thus, than when confined in a narrow space and "petted" by never so gentle a hand, is, I think, unquestionable.

I have seen these birds taught to do a number of tricks, such as flying off the owner's hand, and returning to him from a neighbouring tree or wall, when called or whistled for; running their heads into a miniature yoke and drawing a small carriage; climbing up a pole, like a white mouse, and coming down again with a little flag in their beak; but for my part I would utterly hate the amount of coercion, euphemistically called teaching, necessary to bring about such a result.

Some Budgerigars have learned to repeat a few words, and others to partially imitate the song of a Canary or Linnet; though the latter are much more likely to acquire the warbling of the Budgerigar, which is itself sufficiently pleasing, especially when the bright, merry, green-coated little fellow is paying his addresses to the "lady of his love."

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE ZEBRA, OR CHESNUT-EARED FINCH.

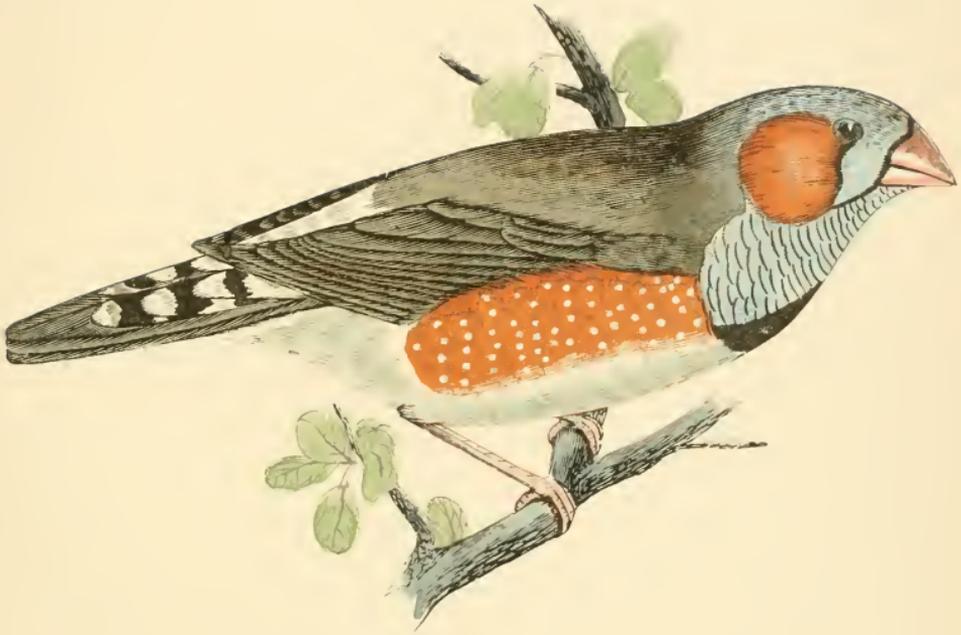
I FORGET how many years since, but at one of the Crystal Palace Bird Shows, I, in common, I doubt not, with many other aviarists, was much struck with an exhibit by Mr. A. Wiener, in one cage, of some thirty or more of these little birds, the produce of two pairs in twelve months, and immediately concluded to go and do likewise.

Shortly afterwards I procured a pair, and turned them into a small conservatory that had nothing in it but an old and barren grape-vine. No sooner were they released from the small travelling-cage in which I had brought them from Covent Garden, than they darted up among the vine leaves, where the little cock blew his tiny trumpet with unwonted vigour. Well, I have already related the history of this little couple elsewhere, and must pass on to other matters, premising that since then I have had a good number of these charming birds in my possession, and have found them to be as hardy and docile as they are pretty.

The male Zebra, or Chesnut-eared Finch, scientifically *Amadina castanotis*, in French *le diamant Zébré*, or *le diamant à moustache*, in German *der Zebrafink*, is, as may be gathered from the above introductory remarks, an agreeable and extremely desirable inmate of the aviary. In length he measures about four and a half inches, of which one and a half belong







THE ZEBRA, OR CHESNUTEARED FINCH.



to the tail. He is rather a difficult bird to describe on account of his plumage being so varied, and made up of such a variety of tints. To begin, his head is ash grey, his wings and back brownish grey, the tips of the flight feathers being almost black. His cheeks, marked at their anterior aspect by a narrow line of black, that gives the bird somewhat the appearance of wearing a moustache, are bright chesnut; the tail is dark grey, and the long upper tail coverts are dotted with round white spots. The throat is white, but as each feather is edged with a narrow black line, this part of the plumage presents a greyish undulated or zebraed appearance: in some specimens the lower part of the throat is quite black, in consequence of the increased breadth of the little black lines. The breast and belly are white, and the sides are reddish purple, dotted with numerous white spots. The beak is coral red, and the feet and legs reddish orange.

The female is an ashen grey bird, with a whitish grey breast and belly; she has a black moustache like her partner, and a narrow line of black surrounds her beak, which, as well as her legs and feet, are of the same colour as those parts in the male, but of a somewhat fainter shade: her tail coverts are also spotted with white; but taking her for all in all she is a very unpretending, but nevertheless extremely interesting little personage.

The young on leaving the nest resemble their mother, with the exception that their beak, legs, and feet are black. In about three months, however, the males assume the adult plumage, and the females the red extremities of their mother, and begin to set up housekeeping for themselves: but, as in the case of the Budgerigar, it is not well to permit the precocious little creatures to burden themselves so prematurely with the care of a family; and in order to effect this the sexes should be separated, as soon as they can be differentiated, until they are at least a twelvemonth old.

The Zebra Finch is a native of New South Wales and

Queensland, whence vast numbers are annually imported into Europe and America, without, as yet, producing any apparent diminution in their numbers in their native land.

When wild these little birds make a large grass nest, lined with feathers, in the hole of a tree, or even in a bush, for they are not at all particular as to the site of the birthplace of their future brood; though, on the whole, they evince an evident desire to save themselves the trouble of building a dome over their nest, by placing it in a hollow branch, or some suitable crevice. In the aviary they never build in a bush if a cocoa-nut husk, or a small box has been placed at their disposal. The eggs are from three to seven in number, quite white, and about the same size as those of a European Wren: the young are hatched in about twelve days, and there is little doubt are, in their wild state, fed upon small insects: in captivity, however, I have known them to be very successfully reared on seed, sopped bread, and yolk of egg; though, as there were many other kinds of birds in the aviary, I cannot positively affirm that the Zebras made use of the latter, but I suspect they did, as they are certainly insectivorous during the breeding season, like our Sparrows, and some other birds.

I have not tried to breed Zebra Finches in a cage; but other connoisseurs have, and have had fair success; one gentleman in particular having obtained several broods from a pair of these birds caged in his nursery, where, to use his own words, "there was always plenty of noise and ball-throwing."

In their native country these birds usually produce but two broods in the year; but in the house, over here, they breed all the year round, summer and winter alike, stopping for a short time sometimes when moulting. In an out-door aviary, where the temperature is not raised for their especial benefit, they generally adhere to the two broods in the season, which is, I have said, their custom in their native woods.

In their wild state the Chesnut-eared Finches subsist mainly on grass-seeds and small insects, but in the house will do very well on white millet or canary seed, or a mixture of both: when breeding, however, their diet should be more varied, and sponge-cake may be advantageously added to the items already prescribed.

They are very healthy and hardy birds, and are subject to very few ailments except egg-binding, which is, unfortunately, rather common with the hen Zebra Finch, whether imported or aviary-bred: and I repeat that I have never known one that was so attacked to completely recover. The first time a bird is affected a drop of castor or olive oil applied to the vent, as well as administered internally, and warmth, which is a *sine quâ non* in such cases, will afford relief; but sooner or later the poor bird will die if permitted to go to nest. Once a Zebra Finch, or any other bird, has been egg-bound, it is best to make a nun of her at once in order to save her from much suffering and an untimely death. Ergot of rye, or rather a tincture made from that destructive and poisonous fungus, has been recommended by several writers and dealers as an infallible cure for egg-binding; but I may take this opportunity of declaring that I have not a particle of faith in its supposed virtues in the case of egg-bound birds. When it seems to have acted beneficially in some reported cases, I believe the relief has been due, not to the drug, but to the mechanical relaxation of the spasm of the cloacal sphincter by the little brush that was employed in administering the medicine.

I cannot close this brief account of a great favourite of mine without confessing that the Zebra Finch, despite his attractive appearance, winning ways, and many other good qualities, is a decidedly quarrelsome fellow; though I cannot exactly call him a dangerous neighbour to birds smaller than himself, he will, nevertheless, persistently harass them, and ought not, as a rule, to be confined with such "feeble folk" as

the tiny Waxbills in the same cage; while in the aviary he will oust them from their nests in sheer wantonness, and appropriate the material to his own use, the whole edifice sometimes, although there may be any amount of nesting places, hay, fibre, etc., about the place.

So ardent is the temperament of this bird, and so keen his desire to keep house and rear a family, that, sooner than remain in single-blessedness, he will form an alliance with a lady twice his size, such as a Diamond Sparrow or a Mannikin, and bring up a nest of mules.

Take him for all in all, his pretty and diversified plumage, his charming miniature trumpet-like note, sprightliness, and the facility with which he adapts himself to his surroundings, combine to make him one of the most desirable little birds of my acquaintance, so that I can most cordially recommend him to those who are about to make their maiden essay in foreign bird keeping.

With regard to the hardiness of these birds, I must say that I have never attempted to keep them out of doors during the winter; although I have little doubt that they would successfully brave the severity of our climate during the cold weather, providing they had a snug nest to sleep in at night, and were supplied with a varied assortment of suitable food, for I have habitually kept them in an unheated room all the year round, where the water in the drinking pan was frozen every morning during frost, and they did not seem to mind it in the least, sleeping as they did in a snug husk, or a nest of their own contrivance: and other connoisseurs have kept them in a garden aviary during the severest weather, and found that they throve admirably in such a situation; though, of course, they did not produce as many young ones there, as they would have done had their abode been maintained at an equable temperature during the entire year. It is, however, unnatural, and consequently detrimental to the birds themselves, to permit them to go on producing brood

after brood of young ones without taking a rest, such as the changes of the seasons would compel them to observe in their native wilds.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE COCKATEEL.

THE most sober-suited of all the Parrot family, except the black Parrots, *Psittacus vaza* and *Psittacus niger*, the Cockateel is nevertheless a very attractive bird: white and a pale lavender grey are the prevailing tints of its plumage, the face being relieved by a patch of primrose yellow, in the centre of which is a smaller spot of a brick-red colour; the head is ornamented with a crest of fine pointed yellowish feathers, which the bird has not the power of erecting or depressing at will, differing thus from the true Cockatoos; so that in reality it is a crested Parrakeet, and not a "little Cockatoo." The wing coverts are white, and the under surface of the tail jet-black.

The crest of the female is grey, and she has no yellow on her face; her outer tail feathers are broadly, and the others finely, spotted with yellow on their anterior aspect; underneath they are crossed by numerous yellow bars, a disposition of colours that extends to the middle of the abdomen.

The Cockateel measures about twelve inches in length, five of which belong to the tail. It is a very docile bird, and breeds freely in captivity, choosing, according to my experience of this species, the highest possible nesting-place it can find; nor have I ever known it to build upon the ground, which a recent writer has asserted to be its usual habit. The eggs are about the size of those of the Collared or Laughing Dove, and are quite white; they are frequently seven or eight in number, but more often from three to five. When located

in an out-door aviary, these birds have two or three broods in the year, but if their abode is heated during the cold weather, they will continue to breed all the year round like Pigeons. The male assists in the onerous task of incubation, sitting all day; he is also the chief caterer for the young, and sometimes is so absorbed by his care for his children, that he forgets to feed himself, and grows quite weak and thin.

A male Cockateel now in my possession was so neglectful of himself that he shrank down to nearly half his former size, and became so feeble that he could scarcely fly; while his partner took things very quietly, leaving her nest soon after daybreak, and absolutely refusing to return to it until dusk, though her poor husband frequently left the eggs for a minute or two in the afternoon in order to try and persuade her to resume her duties, but in vain; when finding that it was impossible to awaken her to a proper sense of her responsibilities, he sorrowfully returned to the nest, fearing no doubt that if he stayed away any longer the precious eggs would take cold; and so matters went on until, as I have said, he became so weak that, in order to save his life, I had to interfere, and take away the nest, when he soon recovered.

The Cockateel has received a number of scientific names, among others *Colopsitha Novæ Hollandiæ*, *Psittacus Novæ Hollandiæ*, *Leptolophus auricomis*, *Nymphacus Novæ Hollandiæ*, which last is, perhaps, that most frequently applied to it in books. The Germans call it *der Nymfensittich*, or *Korella*, and the French *la Perruche Calopsitte*.

In its wild state this bird makes its nest in a hollow branch of a tree, and in the house will make use of a small box, or hollow log, or a hole in the wall; incubation lasts for about eighteen days, and in fine weather the young fledge rapidly: they are able to feed themselves, at least partially, almost as soon as they leave the nest, to which it is very

rare for them to return again. Imported specimens evince a desire to breed about Christmas, but birds which have been reared in England nest in April or May. They are perfectly hardy, although natives of Australia, and seem to be quite indifferent to the severest weather; for I have repeatedly seen mine roosting out of doors during hard frost, when they might just as well have gone under cover, and not suffering in the least from the exposure.

Cockateels permit themselves to be bullied to any extent without attempting to retaliate on their tormentors; not only Redrumps and Turquoisines, but even Cardinals and Budgerigars driving them away from the food-pan with impunity.

When wild the Cockateel feeds on grass seeds, passing much of its time on the ground, where, as its legs are longer than those of most of its congeners, it can run very swiftly. I am not aware whether it eats insects in its native haunts, but mine will when they can get them, mealworms, black-beetles, and even green caterpillars with apparent relish. This bird is also very strong on the wing, and it is a pretty sight to see it wheeling round and round at a great height, gradually restricting the circle, and descending in a spiral to rest on its master's hand or shoulder, for it is readily tamed, and even occasionally learns to repeat a few words.

The natural warbling note of the Cockateel is rather loud and harsh, and it has, moreover, a sharp squeal, when frightened or hurt, that is exceedingly distressing to a sensitive ear. The female is a particularly silent bird, seldom making a noise of any kind, but she is far, nevertheless, from being dumb, and can upon occasion scream as loudly as her mate.

As Cockateels are very active and lively it is a pity to keep them in a cage, where they always look unhappy: with plenty of space to play in, few birds are more attractive.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE REDRUMP.

THIS very beautiful Parrakeet, called by the Germans *der Singsittich*, from the faculty of song it possesses, is one of the most desirable birds that can be placed in a large garden aviary. In a small enclosure it will not do, at least all the specimens I have had have been of a most quarrelsome and tyrannical disposition; but I may have been unfortunate in my experience, for birds, like men, have each his own special idiosyncrasy, and Dr. Russ is scarcely likely to have made a mistake when he wrote concerning the bird under consideration: "*Verträglich unter kleinen Vögeln*," (it is amiable among small birds), which has certainly not been the case with my Redrumps, which have killed Canaries and Budgerigars, and so persecuted their larger companions that I was compelled to allow them an aviary to themselves: but given plenty of room, or kept in a good-sized aviary by themselves, they are charming birds, very easily tamed, and more readily taught to go and come than almost any other bird. They are very strong on the wing, and have a powerful and graceful flight, which they are able to sustain for a considerable time, and when wheeling round and round in the sunshine, look like flashes of richly coloured light. There would not be the least difficulty in acclimatising the Redrump, were it not for cockney sportsmen, who must fire at, maim, or kill any strange bird they chance to see flying about, even when perfectly aware that it is the property of their next-door neighbour quite as much as their pigeons and poultry belong to them.

The first time my cock Redrump got out, and how he did

enjoy the outing! my neighbours all round were instantly on the *qui vive*; some of them placed cages in their windows, in order to try and tempt him in, while others stalked him round the gardens where he happened to alight, and one adventurous spirit attempted to secure him by the device of throwing a cloth over him, as he walked about on the grass, but "Reddy" was too nimble for his would-be captor, and flew off with a loud whistle, which he no doubt meant for a laugh of good-natured contempt. Then how he revelled in a good climb among the branches of a large elm tree, from whence, as soon as he had finished his survey, he took a rapid flight round and round the house, and finally settled with a complacent whistle on the trap-cage, inside which his sober-suited little wife was impatiently awaiting his return; and when he was safely secured she was, in her turn, permitted to enjoy a ramble, and after a good fly, came home again contentedly to her husband and her supper.

There is not the least fear of losing these birds when they are let out; that is, unless some kind neighbour should succeed in trapping them, but I am not so sure that they would come back again if both were let out together, except when they had young ones in their nest, to whom they would be certain to return.

The Redrump is rather smaller than the Cockateel, measuring ten inches in total length, of which the tail comprises about half. *Psittacus hamatonotus* is the scientific name of this pretty bird, which the late Mr. Gould classed among the *Psephoti*, which is manifestly wrong, for the Redrump belongs to the family, a numerous one, of the Grass Parrakeets, and subsists, in its wild state, almost entirely on the seeds of the various grasses indigenous to Australia, making occasional inroads on the settlers' oats, but otherwise it is harmless to the crops.

The upper part of the body of the male is of a beautiful glossy grass green; the breast and belly are yellowish green,

and a patch of bluish red occupies the region of the rump, extending some distance up the back; a peculiarity of colouring which has given to this bird its most usual English name. The two central tail feathers are blue towards their extremities, the others bluish green.

The female is rather smaller than her mate, and is greyish green, or rather greyish olive green, the back and rump are bright green, and the under surface of the body yellowish grey.

The Redrump is a native of most parts of Australia, except the west. Like most of the members of the Parrot family, it nests in hollow boughs, laying three or four white eggs, intermediate in size between those of a Budgerigar and those of a Cockateel: the young resemble their parents, but the youthful males are duller in colour than their father.

Dr. Russ recommends that during the breeding season they should be supplied with "egg-bread, ants' eggs, boiled rice, and fruit, mealworms, green food and poppy-seed." It seems almost presumptuous to differ from so eminent an authority, but I have found oats and soaked bread a sufficient addition to the ordinary diet of canary, millet, and hemp seed. Green food my birds are never without.

The feathers of the Redrump come out on the least handling, but grow again very rapidly: it is a perfectly hardy bird, and may be safely kept out of doors all the year round.

A pair I once kept in an enclosure along with some bantam chickens, would run to the old hen whenever she called her brood, of which she evidently thought they formed a part, for she never interfered with them even when they chased and pecked her children, as they often did.

The "song" of the male is a low and rather sweet warble, somewhat more sustained than that of the Budgerigar, and as Mr. Wiener says "is quite surprisingly agreeable." I imagine the Redrump might be taught to speak, but not having tried the experiment, I cannot say for certain.





THE RED-HEADED GRAY CARDINAL





## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE RED-CRESTED GREY CARDINAL.

THIS handsome bird is a native of Brazil, but nevertheless perfectly hardy, enduring, in this country, our severest winters out of doors with impunity. It breeds, moreover, freely in a good-sized garden aviary, providing it is not interfered with by other birds, and has a nice retired place to build in.

I am extremely partial to the Grey Cardinal, and have kept some of them for a good many years: nor have I found them to be at all deserving of the bad character so often given to them by other connoisseurs, who seem to have been exceptionally unfortunate in their experience with these birds. It is true that during the breeding season it is not safe to keep two pairs of them together, but at other times fifty will live in perfect harmony in the same enclosure, or even cage, nor will they, then, molest any other, even the smallest, bird.

When the nesting passion is strong upon them, however, they are as quarrelsome as Robins, and that is saying a good deal, and should on no account be kept with little birds. A pair of Cockateels, or Pennants, or even Redrumps may be lodged with them, and they will not materially interfere with one another; but Weavers, large or small, or Virginian Nightingales, not of speak of Canaries *et hoc genus omne*, they will at that season harass most unmercifully: but to give them a bad character, and even call them cannibals, and other hard names, for endeavouring, according to the light that is in them, to protect their nest and young, and drive away intruders, is, in my opinion, as unreasonable as it would be to blame a man, the father of a family, for shooting a burglar invading his premises in the middle of the night.

The Red-crested Grey Cardinal, *Cardinalis cucullatus*, *der graue Kardinal* in German, *le Paroaire ou Cardinal huppé* in French, is a bold handsome bird, whose head, ever erect crest, and throat are bright cardinal red; the breast, belly, and under tail coverts are white: a white collar almost meets at the back of the neck, which, as well as the back, rump, and wings are a delicate lavender grey. The tail is black, and the flight feathers of the wings are the same colour, but fringed on their outer aspect with a narrow line of grey.

The female is decidedly smaller than her mate, but so generally resembles him that it is difficult, unless to a very experienced eye, to say to which sex a given bird belongs: some females, however, have a patch of white on the wings, which is scarcely visible unless the bird is flying, when it becomes sufficiently conspicuous: I have never seen it in the male.

It is a curious fact that too liberal a supply of hemp seed, of which by the way these birds are extremely fond, will turn the beautiful white breast of the hen bird a dingy black, although I have not observed that it had the same effect upon the male. At the next ensuing moulting season, however, the bird will regain the usual spotless purity of its snow-white breast, providing the hemp seed is withheld.

The young resemble their parents, but are lighter in their body colours generally, and have smaller and darker crests.

The adult Grey Cardinal is about the same size as the English Song Thrush, and is every whit as hardy. I have found it a very free breeder in the aviary, producing two, sometimes three broods in the season, which commences in April or May, and is often prolonged into September. The eggs are from three to five in number, rather small for the size of the bird, and bearing a general resemblance in colour and markings to those of the European Blackbird. The young are hatched in the extraordinarily short time of twelve days, and grow rapidly if the weather is warm: if it is cold and

damp, however, they do not get on very well, but are apt to grow up lame and otherwise crippled, so that it is a good plan to take the young ones in-doors, and bring them up by hand, which is easily done on mealworms, beetles, ants' eggs, and egg and bread-crumbs.

The female will sometimes build a nest of grass, lined preferentially with horse-hair, in a bush; but more often she will avail herself of some artificial foundation for the nest, which is always a very neat and compact structure.

This bird is a mixed feeder, insects entering as largely into its diet as seeds; beetles, caterpillars, gentles, soaked bread or sponge-cake, and egg must be added to the ordinary diet when there are young ones to be fed; at other times canary, millet and a little hemp seed will be sufficient, with a few mealworms now and then, if the birds are kept in the house; but if the aviary is situated out of doors, the Cardinals will find enough animal food in their abode to preserve them in health and beauty.

I do not think that any one who has kept the Cardinal in a good-sized aviary could confine him in a cage, he is so active and lively, and seems so thoroughly to enjoy his comparative freedom. In the house, however, he will become very tame, taking flies and other insects from the fingers; or, if allowed to fly about the room he will nimbly catch them for himself upon the wing.

It would be quite easy to acclimatise these birds in England, were it not for cats and sportsmen, who are directly attracted by a strange bird, and cannot rest until they have compassed its destruction. This was the case with an old male I had kept for eight or nine years; he had escaped several times during that time, remaining out on one occasion for three days, when he returned to his cage; however, he went out once too often, for he never came back the last time, nabbed by a cat probably, or perhaps trapped by a neighbour.

The song of the Cardinal is Thrush-like and agreeable, and

he is very fond of serenading his mate, around whom he dances in the most grotesque fashion, with crest erect, and wings and tail outspread. He commences to sing with the dawn, and prolongs his music until darkness warns him that it is time to rest. He does not seem to care whether the day is warm or cold, for I have heard my birds singing as merrily when hopping about in the snow, as when the weather was warm, and the sun shining brightly overhead.

To resume: no bird, in my opinion, is more worthy of the notice of connoisseurs, and providing the following points are attended to, he will afford his owner the liveliest satisfaction, for he breeds freely, and, as a rule, is a most exemplary husband and father, although instances are on record in which, I am sorry to say, he proved himself to be neither. Give him plenty of room, and no aviary companion but his wife; nice dry hay and bass, or aloë fibre, to make the foundation of the nest, a wire basket hung up in a quiet corner, and a free supply of horse-hair to line the nest: attract moths into the enclosure by "sugaring", and flies by the bait of a piece of liver or lights, and he and his family will flourish to admiration.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### VIRGINIAN NIGHTINGALE, OR CARDINAL GROSBEEK.

THIS bird is a native of the Southern States of North America, where it is found in great numbers. As a songster I conceive it to have been vastly overrated; but it is a fine handsome bird that deserves a place in every collection. Although it is not as hardy a bird as the Grey Cardinal, it will nevertheless live for a number of years in the house: one that belonged to a friend of mine survived

for more than fifteen years, and was an adult bird when it came into his possession.

Slightly larger than the Grey Cardinal, the Cardinal Grosbeak is a much more brilliantly coloured bird: the male is of a uniform deep red, with the exception of his face, which is black: the crest can be raised and depressed at pleasure, and altogether this Grosbeak forms a very striking object in a garden aviary, where, providing he has a sufficiency of animal food, he will do very well all the year round.

The Cardinal Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes Cardinalis*; *der rothe Kardinal* in German, and *le Cardinal de Virginie* in French, is said to breed very freely in the aviary, but none of those I have possessed ever evinced the least disposition to do so, which is, perhaps, to be accounted for by the fact of their not having a sufficiently secluded corner in which to establish themselves.

The female is reddish brown, and although not nearly as showy and brilliant as her mate, is nevertheless a very pretty bird. In my experience these Grosbeaks have been quiet and peaceable, never interfering with any of their companions, whom, indeed, they permitted to bully them, without the least attempt at retaliation: but whether such a state of affairs would have continued if they had made up their minds to go to nest, I cannot say, but I do not consider it probable.

Acting on the recommendation of a recent writer on foreign birds, who says they will agree perfectly well together, I placed a pair of these birds in the same compartment of the aviary with a pair of Grey Cardinals, but was obliged, almost immediately, to remove them, or they would most certainly have been killed.

Mr. Wiener considers it is not difficult to breed this Grosbeak, "for he will build his nest in a box, or after the manner of Thrushes in a bush, and rear his brood with fair success, unless too many mealworms be given: the eggs are hatched in a fortnight, and both parents feed the young."

The same writer adds: "If I had had to name this bird, I should have felt inclined to call him Mephistopheles." Dr. Russ states that the eggs, which vary in number from four to six, are bluish white, speckled with olive green and brownish spots: he gives the names of a number of amateurs who have bred the Cardinal Grosbeak successfully in Germany, and relates that a pair which escaped in autumn made a nest in a wood, and reared four young ones during the following summer; so that there would be no difficulty in acclimatising them in this country, as far as climatic influences are concerned.

The song of the male bird is sufficiently pleasing, and the female also sings a little, but they are utterly unworthy of sharing with the Queen or rather King of Song the name of Nightingale: however, as they are among the best, if not the very best, of the American songsters, they may, perhaps, have permission to be so called in their native land, where they are, naturally, thought a good deal of.

When wild the Cardinal Grosbeak is pretty well omnivorous; seeds, fruit, green peas, and insects of all kinds finding favour with it as articles of diet: in the house it must be fed in a similar manner, substituting grocers' currants and raisins for ripe fruit in winter: if kept in a dark room, its plumage soon loses its brilliancy, and the rich Mephistophelian garb grows dull and brown, so that after a while the male can scarcely be distinguished from his sober-suited mate. These birds are extremely fond of bathing, and should always have access to a liberal supply of clean water for drinking and bathing purposes: a certain amount of insect food, for which egg and milk are but poor and inadequate substitutes, are essential to the well-being of these brilliant creatures.

The Cardinal Grosbeak is naturally shy and timid, and when newly imported must be treated carefully, every precaution being taken not to startle it, because when frightened it is apt to bang itself violently about the cage, and injure its head. It is a good plan when the bird is first brought into

the house, to keep it in a cage with a canvas top until it has become tame, and accustomed to its new surroundings, which a judiciously administered course of mealworms will effect in a week or two.

If the diet is not sufficiently liberal the Cardinal Grosbeak will moult with difficulty, fail to reproduce his feathers, and, perhaps, fall into a decline; otherwise I am not aware of his suffering from any disease, but have found him quite strong and hardy.

I append copies of two letters which I received from a correspondent relative to one of these birds, as I consider them instructive, illustrating as they do the beneficial effects of the mode of treatment I have just recommended.—

“July 13th., 1881.

Will you kindly give me some advice respecting Virginian Nightingales? A friend of mine bought one about six months ago, and paid sixteen shillings and sixpence for it, and the bird was in splendid plumage when he received it, and he had nothing to keep it in but a cage about two feet six inches long. After being in the cage about two months, the bird began to lose his feathers, beginning round his eyes, and so continued until he has lost them all except the flight feathers of the wings, and his tail, and there is no sign of any more coming in their place. He has been fed on canary and hemp seed mixed, nothing else, as my friend did not know what else to give him. The bird is now in my care. I am giving him canary seed, boiled egg, and blackbeetles, about two or three a day. Kindly advise me how to treat him, and oblige yours faithfully,

—”

The above graphic confession of ignorance would represent the amount of knowledge possessed by a very large number of persons who will keep birds, too often with even more disastrous results than those mentioned above. After some

months I received a second letter from my correspondent, whom I had advised to the best of my ability, and was gratified to find that my prescription had been of use.

“November 20th., 1881.

I must thank you for your kindness in answering my former letter concerning the Virginian Nightingale; and I am happy to be able to inform you that he has come into splendid plumage. I had not got a spare room to turn him into, as you advised, but I put him in a room with about thirty Canaries, with whom he has agreed perfectly. I am very anxious to hear him sing, but he has not made any attempt to do so as yet; and I am ignorant whether it is the right time of year at present or not, and should be so glad if you would give me some information on this point, also what kind of place these birds require for breeding in, as I am about to purchase a female.”

Whether or not my correspondent succeeded in breeding young Virginians the following summer I cannot say, but am inclined to doubt the fact, of which I should in all probability have been duly informed: still it is just possible he did; and if so, it will give me pleasure to hear from him again, should he chance to see these lines. I may also add that the Cardinal Grosbeak begins to sing about the middle of March, and continues his song far into July, or even to the beginning of August.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE LIOTHRIX.

THIS exceedingly pretty bird is of comparatively recent introduction, and is known to dealers and amateurs by a variety of names, among others by those of Pekin Night-

ingale, Japanese Robin, and *vice-versá*, and Sunbird, as well as by the specific name which I have adopted for the heading of this chapter.

The *Liothrix*, *Leiothrix luteus* in Latin, *der Sonnenvogel* in German, *le Rossignol du Japon* in French, is, Mr. Wiener thinks, more nearly allied to the Tits than the Warblers; but to me it seems a true Robin, with all the characteristics belonging to that family: namely, the large head, thick neck, sharp-pointed bill, full black eye, quick restless motion, sharp jerky little song, and general impatience of the presence of other members of its own species.

It is found in considerable numbers in the Himalayas, and also occurs in China and Japan, so that it is tolerably hardy, and indifferent to climatic influences; but, like all the soft-billed birds, keeping it involves a considerable amount of trouble, which few but true bird-fanciers would care to encounter. The food should consist of a mixture of bread-crumbs, soaked currants and grated carrot, also a little lean meat scraped fine, and as many insects as are procurable, especially ants' eggs, which tend to keep the bird in health; but mealworms must be given sparingly, if at all, as they are very stimulating. Some writers recommend crushed hemp seed, which I have found to disagree.

None of the Sunbirds I have possessed ever showed the slightest desire to make a nest; Dr. Russ, however, succeeded in breeding them as far back as 1874, and in the following year, if my memory serves me right, exhibited some of the young ones at the Crystal Palace Show. "The young of the *Liothrix*", he adds, "are more easily reared than those of most insectivorous birds."

The nest, according to the same high authority, is not a very elaborate affair, and is made sometimes in a bush, but more frequently in a little Hartz cage, or a small box, of which one half of the lid has been removed. It lays four eggs of a bluish or greenish white, spotted and speckled with

dull and bright red spots. Incubation lasts twelve days, and both parents assist alternately in the task. The young ones resemble the old birds, but are duller in all their colours.

The male *Liothrix* is about the same size as the English Robin, to which it bears a considerable resemblance. The back is greenish olive brown, changing to yellow on the head and grey on the sides. The throat and breast are bright orange; the wings are black, but each quill feather is bordered on its outer edge by a narrow line of orange chesnut; a conspicuous line of black extends down the sides of the throat from the corners of the mouth, for about half an inch, and give the bird the appearance of wearing a moustache, to which a number of projecting black bristles arising from the same spot give a further resemblance. The tail is shining black, and the three longest of the upper tail coverts are edged with white.

The female bears a general likeness to her mate, but is duller in all her colours, and has no white on the tail coverts.

These handsome birds seem to be rather subject to fits: several specimens I have lost having succumbed, almost instantaneously, to this distressing malady. One minute they seemed to be in the best of health and spirits, singing and dancing about the aviary, and the next they were struggling on the ground, and dead before relief could be afforded; a catastrophe which, in some instances, I attributed to hemp seed, and in others to a too liberal supply of mealworms.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE SPICE-BIRD.

THIS pretty little bird is about four and a half inches in length, of which the tail measures one inch and a quarter. The head, back, and wings are a bright chesnut brown, which is also the colour of the tail. The feathers on the rump are lighter than those of the back, and are bordered at their free edges by a darker line of brown, which gives a mottled, or undulated appearance to that part. The breast, neck, and sides are white, but each feather is marked with three semicircular bands of black, producing an ocellated effect. The belly and under tail-coverts are yellowish white. The beak is black, and the legs and feet greyish blue. The iris is dark brown.

The female is rather smaller than the male, lighter in colour, and has considerably more of the undulated markings on the rump.

These birds have no audible song, but are, nevertheless, most indefatigable warblers; it is quite amusing to watch one of them when pretending to sing: he suddenly starts up from a doze, stands upright on the perch, opens his beak, and ruffles his throat feathers, yet not a sound is heard, save, occasionally when the room is very still, a tiny indistinct murmur, like the distant chirp of a grasshopper, and the buzzing of bees. Then, when the performance has come to an end, the actor and his companions, who had been listening with bent head and evidently attentive ear on either side, all fly off to the seed-pan together.

Dr. Russ has succeeded in breeding these birds, but so far the achievement remains unique; and yet the Spice-bird is an indefatigable nest builder, piling enormous quantities of bass, fibre, and hay together in a bush, lining the small cavity in

the interior with feathers, but rarely producing an egg.

The Spice or Nutmeg Bird, *Spermestes punctularia*, der *Muskatvogel* in German, and *le Grosbec tacheté de Java* in French, is found in large numbers in all parts of India, and the islands of the Indian Ocean, whence it is imported in thousands into Europe every year: ten years ago I received a present of about twenty of these birds, brought over by a friend from Aden, and five of them are yet living, apparently in perfect health and vigour; while those of the little party that I have lost, with the exception of three that were accidentally poisoned, seemed to have died of old age. They are really very pretty birds, and perfectly harmless in the aviary.

These birds are frugal feeders, confining themselves almost entirely to white millet, though sometimes they will take a little canary seed by way of a change. They are very fond of pecking grass in flower, loving dearly to hop about through the long stalks: they are also much addicted to bathing, and will dip themselves four or five times a day in fine weather.

They seem to be quite hardy, for I have always kept mine in an unheated room, where however they had plenty of nesting accommodation, to which they usually retire at night. The only trouble I have had with them is from the overgrowth of their claws, which require to be regularly cut, especially if the birds are kept in a cage; but even when flying about a large room, where they necessarily wear them down more or less by hopping about on the gravel, the nails have to be looked to occasionally.

It was formerly thought that the Spice-bird was the origin of the Japanese Bengali, but Dr. Russ, by a series of careful experiments, has proved that these peculiar birds are descended from a little grey Finch, called *Spermestes acuticauda*, which I have never kept.

Since writing the above I have received a communication from a lady correspondent, to the effect that she has succeeded in breeding these birds in her conservatory.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## THE ORANGE-BREASTED WAXBILL.

THIS, the most charming of all the Waxbills, is the greatest favourite I have among the birds, native and foreign, I have ever kept, and I would not willingly be without a number of them in my bird-room. The total length of this bird is not quite three inches, of which the tail measures rather more than one inch.

The plumage of the male is dark greenish brown on the back; the throat is yellow, and the breast and belly bright orange, which in older specimens becomes so dark as to be almost black. The vent and rump are reddish orange, and the beak the colour of red sealing-wax, while a narrow line of vivid red runs from the angles of the mouth past the eyes to the middle of the head. The legs and feet are yellowish green.

The female is rather greyer than her mate on the upper parts of her body, and has no orange on her breast, which is a pale greyish yellow, deepening to dim orange at the vent.

These birds nest very freely in confinement, and live well in an unheated room, though natives of Western Africa. The eggs are very minute and quite white. The young are hatched in ten or twelve days, and are fed on sponge-cake, ants' eggs, soaked seeds, green food, especially the unripe seeds of grass, and aphides.

Although such miniature birds, the Orange-breasted Waxbills will live for a long time in confinement, and that, as I have said, in an unwarmed apartment; but they usually sleep in their snug little nests during the cold weather, from which they seem to receive no injury.

Dr. Russ relates an instance of one of these little things producing in one year the enormous number of one hundred and twenty-one eggs, from which fifty-four young ones were actually reared; and adds that even this extraordinary instance of prolificacy has been exceeded, which seems almost impossible.

The nest is neatly built in a cocoa-nut husk, or shell, of fine hay, aloe fibre, and blades of grass, and is lined with hair and small feathers: the female alone incubates, but is assiduously fed by her mate, who jealously guards the nest, driving away every other bird that ventures near the spot where his little wife is setting.

I am not aware of any disease peculiar to these birds, but have lost some hens from egg-binding: however, on the whole they are wonderfully enduring.

The large numbers of these birds that are annually imported from Western Africa enable them to be sold at a price that places them within reach of every amateur.

Among a multitude of scientific names given to these little birds I prefer that of *Estrela subflava*, which very well describes them: the German name is *das Goldbrüstchen*, and the French *le Sénégal à ventre orange*.

The song of the male is weak but sweet, and the way in which he dances, with outspread wings and tail, round his little partner, singing his song the while, is very amusing.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE ORANGE-CHEEKED WAXBILL.

THIS is another very charming little bird, rather larger than the Orange-breast, and quite as desirable in a collection. Its scientific name is *Estrela melpoda*: the Germans call it *das Orangebäckchen*, and the French *la Joue orange*.

The top of the head is dark grey, the back, wings, and tail reddish brown, and the rump and upper tail coverts bright red. Under and round the eye is a patch of orange, whence the name of the bird in English, German, and French. The chin is very light grey, almost white, the neck a little darker than the chin, and the breast and belly darker still; the beak is red, and the legs and feet bluish grey.

The Orange-cheek is a very active and lively little bird, but very shy: it is continually on the move, spreading its tail from side to side, and flitting restlessly from bough to bough in the aviary; the song is very trifling, and scarcely ever heard, except in the spring for a short time.

The female is, perhaps, a trifle greyer than her mate, but it is almost impossible to distinguish between the sexes: the best plan is to buy a number of these pretty little creatures, on the chance of there been some females among them, and there need be no fear of the unmated members of the party causing any disturbance, for they are extremely peaceable little things, and utterly incapable of fomenting a quarrel, much less getting up a fight.

I have not succeeded in getting these birds to breed; but other amateurs have been more fortunate, and I think it would not be difficult to rear them in a well-warmed conservatory, where the presence of aphides, of which the Orange-cheek is very fond, could be encouraged. At the same time they will live quite well all the year round in an unheated room; but, like the rest of the Waxbills, they, at that season, spend a great part of their time warmly tucked up in their cozy little nests.

The chief food of the Orange-cheeked Waxbill is millet, but canary seed, and soaked bread, or sponge-cake are occasionally partaken of; it is also very fond of green food, and of bathing, and has no special disease that I am aware of: the only deaths I have had among these birds having been from egg-binding in a couple of instances, and old age.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE DIAMOND SPARROW.

THE Diamond Sparrow called, among many other scientific names, *Amadina Lathamii*, and *Spermestes guttata*, which last I much prefer as descriptive of the bird, is named *der Diamant Sperling*, or *der Tropfenfink* by the Germans, and *L'Oiseau diamant* by the French.

It is about the size of an English Linnet, and is a very handsome bird, with a grey head, brownish grey back and wings, bright red rump, and short black tail about an inch long. The beak is red, the throat and neck white, a broad black band crosses the middle of the breast, the belly, vent, and under tail coverts are white, the sides are black, with a number of round white spots on them, from which peculiarity many of the bird's names are derived. The feet and legs are bluish grey, and between the beak and the eyes is a small black spot on either side of the head.

The female resembles the male in general appearance, but is rather larger, and has usually more white spots on her sides than he has; her head, too, is greyer: it is difficult, however, to say to which sex a given bird belongs, but when a pair are placed together, the more independent and bolder carriage of the male at once reveals his sex.

When wild, these birds live partly on insects and partly on seeds, building a large, rough, domed nest of grass, lined with feathers, on the top of a small bush, or even an isolated sapling, and lay five or six, or even seven or more, white eggs, which are hatched in about twelve days.

In the house these birds may be kept in a cage or in a bird-room or aviary. I have not tested their endurance out of doors during the winter, and I have not found them at all

quarrelsome, a character given to them by several writers. The female, if supplied with an abundance of building material, such as hay, bass, cocoa or aloe fibre, and feathers, makes a nest for herself in a bush; but if there are other birds in the aviary, she prefers the protection of a small box, or a German wicker-cage, usually rearing her young without the slightest difficulty or fuss on sponge-cake, soaked millet, bread, and ants' eggs: the young greatly resemble their parents.

The cry or call-note of the Diamond Sparrow is one of the most melancholy sounds I ever heard, and that, too, without being in the least degree musical; it is drawn out to an unconscionable length, and capable, I should think, of turning the brain of any unfortunate mortal condemned to listen to it continuously for any length of time. The male has a little song, which is tolerably sweet, but only heard during the brief season of courtship. There are frequently two, sometimes three broods in the season; but occasionally, if the hen has been disturbed by mice, or other birds, with her first brood, she will, apparently in disgust, give up the attempt to become a mother for the remainder of the year, and will not lay again till spring.

The Diamond Sparrow inhabits all the temperate parts of Australia, especially the valley of the river Murray, where I have frequently found its nest in the mallee scrub, but never at any great distance from water.

In the house a diet of seeds, canary and millet, with green food, grass and groundsel (poor groundsel) will keep these birds in perfect health; but when breeding they must, in addition, be supplied with the various extras already enumerated.

When it arrives in this country, the Diamond Sparrow is usually in the most deplorable condition, almost entirely featherless, and exhausted; but when transferred to a larger cage, or, better still, restored to comparative freedom in a large room or aviary, it soon regains its feathers and condition.

I have never lost a Diamond Sparrow except from egg-binding, a complication, however, to which it is not nearly so subject as many other foreign birds.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE RED-FACED LOVE-BIRD.

THIS miniature Parrot measures some five inches in total length, nearly two of which belong to the tail: it is a well-known and favourite bird with amateurs, who indulge in much harmless sentimentality over its constancy to and affection for its mate, which, as the supposed "pair" are very frequently of the same sex, is, I need scarcely say, no more than a popular, if pleasing, error; for one of these birds will live quite as well without a companion as with one, and does not seem in the least to mourn for the loss of a friend, much less die of grief unless a substitute for the departed is quickly found.

*Agapornis pullaria*, in German *der Unzertrennlliche*, or the inseparable, which is also its French name *l'Inséparable*, is a bright green bird, with a red mask extending round the beak to a varying depth according to the age of the specimen; it is a native of Abyssinia, and according to my experience not a long liver in this country, even when kept during the winter in a well-warmed conservatory. Other aviarists, however, have a different tale to tell concerning the Red-faced Love-bird, one in particular insinuating that he has even bred it in his bird-room, which I, in common with Dr. Russ and Mr. Wiener, am reluctantly compelled to doubt.

The female can be readily distinguished from the male Red-face, not by the extent or intensity of colour of her rubicund mask, which some writers tell us is the differentiating mark







THE RED-FACED LOVE-BIRD.



between the sexes, but by the under side of her wings being green, while those of her mate are black.

These birds are natives of the western coast of Africa, and are specially abundant in Abyssinia, where they are said to bring up their young families in the hollow branch of a tree, and to feed on all manner of seeds, preferring millet and maize, which should also be their chief food in this country, taking care that both seeds are frequently given soaked.

The principal disease to which these birds are subject is decline; brought on, I have no doubt, by confining them to a dry and insufficiently nutritious diet. I have not any of them in my collection at present, but if I thought of getting any more, I should feed them altogether on soaked seeds, millet, maize, and oats: but I hold them most uninteresting whether kept in cage or aviary, for they are listless and apathetic to an aggravating degree, seldom stirring from the perch where they sit dozing for hours side by side, except when impelled by the cravings of their appetite: they have no song that I have ever heard, scarcely a squeak, and have not, I think, ever learned to repeat a word.

The only way, I imagine, to induce these birds to breed in England, would be to place them in a conservatory, where the temperature would continually remind them of their native land, and then, if provided with suitable hollow logs, they might perhaps condescend to nest; but seeing that they can now be bought for a mere trifle in all the bird-shops, I do not think it would be worth any one's while to try the experiment, except, perhaps, once from curiosity.

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## CHAPTER XL.

## THE MADAGASCAR LOVE-BIRD.

THIS is a much nicer, more interesting, and hardier bird than the Abyssinian, which it about equals in size: the general colour of the plumage is bright green, but the head and neck of the male are pale lavender: the female is uniformly green, so that there is no chance in this case of manipulating hens, as is said to have been done with the Budgerigar; though I am strongly inclined to believe that such a paltry fraud has never been practised to any extent, if, indeed, at all.

The Grey-headed Parrakeet, *Agapornis cana*, *der graukopfige Zwergpapagei*, *la Perruche à tête grise*, is a native of the island of Madagascar, whence considerable numbers of these pretty and interesting birds are annually imported into Europe, where, however, especially in Holland, they are largely bred in aviaries.

Not long ago the White-headed Love-bird was very dear in London, but he can now be purchased very nearly as cheaply as the Budgerigar, or the Red-faced Parrakeet. I have kept these pretty creatures for some time, but have not, so far, succeeded in inducing them to make a nest, although they seem to be in as perfect health, as they certainly are in feather. Many other amateurs, however, have reared them successfully, and a recent article in a tri-weekly newspaper, describing their mode of nidification in the writer's aviary, confirms the account given by Mr. Wiener of their peculiar habits in this respect.

“The Grey-headed Love-birds”, says that graphic and agreeable author, “construct a kind of nest in a curious way, for they will tear wood into strips, and placing these strips

between the feathers of their back, will carry them into the hole selected for a nest. As these bits of wood mostly fall to the ground during their flight, or in entering the nest, extraordinary assiduity and patience are shown by the quantity of splinters which a hen Grey-headed Love-bird accumulates in her nest."

The lady whose account of these birds I have already alluded to, says that they carry paper and bits of twigs, as well as splinters of wood into their breeding place, which is certainly a curious fact, quite contrary to the general custom of the Parrot family, which, with the exception of the birds under consideration and the Rosy-faced Love-birds, *Agapornis roseicollis*, lay their eggs on the bare wood.

Little is known of the habits of these pretty birds in their wild state, but in the house I have found some of them peaceable, although Dr. Russ warns amateurs against placing them in a small cage with little birds, whose legs, he says, they are apt to bite.

They feed, in the house, on canary and millet seed, but will also eat oats, hemp seed and bread-crumbs. They do not appear to suffer from the cold of our winters in an unwarmed room, but I have not tested their endurance out of doors. The breeding season, in this country, commences about October. They are strong flyers, and active and sprightly little birds.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE BLUE-WINGED LOVE-BIRD.

**T**HIS very charming little Parrot is smaller than either the Red-faced Abyssinian, or the White-headed Madagascarene Love-bird; in colour it is bright green, with blue on the rump and large wing coverts.

In the female the rump is the same colour as the rest of her body, and the blue patch on her wings smaller than in the case of her spouse.

It is a native of Brazil, but, like many other importations from that country, is, nevertheless, perfectly hardy, and apparently quite indifferent to the many vicissitudes of our ever changing climate.

Dr. Russ, to quote once more from that distinguished naturalist and authority in all matters pertaining to bird lore, has succeeded in breeding these birds to the third generation; but the specimens in my possession have not as yet attempted to perpetuate their race.

The Blue-wing, which is also called the Passerine Parrot, or Parrakeet, is one of the very few foreign birds described by Bechstein in his admirable book, published originally in 1792; he gives it the name of *Sperlings papagei*, its scientific appellation is *Psittacus passerinus*, and its French name *La Perruche passerine été*, or *le Troui été* (Buffon).

So far I have found these birds quite peaceable in the aviary, and Dr. Russ says that they are usually so, though an old male will sometimes attack small birds and bite their legs. Like the rest of the Parrot family, the Blue-wings are said to nest in the hollow branch of a tree, but I cannot say whether or not they make a nest of splinters of wood like their relatives of the white head, and the rosy face.

In the house their food consists of millet and canary seed, but they also eat hemp, especially in winter, and seem to like it. I have not observed them bathe, but they like to roll in wet grass, after the fashion of the Budgerigar. They are not such active birds as the White-heads on the wing, but are for ever climbing among the branches in the aviary, where they may frequently be seen walking head downwards from one end of a bough to the other.

The male has a sharp little cry, which would be called a harsh scream if it were louder.

They do not learn to speak, wrote Bechstein, but are very sociable and affectionate, which is quite correct; but the father of bird-lore very seldom made a mistake.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE PARADISE WHYDAH-BIRD.

FEW amateurs would consider their collection complete without a pair, or two, of these curious birds, which, in spite of their wonderful tails, and glossy black plumage, are not great favourites of mine, for I have been rather unfortunate in my experience with them, having rarely been able to keep them for more than a year or so.

Between January and July both sexes of this species are alike in colour, and somewhat resemble a Grey Linnet, which they about equal in size, although the undress tail of the male is decidedly longer than that of the English bird.

About midsummer the male of the Whydah-bird begins to put on his wedding dress, which consists of a deep, almost jet, black body-coat, with a broad collar of rich chesnut-brown; his vest and continuations are snow-white, and in a surprisingly short time he produces four black tail feathers, the outer pair of which are more than twice the length of his body, occasionally attaining the prodigious length of fourteen inches from shaft to tip.

The female retains her simple brown costume throughout the year, but can readily, at all seasons, be distinguished from her mate by her inferior size.

The Whydah family, generally, have a curious habit of scratching with their feet in the sand that should always be plentifully scattered on the floor of their abode; and this they presumably do in search of insects, for I have never

seen them pick up any of the seeds they might have uncovered: and it is, perhaps, in consequence of their inability to procure this kind of food that I have failed in my attempts to keep them for any length of time.

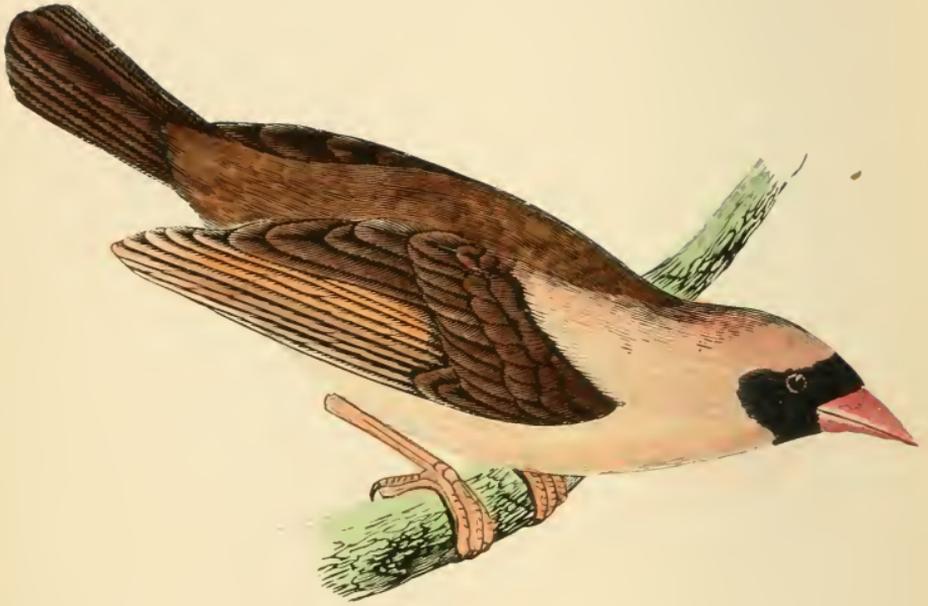
Decline, and inability to cast their feathers, seem to be the principal diseases incidental to these birds: those I have lost appeared in good health only two or three days before their death. One day I found them sitting bundled up on their perch, with head under wing; the next they were unable to fly, and on the following morning I found them stiff and cold, and nothing but a bag of bones.

The Whydahs will eat mealworms and blackbeetles, small ones, but I do not fancy that these insects agree with them: a friend of mine who lives in South Africa has told me that these birds chiefly subsist when wild on a kind of small shining beetle that is very abundant in the woods frequented by these beautiful and quaint-looking creatures.

I well remember the feeling of longing, not to say envy, with which, then a youngster myself, I contemplated a sailor lad at Havre, who was carrying one of these remarkable creatures in a bamboo cage past the window of the house where we were staying; presumably the young fellow was just off ship, and had brought the bird from Africa as a present for his mother, or possibly for someone "nearer and dearer" still, if that can be. Yet, when my desire was fulfilled, many years afterwards, and I became the actual possessor of a real live pair of Whydah-birds, I did not care nearly as much about them as might have been expected: which, after all, is human nature.

To resume: *Vidua paradisea*, die *Paradies Witve*, and *la Veuve à Collier d'or*, as the bird is named in Latin, German and French, respectively, is, properly speaking the Whydah-bird: the popular designation of "widow" bird being, I fancy, a free translation of the Latin word *vidua*, as their true name was Latinised by Linnæus, rather than an actual name be-





THE RED-BEAKED WEAVER





stowed upon them by that distinguished naturalist, in consequence of their sombre appearance; for they are really not at all widow-like, but, on the contrary, rather gay, and, if not exactly vivacious in manner, yet not quite as quiet and subdued as a mourning widow is popularly supposed to be.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE RED-FACED WEAVER-BIRD.

**I** ONCE, and once only, possessed two of these birds, which had been sold to me for a pair, but turned out to be two males, and I found them the most indefatigable constructors of neat toy nests I ever saw.

They were small birds, about the size of the Greater Redpoll, or Siskin, and when out of colour bore a great resemblance to a hen House Sparrow: but when they assumed their summer dress, the ordinary brown and black of their feathers became intensified, and a ring of deep red made its appearance round their beaks.

I am not quite certain of their identity, but imagine them to have been a variety of the Red-headed Weaver, *Ploceus erythroptus*, *der rothkopfige Webervogel* of the Germans, and *la Dioche à tête rouge* of the French. Unfortunately they did not remain very long in my possession, for, having sent them to one of the bird shows at the Crystal Palace, someone took a fancy to them, and, in spite of the supposed prohibitive price I had placed upon them, became their purchaser.

While they were with me I fed them on canary and millet, with a few mealworms now and then, and they seemed in capital health and spirits.

All the Weavers are natives of Southern Africa, except one species found in Madagascar, *Ploceus Madagascariensis*, which

is a gorgeously appareled bird, that has been acclimatised in St. Helena, the Island of Reunion and the Mauritius.

Though I have often looked for them, I have not hitherto met with any more of the Red-faced Weavers in the shops of the London dealers, and imagine them to be rather scarce.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE RUFIOUS OR RED-BEAKED WEAVER.

IN its undress this bird is almost exactly like that described in the last chapter, but the summer dress of the male at once proves it to belong to a different species. When in colour, the whole of the breast and belly become a bright yellowish red, and a beautiful bloom appears on the brown and grey back.

The female, of course, does not change her dress, and may be known from the male when out of colour by her smaller size. The beak, in both sexes, is coral red. The tail of these birds is peculiarly short, not measuring more than an inch, or thereabouts, the total length of the bird being four and a half inches.

The Red-beaked Weaver is also an indefatigable nest builder, and the way he commences his task extremely curious. Having fixed upon an appropriate site for his operations, he commences by binding two twiglets together with a piece of fibre, forming a circle, round which he twists blades of grass, or pieces of fibre, but preferring fresh grass, when he can get it: as soon as the circle is about the thickness of a goose-quill, he begins to extend it, and standing at what forms the entrance of the future nest, he weaves on, gradually contracting the opening, until at length it disappears and a perfect nest is formed:

then turning round he fills up the opening, reducing it from a diameter of about three inches, to one of an inch and a half. The nest being then finished, the little architect forsakes it, and proceeds to build another, leaving his work of many days to be occupied by a pair of Waxbills, who delight in such structures which they partially fill with feathers or cottonwool.

The real nest of the Weaver-bird, always the work of the female, is a much more elaborate affair than that which I have just described, but is very seldom constructed in this country; and when it is occasionally made, it is still less frequently occupied, for it is very rare indeed for any of the Weaver-birds to breed in captivity.

Like the preceding species, the Red-beaked Weaver, *Ploceus sanguinirostris*, *der rothschnabeliger Webervogel* in German, called *le Travailleur* by the French, can be kept on a seed diet for a long time, but appears to moult better if a few insects are added now and then.

These birds are perfectly hardy, and may be kept out of doors all the year round, if first turned out in June or July, and the coldest weather scarcely stops the building labours of the male.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE COMMON WAXBILL.

THIS is a delightful little creature, about the same size as the Zebra, or Orange-breasted Waxbill, and is often called the Lavender Finch, and the St. Helena Waxbill, but erroneously so, for it is quite a different bird from either of those with which it is occasionally confounded.

The prevailing colour of this little Waxbill is a delicate grey, lighter on the under than on the upper parts of the body;

the wings and tail are black, and the vent and under tail coverts rose. A red line starts from the insertion of the red beak, crosses the eye, and reaches to the middle of the head on either side.

These small creatures are very hardy, very pretty, and most inoffensive: they are very fond of nest-making, and occasionally deposit a tiny white egg in the enormous mass of hay, fibre and feathers they are pleased to consider a nest. I have not succeeded in getting them to set, but Dr. Russ has often bred them.

The chief food of these birds is white millet; but they will eat sponge-cake, and even soaked bread, but are particularly fond of aphides, which they will clear off the branches of a rose-tree with a rapidity quite wonderful to behold.

It is one of the prettiest sights imaginable to see a number of these delicate little things sitting close together on a bough, engaged in preening their feathers, or singing their pretty little song; then, as soon as they are tired of singing, or have finished their toilette, it is most amusing to watch their antics when sporting among the boughs, or helping themselves from the seed pan, where with outspread wings and ever twitching tail they recall to mind a little poem, "Puppy Dogs' Tails," that appeared, some years ago, in a long since defunct periodical.

"Now there hangs by these tails a peculiar fact,  
For the reason of which I am mentally rackt;  
'Tis that whether in anger, in pain, or in play,  
They continue eternally wagging away,"

which is an undoubted fact, and a very pretty sight in the case of the birds under consideration.

When the breeding season has set in the scene changes: what quarrels and jealousies one has to witness among these small people! how they chase each other about the aviary, with shrill and angry cries! how they tilt against each other

on the wing for the possession of some coveted nesting place! but the tiny combatants are so light that the severest tussels in which they engage are very harmless affairs indeed.

The Common Waxbill is perfectly hardy, and will live for years in an unwarmed bird room, but will not, under such circumstances, breed, even if a few eggs are now and then deposited: but if its native climate of Western Africa can be reproduced for its benefit in this cold and smoke-begrimed island, few birds will rear a greater number of young ones in a season, on a diet of soaked seeds, ants' eggs, sponge-cake and aphides.

One or two I have lost from egg-binding, and a few more apparently from old age. It is said that they will live out of doors all the year round, but this I have not proved.

The scientific name of this species is *Estrelida*, or *Ægintha cinerea*, the Germans call it *die graue Astrild*, and the French *le Bec de Corail ordinaire*.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE SILVERBILL.

THE subject of the present chapter is one of the sweetest and most indefatigable little songsters with which I am acquainted: in fact he scarcely ever stops singing, and the female is almost as accomplished a performer as her mate.

The Silverbills are very gentle and inoffensive birds, breeding freely, whether in cage or aviary; all they require for nesting purposes being a cocoa-nut shell, not husk, and some fine hay and feathers.

The length of this bird is about three and a half inches, of which one inch and a quarter belong to the tail. The sexes are very much alike in appearance, so much so that it is

difficult to tell which is which. The female is, perhaps, a trifle smaller, and just a shade lighter in colour than the male, so that when seen together, she may with tolerable certainty be picked out: but when viewed alone it would take a very experienced eye indeed to determine to which sex a given bird belonged.

The head, back, and large wing coverts are light brownish grey, the shoulders and flight feathers of the wings are many shades darker, and the tail so dark that it appears almost black. The throat and breast are a little lighter than the back; the belly and lower tail coverts are almost white; the beak is a bluish silver grey, the lower mandible being paler than the upper. The legs and feet are greyish flesh colour.

These little birds will, under favourable circumstances, produce two or three broods, of from three to five young ones, in the season, and rear them on soaked seed, sponge-cake, ants' eggs, and aphides.

The best way to induce all the small Finches and Grosbeaks to breed in this country, is to turn them into a large conservatory, well planted with common evergreen shrubs, the larger the better, where the temperature can be properly regulated, and maintained equably all the year round, when brood after brood of every kind will make its appearance to delight the heart of the owner, and put money in his pocket too: if an abundant supply of aphides can be cultivated in the place, success will be even more certain.

I am aware that many connoisseurs will exclaim at this, and say that they have perfectly well succeeded without any such fuss, in an ordinary aviary: but cross-questioned, I fancy, they would be fain to admit that their "success" consisted of a few odd birds now and then, not always successfully reared, and frequently crippled and deformed. Let them try my plan, and I am satisfied they will admit, after trial, that it is the only way to command real success.

One other point must always be remembered, viz: that

birds of the same size only, and living upon the same kind of food, should be kept in the same enclosure.

That the Silverbill has been officially recognised as a musician of no mean ability, is manifest from the scientific name of *Munia cantans* that has been bestowed upon it. The Germans and the French, however, like ourselves, take its name from the colour of its beak, and call it, respectively, *der Silberschnabel*, and *le Bec d' Argent*.

These birds appear to be very hardy, for I have been able to keep them for years, at all seasons, in an unwarmed room; the only losses I have had having been from egg-binding in one or two cases, and from old age in one or two more.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE BENGALI.

THE first time I ever saw any of these curious little birds was at one of the Crystal Palace Shows, some years ago, when a pair were exhibited in the "any other variety" class, and attracted a good deal of attention, though I forget whether they obtained a prize. They spent the greater part of their time in a cocoa-nut shell half filled with cotton wool, and seemed such nervous, chilly little beings that, after a look at them, I passed on, and dismissed their memory from my mind as utterly unattainable; nor was it until some considerable time had elapsed that I again saw some of them at a dealer's, when, although the price was very high, I invested in a pair; which, however, turned out badly with me, for the hen died egg-bound soon afterwards, and the cock, who did not seem to miss his wife in the least, grew so enormously fat, that he dropped off his perch one day in an apoplectic fit.

The Bengali is supposed by Dr. Russ to be descended from the Sharp-tailed Finch (*Munia acuticauda*), and by others from the Striated Finch (*M. striata*); the plumage of these birds having undergone so many alterations during centuries of domestication, that, as in the case of the Canary, it is now difficult to determine exactly from which original they are really descended.

The Bengali is about four inches in length, one inch and a quarter of which belong to the tail, the two central feathers of which appendage are pointed, and a quarter of an inch longer than the others.

There are said to be three varieties of Bengalis, the pure white, the white and brown, and the white and buff; but as these varieties, so called, do not always breed true to colour, it is at least doubtful whether they are not one and the same.

Like most of the small Finches, these birds prefer to make their nest in a cocoa-nut shell, a small box, or better still, in the deserted toy-nest of a Weaver-bird; where, as a rule, they breed as freely and with as little trouble to their owner as a Canary, or less. The adult Bengali lives on canary and millet seed; but where there are young ones in the nest to be fed, sponge-cake, ants' eggs, and soaked seeds, must in addition be supplied. These birds are not always good feeders; though I imagine that much of the failure experienced with them is owing to the presence of parasites in the nest, which either so torment the old birds that they desert their brood, or so weaken the young ones that they are unable, from want of rest, and actual loss of blood, to stand up in the nest to be fed, and soon die miserably from exhaustion.

I need scarcely, in this connection, observe that prevention is very much better, if not easier, than cure; and would recommend Keating's insect powder, well sprinkled over the nest, which will prevent the appearance of vermin, and quickly





THE JAVA SPARROW.





kill them if any are present: it may safely be dusted over eggs and young birds, providing the latter are not actually gaping at the time when it is being used, for if it were to get down their throats it would certainly not have a beneficial effect upon them, if indeed it did not kill them outright.

I have already mentioned the diseases to which I have found the Bengalis subject, and would merely further remark under this heading, that it is unwise to turn them at once into a large aviary after purchase; for they have so long been used to a confined space, that they seem to have partially lost the use of their wings, and are lost and bewildered when they find themselves turned loose, and not unfrequently perish from absolute inability to find their food.

The better plan is to transfer them into a cage about twice the size of the one they have been accustomed to, and to go on gradually increasing the dimensions of their abode until they are able to use their wings, and make their way about.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE JAVA SPARROW.

THESE really handsome birds are very old favourites with fanciers, and were comparatively common in Bechstein's time. "There are few vessels", said that excellent authority on bird-matters, toward the close of the last century, "coming from Java, and the Cape of Good Hope, that do not bring numbers of these birds, which have as bad a character in those countries, and particularly in China, their native place, as the Sparrows have amongst us, on account of the ravages they make in the rice fields. They have nothing attractive but their beauty, for their song is short and monotonous. They cost four or five pounds sterling a pair in Germany."

There are one or two points in the foregoing extract that require a little explanation: in the first place, the Java Sparrow, *Loxia oryzivora* (Linnæus), *der Reisvogel* (Russ) and *le Padda* (Buffon), is not a native of the Cape of Good Hope, nor is it indigenous in China, although largely bred there: its natural habitat is Java, Borneo, Sumatra, and the Islands of the Indian Ocean, and the price has declined from that mentioned by Bechstein, to some three, four, or even less, shillings a pair.

The Java Sparrow is about the size of an English Bullfinch, but as it is a much more closely feathered bird, it appears smaller. The beak is large and thick, and of a reddish rose colour; the head and throat are black, and the cheeks white; the tail and flight feathers of the wings are black, but all the rest of the upper part of the body is a delicate slate grey; the breast and belly have a purplish tinge, and the under tail-coverts are white. "The whole plumage," says Buffon, speaking of the Java Sparrow, "is so well arranged that no one feather passes another, and they all appear downy, or rather covered with that kind of bloom which you see on ripe plums."

The female is exactly like her mate, which can only be distinguished from her by his somewhat more bounceable manner; for it is a mistake to suppose, as Bechstein seems to have done, that the hen Java Sparrow "is irregularly spotted with dark brown on the cheeks and lower part of the belly."

Captive Java Sparrows breed freely enough, whether in cage or aviary, if supplied with nesting material, hay, grass, feathers, etc., and suitable nesting places, such as cocoa-nut husks, small boxes, Hartz-cages, and such like; though I have not myself succeeded in obtaining young ones from them, but that may be because I have taken no pains with them, but left them very much to themselves, and even then I think they would have bred successfully if they had not been disturbed by mice.

The white variety, which is a Japanese creation, is said,

both by Dr. Russer and Herr Wiener, to be very easily kept and bred: however, as I have not tried it, I shall merely observe that it is much cheaper than it used to be, the price having declined from £3 to eighteen shillings or fifteen shillings a pair.

The common Java Sparrow is a perfectly hardy bird, and may be safely wintered out of doors; it is a frugal feeder, and will thrive on canary and millet seed.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE SAFFRON FINCH.

THIS bird, of which the scientific name is *Sycalis Braziliensis*, the German *der Safranfink*, and the French *le Chardonneret à front d'or*, is one of the most charming birds I know, and is, I fancy, the same that is described by Bechstein under the name of *der grüne Stieglitz*, for in some specimens the deep orange tint of the forehead in the male assumes a positively red shade, such as the Father of cage-bird lore attributes to his Green Goldfinch.

In size the Saffron Finch is equal to an ordinary Norwich Canary, with which bird it freely forms an alliance, and hybrids are said to have been obtained from it by Dr. Russ, and others; but the eggs of a Canary I paired with one of these birds were all barren. The general colour of the Saffron Finch is greenish yellow, the throat and forehead are golden orange, and the flight and tail feathers black, with yellowish green edges.

The colours of the female are lighter than those of the male, and she bears a considerable resemblance to a buff cinnamon Canary that has been moulted on green food, for she

has very little orange on her head, and none to speak of on her throat.

The young, on leaving the nest, are very much like a hen Sparrow, and they do not attain to their full plumage until they are two years old, at which time also they first evince a desire to breed: I do not assert this to be their universal custom, but in my experience of them it is so.

The nest is made in a cocoa-nut husk with a largish opening, or a shell, or small box, of hay, fibre, etc., and lined with hair and feathers; the eggs, which are from four to six in number, vary greatly in colour, some being as light as those of a Canary, and others so dark as to be almost black. It is a curious fact that, although barren, the eggs laid by my hen Norwich Canary that was paired with a Saffron Finch greatly resembled those of the latter bird in colour. The period of incubation lasts about thirteen or fourteen days, and I have not observed that the male took any part in it, though he was most attentive in feeding the young, which are easily reared on soaked bread, insects and soaked seed.

The song of the male Saffron Finch is sweet, but he introduces some harsh notes into it that somewhat mar its effect.

I have not found these birds quite as hardy as most of the other Brazilians, for they do not seem able to stand our winters without a good deal of protection out of doors: though at the same time they are certainly not as delicate as Mr. Gedney says they are; for I have kept them for eight or nine years in perfect health and increasing beauty, while he says he has lost upwards of twenty pairs in the same time, which is, surely, a most unfortunate experience.

During the breeding season these birds will eat insect food, on which they chiefly feed their nestlings, but at other times they are quite content with seed.

The Saffron Finch will soon become very tame, and indeed I know of few more desirable birds: some writers assert them to be quarrelsome, but I have not found them so.

## CHAPTER L.

## GOFFIN'S COCKATOO.

I HAVE already said so much about this bird in my "Amateur's Aviary", that very little now remains to be added. His scientific name is *Psittacus* or *Cacatua Goffini*, in German he is called *der Goffin's Kakadu*, and in French, *le petit Cacatois à huppe rougeâtre*. He is a native of the Solomon Islands; the general colour of his plumage, which secretes a quantity of pearly white powder not unlike glove chalk, is white; the under wing feathers are pale primrose yellow, and so are the under tail coverts, but the crest feathers, which are broad and white, are reddish salmon colour at the base, with the exception of the largest in front, which are white throughout.

Goffin's Cockatoo is about the same size as the common Grey Parrot, his beak is greyish white, and his feet and legs a very pale slate colour: the iris of the eye is black in the male, and brown in the female, which may thus be distinguished at a glance from her partner: difference of size exists among these birds, but indicates age, not sex; they grow slowly, and live for a great many years: mine is now fifteen years in England, and shows not the least sign of decrepitude as yet. It is a very intelligent bird, a good talker, and could, I believe, be easily bred, if a young healthy pair could be obtained. Being scarce it commands a high price in the bird market; as much as £5 or £6 being asked for an adult specimen.

The ordinary diet of Goffin's Cockatoo should be canary and hemp seed, but he may also be given boiled potato, rice cooked, bread, and a little egg, or a well-picked chicken bone

now and then assists him to moult, but should not be given too frequently or his feathers will be always falling out. I have not observed that he drinks much, but if given a dry crust, he will at once dip it in his water tin, and not attempt to eat it until he thinks it has been sufficiently soaked. He is a very hardy bird, as well as a long liver, and I know of no complaints to which he is subject. I certainly lost the only female I ever possessed in a fit, caused, I think, by egg-binding; but this I suspect was more an accident arising from her age, than from natural delicacy of constitution.

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## CHAPTER LI.

### THE ROSY COCKATOO.

**T**HIS is a very handsome but not, in my opinion, a desirable bird: true, I have never owned but a single specimen, but which I found so highly objectionable in every respect, that I have not had the courage to venture on another.

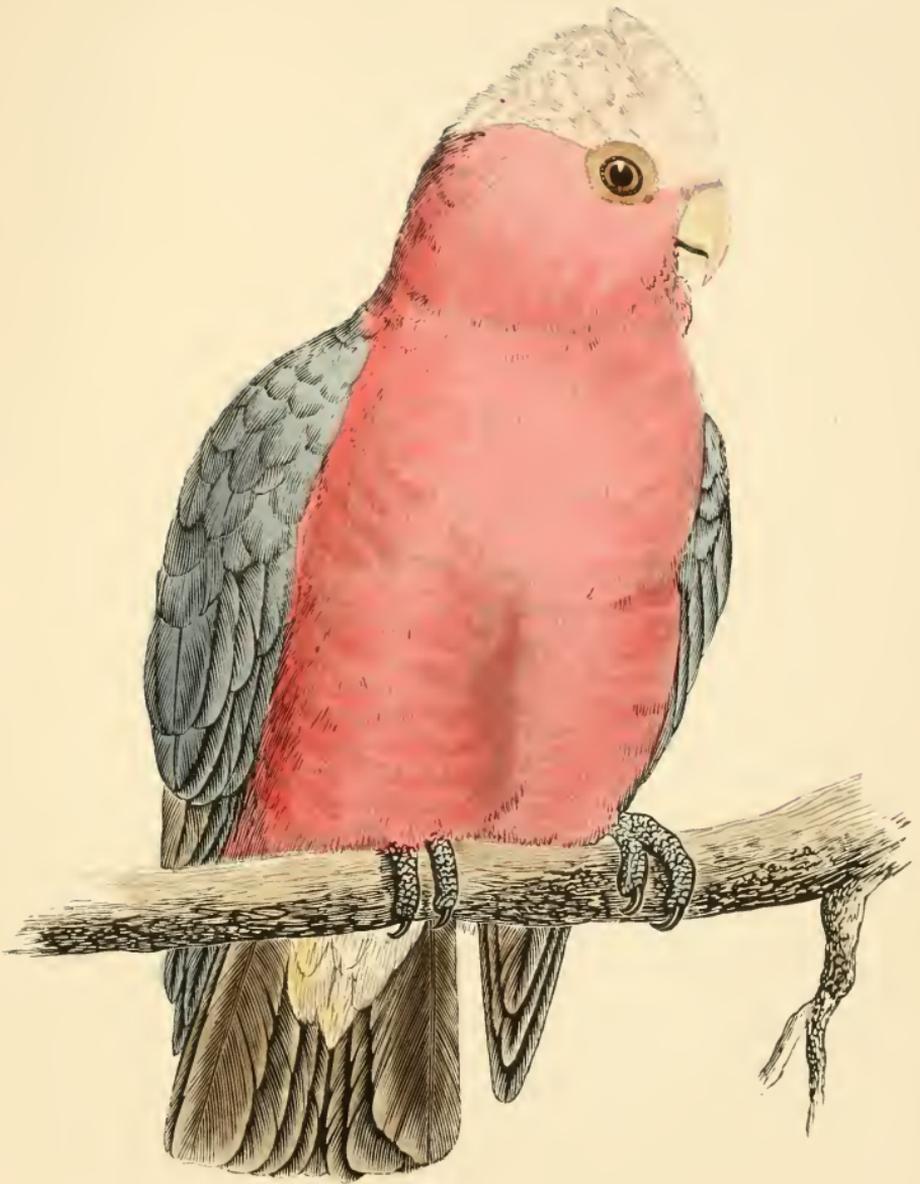
The Rosy, or Rose-breasted Cockatoo is about the same size as the bird described in the last chapter; the upper part of its body is slate grey, the under rose colour; the short crest is rose and white, and the under part of the tail black.

The male, as in the case of Goffin's Cockatoo, can be readily distinguished by the black colour of the iris, that of the female being brown; otherwise the sexes are indistinguishable apart.

These birds are fed on canary and hemp seed, with the addition of oats and soaked maize as a change, now and then. They do not learn to speak much, but one of them will occasionally say a word or two: they scream, however, awfully and almost incessantly: but on the other hand, are quite hardy and will survive in captivity for a number of years.







THE ROSE-BREA-STD COCKATOO.



The scientific name of the Rosy Cockatoo is *Psittacus roseicapillus*; in German *des rosenrothe Kakadu*, and in French *le Cacatois gris-rose*.

To Mr. Gedney belongs the distinction of being the only person who has, so far, succeeded in breeding the Rosy Cockatoo in captivity; but what he has done can, no doubt, be accomplished by others, that is, if they think it worth their while, which I certainly do not, to make the attempt.

Both the Rosy and Goffin's Cockatoos require a very strong cage or aviary to lodge them in, for they have immensely powerful beaks, which they are only too ready to exercise on the furniture when they have the chance.

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## CHAPTER LII.

### THE RING-NECKED PARRAKEET.

THIS well known species, which, strange to say, is not alluded to by Bechstein, although its Plum-headed relation (*Palæornis cyanocephalus*) is, is the only member of the Parrot family that inhabits the African and Asiatic continents, whence it used formerly to be imported into Imperial Rome; and is probably the only bird belonging to the *Psittacidae* that was known to the ancients.

It abounds in most parts of India, and is especially plentiful in the vicinity of Calcutta. Once this bird has become tame and acclimatised it bears our climate well, and will live for quite a number of years in the house. It is said to be spiteful with other Parrots, but I have never tried it in an aviary out of doors, so cannot say anything to its conduct under such conditions.

The general colour of the species is green, lighter below

than above: the throat is black, and a ring, partly of the same colour, and partly rose, surrounds the neck; whence some of the names by which it is known: its scientific designation is *Psittacus* or *Palæornis torquatus*, the French call it *la Perruche à collier rose*, but the Germans have given it the name of *der kleine Alexander Sittich*.

This bird measures about twenty inches in total length, ten of which belong to the tail: the "*Gefiederte Welt*" for 1873 contains an account of the successful endeavours of a pair of these birds belonging to Herr Otto Wiegand, to rear a brood of their own.

Some of the Ring-necked Parrakeets learn to speak very freely and distinctly, while others are not at all docile, and can scarcely say a word.

The staple diet is hemp and canary seed; milk and meat cause irritation of the skin, in order to allay which the unhappy bird plucks out its feathers until it leaves itself quite bare.

It is not a great drinker, but it is, nevertheless, cruel to keep the poor creatures without water, under which circumstances their thirst compels them to eat a great deal more "sop" than they can digest: still, the notion has taken a firm hold on the public mind, that Parrots require nothing to drink; so firm, indeed, that the authorities of the London Zoological Gardens deprive many of the Parrots under their care of water, and maintain that this is the proper course to adopt towards them: in reply to which I would merely request the visitor at the "Zoo" to look at the labels on the cages in the Parrot House, and, if I am not very grievously mistaken, I think he will find the greater part of them to be of ominously recent date.

My Ring-neck was very fond of bathing, and drank moderately: maize and oats may be given occasionally by way of a change.

## CHAPTER LIII.

## THE COMMON RING OR LAUGHING DOVE.

THIS familiar pet of my boyhood ought, perhaps, to have been included among the British, and not among the foreign birds I have kept, for like the Canary, though of exotic origin, it has long since become naturalized in this country.

Unlike the Canary, however, it has, so far, scarcely departed from its original; only one variety, the White, often called the Japanese Dove, has been produced: and even this is doubtful, for it frequently has red eyes, and is probably nothing but an albino.

It used to be kept much more frequently some years ago than it is at present, new and more showily feathered species having taken its place in the estimation of juvenile connoisseurs, to whose consideration I can nevertheless most heartily recommend it as a very charming pet, capable of becoming so tame as to sit on its young owner's shoulder, and eat bread and seed from his hand. It is not well to let these birds fly out of doors, for they have none of the homing instinct of the Pigeon, and will sooner or later stray and be lost.

The Laughing Dove is about twelve inches in length, and is reddish grey above, and whitish grey on the under parts of the body; the legs and feet are red, and a semicircle of black marks the back of the neck and gives the bird one of its names, the Ring or Collared Dove; its scientific designation is *Columba risorius*, its French name *la Tourtouvelle à collier*, and its German name *die Lachtaube*, or the Laughing Dove.

There is scarcely any difference in the appearance of the

sexes; the female, however, is if anything a trifle smaller than her mate.

The cooing of these birds has some resemblance to laughter, and when the cock bird is addressing his spouse, he does not turn round like the true Pigeons, but hops forward, stops, bows his head, and swells out his crop, giving rise at the same time to his peculiar, but not unmusical notes.

The Laughing Dove has about three broods of young during the year; but occasionally may produce as many as four, or even five: the eggs are white, smaller than those of a Pigeon, and sat upon for fourteen or fifteen days: one of the eggs is usually barren, but sometimes both will prove to be fertile and hatch.

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## CHAPTER LIV.

### THE WHITE-BREADED PIGEON.

SOME years ago I bought of a London dealer a pair of extremely pretty birds, which he called White-breasted Pigeons, but which I am unable to identify with any species of the *Columbidæ* described by the authors to whose works I have had access. They were rather stouter in build than the Laughing Dove, had shorter tails, and were altogether plumper in proportion to their size.

The male was a beautiful rich chesnut on the upper part of the body, and his breast and belly were the purest white imaginable, the under feathers of his wings were bright red, and his feet and legs were rose coloured.

The female was duller in her upper parts, and greyer on the lower, nor had she the red underwing of the male.

I placed them in a corner wired off the conservatory, where, during the summer months, they seemed to get on very well,

feeding on canary, millet, and hemp seed. I kept a pair of Virginian Nightingales in the same place, and soon found that my Pigeons were as fond of mealworms and other insects as the Scarlet Grosbeaks were.

After a while they made a slight nest of sticks on the top of a small square cage that was hung up in the enclosure where they lived, so I was in hopes of a brood, but cold weather setting in, no eggs were laid, and the birds fell into moult. I kept the place as warm as I could, but they gradually pined away, and died before spring, evidently from decline. I deeply regretted their loss, for they were very interesting as well as very pretty birds.

Instead of cooing, the cock made a peculiar noise like the pouring of water from a bottle; while the hen grunted exactly like a guinea pig.

The dealer I bought my birds of said they came from Africa, and evidently they required more heat than I was able to give them, for as long as the weather was warm they seemed lively and happy, but the least cold seemed to benumb them at once. They were exceedingly gentle and inoffensive, and permitted the Red Grosbeaks to bully them to any extent. I have not met with any more of the species since: but should I do so, I would adopt a different mode of treatment; that is to say, keep them at a minimum temperature of 60° Fahr., and give them a liberal supply of insect food.

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THE GOMBARSOU.



I do not consider them hardy, and lost all I attempted to keep during the moulting season; the reproduction of their feathers seeming to exhaust the birds, which died either during, or immediately after moult.

Mr. Wiener, on the other hand, "found this bird quite hardy, and ever lively and in good condition", so that I must have been as exceptionally unfortunate with them, as Mr. Gedney was with his Saffron Finches: however I did not consider them sufficiently interesting to make it worth my while to try them a second time.

The Combassou is a native of the western parts of Africa, and is especially abundant in Abyssinia, where it is said to occupy the place of the Sparrow in this country.

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## CHAPTER LVI.

### THE GIANT WEAVER.

ONCE upon a time, several years ago, I saw an advertisement in the *Exchange and Mart*, to the effect that some one wanted to exchange a pair of "Orioles" for a pair of Budgerigars; and as I had a number of the latter birds, and none of the former, I replied, and in due course received the birds: which turned out not to be Orioles at all, but a kind of Weaver-bird as large as the Grey Red-crested Cardinal.

They, the cock especially, were very showy and handsome birds, green, yellow and black, with a bold, independent carriage, that made them look handsomer still.

The female was darker, less brilliant in her colours, and considerably smaller than her mate, who had a loud and not unmusical whistle, while she was exceptionally mute.

Not exactly liking the look of their powerful black beaks and feet, I hesitated to introduce them to the company of

my little Finches indoors, and, the weather being mild, placed them in a garden aviary already tenanted by a pair of Cockateels, and a pair of Grey Cardinals; with the latter of whom they at once engaged in deadly combat: so fierce was the encounter, that I thought I should have had to interfere and separate the belligerents, but after a few minutes the Cardinals were defeated and beat a hasty retreat: the Weavers content with the victory, let their enemies alone, and the four afterwards got on very comfortably together, an armed truce having, apparently, been agreed to between them. With the quiet, easy-going Cockateels, my Orioles, as I continued to call them, never interfered in the least.

I soon found that my new acquisitions were extremely fond of insects, but they eat all manner of seeds, and seemed strong and healthy.

After they had been in my possession for some weeks, I imagined, when I saw the male flying about with pieces of fibre in his beak, that I might shortly expect a young brood: but no such good fortune was in store for me, the fellow was only intending to build a toy-nest, which he did after this manner: taking a long stalk of grass in his beak, he threw it over one of the perches in the aviary, and fastened the two ends together, by twisting them round and round each other, then twining other stalks of grass round the foundation he had thus made for himself, he soon framed a wonderfully constructed nest, the size of a cocoa-nut husk, which presented a very curious appearance from the fact of the clever architect having left about an inch of each grass stem sticking out, so that the general effect reminded the spectator of a porcupine, or rather of a hedgehog rolled up. One of these nests I exhibited along with the birds at one of the Crystal Palace Bird Shows, when they were seen and admired by some amateur, who carried them off after payment of the price I had placed upon them, and which I thought would have been prohibitive.

The female never made the least attempt to build, though the

male seemed very anxious to induce her to do so, and frequently chased her about the enclosure until she fell exhausted to the ground.

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## CHAPTER LVII.

### THE GREEN SINGING FINCH.

THIS pretty little bird only requires to be known, in order to be appreciated as he deserves: he is about the same size as the Siskin, a bird which he greatly resembles, with the exception that he had not so much black on the head.

The top of the head, black, wings and tail are greyish green, the throat, breast and belly greenish yellow, which is also the colour of the rump and face.

The female is almost exactly like her mate, but is just a very little greyer on the back.

They make an open nest in a bush, and lay about four bluish-white eggs, which are sometimes speckled with a number of small spots of a darker shade of blue, and sometimes quite plain.

Mules have been produced between these little birds and the Canary.

The scientific name of the Green Singing Finch is *Fringilla Butyracea*, in allusion to its colour, while the Germans name it *der Hartlaubs, oder der Mozambik-zeisig*, and the French, *le Chanteur vert ou le Chanteur de Mozambique*. It is a native of the western coast of Africa, but has been naturalized at St. Helena, whence it is often called the St. Helena seed-eater.

The song of this little bird is very sweet, and is, moreover, continued during the summer and autumn months. Mr. Wiener pronounces the Green Singing Finch to be "the best songster among the small foreign Finches," a verdict which I cordially endorse.

The food of these birds consists of seeds of various kinds, canary, millet, grass seeds, plantain, etc., some of which had better be soaked before being given to the birds, especially when these have young ones in the nest.

They are sufficiently hardy to live all the year round in an unwarmed room, but I doubt whether they would successfully brave the severity of one of our winters out of doors.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

### THE AVADAVAT.

THIS pretty and very old favourite is *der Tigerfink* of the Germans, *le Bengali piqueté* of the French, and *Fringilla amandava* of scientific writers.

It is almost superfluous to attempt the description of so well known a bird, which measures some three and a half inches in length, one and a quarter of which belong to the tail. When in his full summer dress the male Avadavat is a very fine fellow, of a deep reddish brown colour, spotted all over with small white spots.

The female is brown, darker above than on the under parts of the body.

Some Avadavats which I kept for several years in a conservatory, invariably made their nest on the ground, at the root of a vine that grew there: they domed their little abode and lined it with wool and feathers, leaving only a very small hole on one side for entrance and exit.

The eggs are white, and five or six in number: but I never succeeded in obtaining any young birds; probably the temperature of their abode was not sufficiently high.

The food of the Avadavat consists chiefly of white millet; it will, however, eat a little canary and grass seed now and

then; they are very partial to aphides, and small flies, upon which they are said to rear their young.

The male has a pretty little song, surprisingly loud for the size of the bird, which he is constantly singing: he is also very lively and active, and extremely attentive to his little wife, whose head and neck feathers he is continually preening, unless when engaged in eating and singing.

Avadavats are imported in thousands from India, and live for a long time in this country, once they have become acclimatised; but unfortunately many of them die before that desirable consummation is attained: and the reason, I think, of this is that they are imported in small boxes wired in front, in large numbers, they keep each other warm, no matter how severe the weather, by their mutual heat: but when two or three pairs are separated from their companions, and placed by themselves in an open cage, they soon get a chill, which, if it does not kill them right off, sows the seeds of various complaints to which the poor little creatures soon succumb. The only time to buy these birds is during the summer months; although the purchaser will then have to pay a larger price than during the winter: a moment's reflection will satisfy the reader as to the correctness of my views in this respect, I think, and save him from some loss, and a great deal of disappointment.

The Avadavat, as I have said, is, when once acclimatised, sufficiently hardy to live all the year round in an ordinary sitting room; but under such circumstances he is often apt to become bald; the remedy is to place him in a temperature of about 85° Fahr. by day, and not lower than 60° by night, when he will grow his feathers again rapidly.

There is no doubt these birds would breed freely in a well heated aviary; but as they can be purchased for two or three shillings a pair, it seems scarcely worth while taking any trouble to produce them at home.

## CHAPTER LIX.

## THE PIPING CROW.

THIS large and handsome bird, which is a member of the Crow family, is a native of Australia, where it is one of the most common birds in the vicinity of farms and stations.

It is rather larger than an English Jackdaw, and black and white like one of our Magpies, but without the long tail of the latter birds: its beak is greyish blue; the strong legs and feet are grey.

There is not much difference between the sexes in outward appearance, but the female has, perhaps, less white about her than her mate.

When wild the Piping Crow, or Native Magpie, as it is termed by the colonists, feeds on insects and small reptiles; and, it is said, upon young birds. In the house, it will devour anything that comes to table, but prefers meat, and is especially fond of picking a bone.

The natural note of the Piping Crow is very sonorous and musical, bearing no small resemblance to that of the English Thrush, only many times louder.

These birds are great favourites with the settlers, who protect the wild birds, and generally have a tame one hopping about the place among the poultry. They soon learn to speak many words, and even long sentences: one that belonged to a friend of mine was in the habit every morning at day-break of calling the servant, "Bella, Bella, get up, and get Micky's breakfast." 'Micky' being himself, nor would he desist until she came in and gave him his matutinal bone.

The same bird was a capital hand at whistling "There's nae guid luck about the house," which in that particular case was singularly appropriate; he had his liberty all day, but invariably

returned to the house at night, never attempting to consort with his wild relations, whom he seemed to hold in considerable contempt, calling out whenever he chanced to see one, "Who are you?" in no very complimentary tones.

I remember once seeing another of these birds that belonged to an acquaintance, and also had full liberty to go and come about the place, busily engaged one day in picking up grubs on a piece of newly-ploughed ground, which the man had just left to go to his dinner; when lo and behold! Mag. was suddenly surrounded by a flock of wild Crows, some of which commenced an attack on the domesticated bird, which at once threw himself upon his back, and commenced, as their manner is, fighting with beak and claw: the odds were against him however, and he doubtless felt that he must adopt other tactics if he wished to save his bacon. Whether or not, after a few minutes of his aboriginal method of warfare, he suddenly jumped to his feet, and swelling out his breast began to repeat, as loudly as he was able, his whole not very choice vocabulary, which so astonished, and no doubt frightened his adversaries, that they at once flew away, and Mag. returned, whistling, to the house in triumph.

When it was required to call this bird in from his rambles about the farm, and he never ventured to any great distance, all that was necessary was to go to the door, and rub two knives briskly together, when he directly made his appearance, thinking no doubt, that it was dinner-time, a delusion he was always encouraged to retain by giving him a bone to pick.

I always looked upon this bird as mine, and was to have taken him with me when I returned to Europe, but some month or two before the time fixed for my departure he unfortunately disappeared, whether stolen by some passing tramp, or killed by a marauding cat, no one ever knew.

The Piping Crow is perfectly hardy, and would live in an out-door aviary all the year round, in this country, without inconvenience.

## CHAPTER LX.

## THE PARADISE PARRAKEET.

THESE wonderously beautiful but most unsatisfactory birds feed in their wild state almost entirely on the blossoms of the gum and acacia trees, and are, consequently, extremely difficult to keep alive for any length of time in this country.

The male has an emerald green neck and breast, a crimson band across his forehead, a yellow ring round his eyes, and crimson thighs and vent. The crown of the head is velvet black, the neck brown, and the back brown with a greenish tinge; the wings are blue, the tail is green above, with the under surface white, and the tips of the feathers blue. The feet and beak are grey.

The female is very soberly attired compared to her mate, being almost uniformly grey, with a greenish or reddish tinge here and there.

I would not recommend an inexperienced amateur to be tempted by their beauty to buy these birds, for they are very expensive, and rarely live long in this country: instances, however, have come to my knowledge of an odd one surviving for a couple of years, but such exceptions to the general rule are few and far between.

All the specimens that I have possessed died, apparently of inanition, in the course of a few months, in spite of all my endeavours to keep them alive, whether in a cage, or loose in an aviary, where, by-the-bye, I have seen a male bird eating mealworms, and tipula flies, commonly called "daddy long-legs."

If it is desired to try to keep the Paradiseas, flowering groundsel and mignonette supplied freely during the summer

months will alone avail: towards autumn they must be gradually weaned off to seed and boiled rice, sweetened with honey or syrup: to try and keep them on seed alone will nearly always end in disappointment.

Dr. Russ gives the following recipe for feeding these birds, which I mean to strictly follow next time I make up my mind to invest in a pair:—"Canary seed, millet, hemp, and oats, together with 'egg-bread', boiled rice, fresh or dried ants' eggs, sweet ripe fruit, cherries, straw- and raspberries, grapes, dates and figs."

The scientific name is *Psephotus pulcherrimus*, and the German *der Paradiessittich*; I am not acquainted with its French appellation.

So far I do not believe that these birds have been bred in Europe, although recently aviary-bred specimens have been advertised. Dr. Russ had a hen that produced several eggs, and that, I think, is the full extent to which the domestication of this beautiful species has proceeded so far.

The price of the Paradise Parrakeet has declined somewhat of late years, in consequence of aviarists declining to pay the large sums asked for birds that only lived a few weeks, or at most months, after coming into their possession, and they can now be purchased for about two sovereigns a piece, which is, however, much too high a price to pay for them at present, and until we are better acquainted with their habits and requirements in captivity.

They are natives of New South Wales and Queensland.

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## CHAPTER LXI.

## THE MOCKING-BIRD.

ENTHUSIASTIC Americans are never tired of loudly proclaiming that the Mocking-bird, their best indigenous songster, “bangs all creation”; but we who are accustomed to hear the Nightingale, the Blackcap and the Thrush, are compelled to demur to such a sweeping assertion; while at the same time we are quite ready to admit that he possesses some merit, if not quite as much as his countrymen fondly flatter themselves, and would fain persuade us, he has.

It would not be difficult to fill pages with the praises of this bird, as sung by too partial American ornithologists, but considerations of space, if nothing else, forbid.

There are several kinds of Mocking-birds, but the species of which the present chapter treats, is the Mocking-bird, *par excellence*, the *Turdus polyglottus* of scientific writers, and the *Spotdrossel* of the Germans.

It is a native of North America, migratory in the Northern, and stationary in the Southern States of the Union. In size it is somewhat less than our Song Thrush, to which it bears a strong family likeness. The predominant colours of its plumage are grey and white, variously blended with pleasing effect all over the body.

The male can be distinguished from the female by having a wider band of white on his wing.

The Mocking-bird is quite hardy, and will live for a number of years, twelve or fifteen, or even more, in the house, where he soon becomes very tame: he is best fed on Thrush’s food, that is, sop, fruit, insects of all kinds, a snail or a few small garden worms now and then, and scraps of raw lean meat.

It is a quarrelsome bird, and cannot be trusted in a mixed aviary without danger to its smaller companions.

A pair of Mocking-birds require a good-sized garden aviary to themselves, if it be desired that they should breed, which they are ready enough to do; making a nest in an open box, or a Hartz-cage from which the top has been removed, or a wire basket. The eggs, from three to seven in number, are bluish green with brown spots, and are hatched in about fourteen days.

So far all ordinarily goes well: but disappointment is almost certain to follow later on; for, after a few days, the old ones too often desert their helpless brood, which, of course, must then perish miserably, if, indeed, they are not killed outright by the unnatural parents, who, stimulated by eating too many good things, want to go to nest again. The only course for the owner to adopt under such circumstances is, as soon as he perceives the least tendency on the part of the parents to neglect their duty, to at once constitute himself the foster-father of the little brood, and bring them up by hand, which is not a very difficult task.

Nest and all should be removed indoors, care being taken that the young ones are not disturbed: they must be kept in a warm place, be covered over with cotton-wool, and fed, about once an hour, from dawn to dusk, on gentles in the pupa stage, small black beetles, yolk of egg, scraps of lean raw meat, and green caterpillars, if obtainable. Thus managed the youthful Mocking-birds will thrive to admiration, and be able, in about three weeks' time, to take good care of themselves. By thus acting three good broods will in all probability be obtained from a single pair each season, whereas if the birds were left to themselves, most likely not a single one would be reared.

The Mocking-bird requires a large-sized cage, or his plumage will very soon be spoiled: he thrives best in a large, well-planted aviary out of doors, where he can get both air and

light, but a portion of it must be covered in, and otherwise well protected from the weather.

The breeding season extends from May to September.

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## CHAPTER LXII.

### THE GOLDEN PHEASANT.

THIS magnificent bird, rivalling even the Birds of Paradise by the gorgeousness of its attire, is not by any means as desirable a possession as might at first sight appear.

Surely no one beholding for the first time his golden crest, purple tippet, red back, yellow breast, and graceful tail, would suspect that so splendid a creature could be the utter savage he undoubtedly is, and, like most other savages, an arrant coward to boot, but such is nevertheless the fact.

The female is a very unpretending plain brown bird, without a trace about her of the magnificent colours of her mate.

Three or four hens should always be allowed to one cock, and the better plan is to take away the eggs as they are laid, and hatch them under bantams, or in an incubator: the chicks are easily reared on yolk of egg, ants' eggs, and the pupæ, not the larvæ, of the flesh-fly, adding, when they get a little older, some of Sprats' excellent food.

The hen Pheasant makes no nest, but merely scratches a hole in the ground, pulling into it such grass stems as she may find lying close by, and lays her eight or ten chocolate coloured eggs on each succeeding day until the batch is complete. The period of incubation is twenty-one days, and the young are able to run strongly almost immediately upon leaving the shell.

Young Pheasants have a nasty habit of pecking each other, and pulling out, especially, the large feathers of the wings

and tails, as soon as they make their appearance, in order to eat them: and this can only be prevented by separating the birds until they are fully fledged, which is rather a nuisance, if there are many of them, but better than allowing them to eat each other, which is what they would do if they were left together.

It will be readily gathered from the above that the possession of a covey (I suppose I may use the expression in this connection) of Golden Pheasants is not an unmixed blessing. It was one of the dreams of my boyhood to possess a pair of these beautiful birds: but when, at length, my desire was gratified, I must admit that they scarcely realized my expectations.

A cock and hen were advertised in the *Bazaar* newspaper, and as the price asked seemed reasonable, I invested, and in due season received the birds. The cock was minus his tail, which he had, evidently, lost *en route*, for the feathers were in the box in which the pair had travelled. It was a much more serious case with the hen, she—both birds were exceedingly wild—came out of the box with her scalp hanging down over one side of her face.

Truly a sorry plight! the tail would grow, that did not matter much: but the scalp? I replaced the skin as well as I could, but feared that it was too late, as it was already nearly dry; and my fears were realized, union did not take place, and the poor thing remained to her dying day with a portion of it hanging on one cheek. However, it did not seem to cause her much inconvenience, she ate well, and seemed lively, and after a while both she and her husband became very much tamer than they had been at first.

They had a good house and a good run, and when the fine weather set in, I gave them a flat basket containing some hay, which I placed behind some boards in a corner of their house on the ground, and was pleased to see shortly afterwards that it had been occupied. Several days passed, but

no egg made its appearance, and one morning I found the poor hen dead, with her bald head split open, and all the feathers torn off her back.

Yes: he did it, the wretch! there was no doubt about that, for there was blood on the end of his yellow beak, and on his feet, and I felt terribly tempted to wring his beautiful neck, but refrained for my own sake, not for his.

I have said he was a coward, and so he was; for he permitted a cock Redrump Parrakeet that inhabited the same enclosure to drive him about, without attempting the least resistance; and when later on I introduced some bantam pullets to his company in lieu of his murdered wife, they led him such a life, that I should think he must have felt sorry for what he had done.

Hybrids between a common fowl and a Pheasant are not uncommon, but are sterile; whereas crosses between different species of Pheasants are fertile, whether among themselves, or with the parent stock on either side; from which I take it that the Pheasant and the fowl, though both supposed to belong to the same family, are not descended from "a common ancestor", though the different sorts of Pheasants possibly may.

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## CHAPTER LXIII.

### THE RIBBON-FINCH.

THIS curiously marked Sparrow, for it is nothing else, is very commonly called by the repulsive name of "Cut-throat", in consequence of a red mark that encircles the throat of the male: a peculiarity which has given rise to the more euphonious German name of *Bandfink*; its scientific appellation is *Spermestes fasciata*; but the French, like ourselves, see a

symbol of murder, or suicide, in its crimson cravat, and call it *le Cou coupé*, which, to English ears at least, does not sound quite as dreadful as the designation by which it is generally known to dealers in this country, and which I hope soon to see altogether banished from ornithological nomenclature.

The ground colour of the plumage is reddish, almost chocolate brown; the upper parts darker and the under lighter, but all spotted alike, and flecked with small patches of a darker shade than the ground colour: while the neck of the male, as I have already said, is encircled by a crimson band, extending from ear to ear.

The female can be readily distinguished from her mate by the absence, in her case, of the crimson band.

The young males even in the nest show the distinctive mark of their sex; so that here again there is no possibility of fraudulent dealers palming off on their unwary customers a male for a female, or *vice-versá*.

The Ribbon-Finches are excellent breeders, and great favourites with many people. Dr. Russ relates that a pair in his possession from the 8th. of November to the 20th. of June reared no less than twenty-one young ones; while a lady in Vienna had, in the course of three years, no less than one hundred and seventy-six young ones from a single pair, the female of which during that time deposited the extraordinary number of two hundred and forty eggs!

The young females are quite ready to take the cares of a family upon them at the early age of between two and three months. But it is not advisable to encourage such unnatural precocity, for the produce of these immature unions is invariably lacking in stamina.

Dr. Russ gives the Ribbon-Finches a bad character, but his countryman Herr Wiener has found them peaceable enough; nor have I observed that they disagreed with their companions. In a crowded aviary, quarrels among the inmates

are inevitable; but given plenty of room, birds of different species will not, as a rule, interfere with one another.

If the temperature of their abode is maintained at a minimum of 60° Fahr., these birds will keep on breeding with scarcely any intermission all the year round.

The nest is made in a box, or a Hartz-cage, of hay, straw, fibre, etc., just like that of a Sparrow, and is lined with wool and feathers: the eggs are from four to seven in number, and are hatched in twelve days. The young are readily enough reared on ants' eggs, egg-food and soaked seeds.

The old birds are sometimes excellent feeders, and sometimes will not rear a single young one, deserting the nest when the nestlings are about a week old; when this happens they can be brought up by hand.

The Ribbon-Finch is a native of Africa, but nevertheless extremely hardy: I have not, however, tested its endurance out of doors during the winter.

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## CHAPTER LXIV.

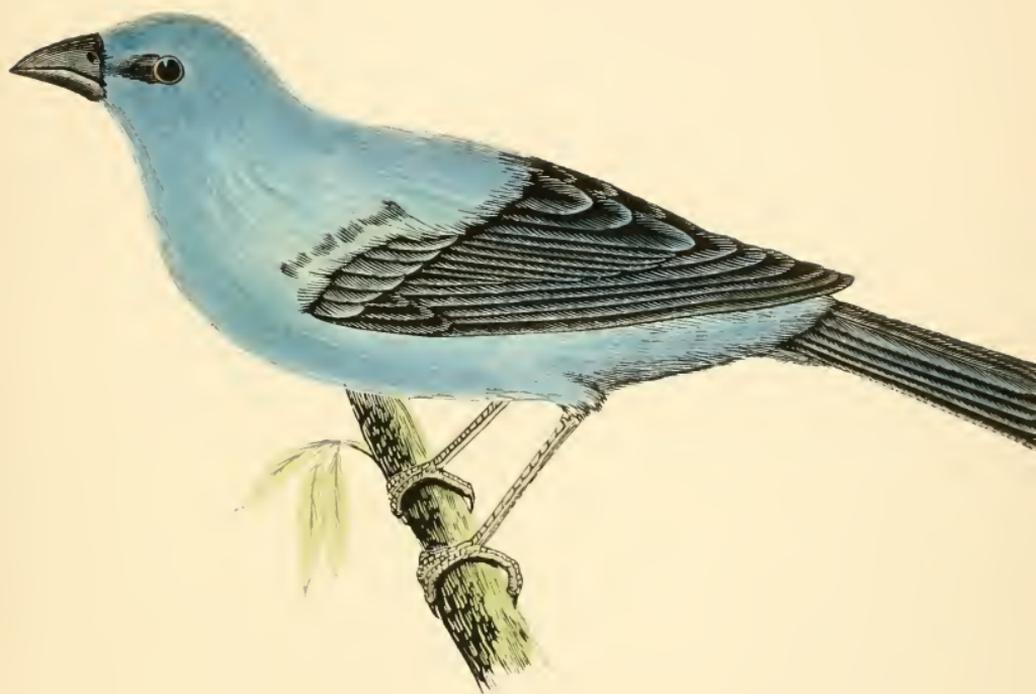
### THE INDIGO BIRD.

THIS bird and its congener, which forms the subject of the next chapter, are rather Buntings than true Finches, as any one who has tried keeping them on a Finch's diet has soon found out to his cost.

The Indigo Bunting measures about five inches in length, and, during the summer, as may be gathered from its name, is of a deep indigo blue colour, which is more intense on the crown of the head than on any other part of the bird's body: but this bright attire he only wears for about the four warmest months of the year, after which he puts on an unpretending brownish grey suit, with a very slight and indistinct shade







THE INDIGO BIRD



of blue running through it, especially on the head and breast.

The female is always an insignificant looking little brown thing, quite unworthy, as regards appearance at all events, of being the wife of so richly clothed a mate.

The Indigo Bunting is a native of North America, migratory in the Northern States, and stationary in the Southern. From among a number of scientific names that have been bestowed upon it, I select that of *Emberiza cyanea* as, in my opinion, the most appropriate. Its French designation is *le Ministre*, but the Germans call it *der Indigofink*. It is described by Bechstein, who evidently knew but little of its habits and true character, for he dismisses it in a few lines with the following recommendation as to diet: "Its food is canary seed, millet, poppy seed, and bruised hemp seed", upon which it will no doubt survive for a time, but will soon fall into a decline, unless a liberal supply of insects can be added; egg and sponge-cake, as advised by some writers, forming but a poor substitute for its natural diet.

In a sheltered and well-wooded aviary, these birds will pass the winter in this country without apparent inconvenience, and breed in the following spring, if not molested by mice and other birds. "The nest", says Dr. Russ, from whom I am obliged to borrow this description, for my birds never attempted to build, and indeed were not in a suitable position to induce them to do so, "is built in a thicket, near the ground, of grass stems, leaves, etc. The eggs are about five in number, blue, speckled with dark spots."

"The young", continues the same authority, "resemble their mother."

These birds become very restless, especially at night, during the migratory season, but settle down again after a week or ten days.

They seldom rear a brood in captivity, and the better plan, when they do nest, is to take away the young ones, as was advised in the case of the Mocking-bird, and bring them up

by hand, on ants' eggs, gentles in the pupa stage, and scraps of raw meat.

Mules are said to have been obtained between these birds and the Canary: but I very much doubt the fact, from the different mode of feeding peculiar to the two species.

Decline is the usual cause of the death of the Indigo Bunting in captivity: it may be prevented by a liberal supply of insect food, especially during the period of moult; but once it has declared itself it cannot be cured.

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## CHAPTER LXV.

### THE NONPAREIL.

THIS wonderfully beautiful bird is a near relation of the Indigo Bunting, hailing from the same region, feeding on the same kind of food, and having the same habits, except that it does not come into, and go out of, colour, but retains its gorgeously tinted dress right through the year.

The head and neck of the adult male are violet, with a red circle round the eyes; the upper part of the back and the shoulders are yellowish green, the lower part of the back, the rump, and all the under part of the body are red; the lesser wing coverts are violet brown, with a reddish tinge; the flight feathers are brown, bordered, some of them with grey, and some of them with red; the two central tail feathers are vermilion, and the others brown with red edges.

The female is of a dull olive colour throughout, darker on the back than on the lower portion of the body.

The young resemble their mother, and do not acquire their full attire until the third year of their age.

The scientific name of this bird is *Emberiza ciris*; the French

call it *le Pape*, from its gorgeous attire no doubt, and the Germans *der Papstfink*, perhaps for the same reason.

Like the Indigo bird, the Nonpareil is a tolerable songster, and will survive our winters in a well-sheltered out-door aviary; in which situation it will be more likely to breed and retain the brilliancy of its coat of many colours, than if kept in the house.

The young, if any should be hatched, will stand more chance of being reared if they are taken away as soon as possible, and brought up by hand, as recommended for the young of the Indigo Bunting, than if left to the tender mercies of their parents, who would probably desert them before they were fledged, or brain them as soon as they commenced to fly about.

A good plan to obtain a constant supply of gentles for the use of insect-eating birds during the winter months, is to hang a paunch, sheep's or bullock's, toward the end of autumn in an out-house, taking care to place just beneath it a large flat box, about four or five inches deep, and filled with fine dry sand, or well-sifted ashes, to within about an inch of the top; the paunch will very soon be filled with millions of maggots, which will feed and thrive on the inner parts, while the outside, drying in the air, will give off no offensive odour, and the larvæ, as soon as they have finished feeding, will drop from it and bury themselves in the sand or ashes, in order to undergo their transformation into the pupal stage.

As soon as the whole colony has buried itself, the box must be removed into a cool cellar, where the pupæ will remain quiescent all through the winter, and far into the spring, and in the meantime a few handfuls of the earth of ashes, scattered lightly over the floor of the aviary every morning, will serve to keep the insectivorous birds in it healthily employed for an hour or two each day in picking up the grubs.

Another good plan to secure a supply of insect food, is to

put some rabbit skins into a box with a loosely fitting lid, stow the box away in a loft, and leave it untouched for six months or so, when it will be found to be literally swarming with the fur-moth and its larvæ, both of which are exceedingly acceptable to the small foreign Finches and Waxbills.

Failing gentles and fur-moths, aphides may be cultivated to any extent in a small glass-house, or even a garden frame, from which the frost can be excluded, without shutting out the light: no insects are better for rearing young Waxbills of all kinds, and small Finches, from the Zebra Finch, to the Orange-breasted Waxbill.

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## CHAPTER LXVI.

### THE BLACK-HEADED FINCH, OR THE THREE-COLOURED NUN.

**T**HE Black-headed Finch has doubtless received its second English name from its quiet garb of black, white, and brown, which gives it a certain staid conventual air, which its habits do not at all belie; for it is an extremely quiet, not to say indolent, bird.

It is a native of Southern India, but does not appear to be particularly delicate, or susceptible to cold: I have not tried it out of doors, but it passes the winter uninjured in an unheated aviary indoors.

It requires a good deal of looking after in the matter of claws; these grow very rapidly, and unless they are attended to, the poor bird is apt to be caught by them in its nest, or among the furniture of the aviary, where it will perish miserably, unless speedily relieved.

It feeds entirely on seed, chiefly white millet, and is very fond of bathing.

The scientific name of this quiet bird is *Spermestes malac-*

*censis*, the Germans term it *die dreifarbigte Nonne*, and the French *la Nonnette à tête noire*, or *la Nonnette à ventre bleu et noir*.

The lower part of the body is pure white, the head black, and the back a rich brown. There is no difference in the outward appearance of the sexes; but the female is a trifle smaller than her mate, and just the least bit less thick about the head and neck.

These Black-headed Nuns are very peaceable, inoffensive birds, never interfering with any of their companions, and yet able to take their own part, should occasion require them to do so. It is said that they will pair and produce mules with the Bengali, but I have no personal experience of this cross, which is also said to be fertile, *inter se*, as well as with either of the parents.

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## CHAPTER LXVII.

### THE SNOW BUNTING.

I MAY say that I never possessed a bird I thought more of than the fine handsome fellow that forms the subject of the present chapter, for my children, quite unknown to, and unsuspected by me, bought him, with their own pocket-money, and presented him to me for a Christmas-box. They had heard me mention that I had seen one of these birds in a shop in the town, and that I should have purchased it, only I happened not to have had any change with me at the time: and when afterwards, I would have done so, the bird was gone. I little suspected who the purchasers had been, or thought that I should ever see it again; but I was wrong, for once in my life, for before many days had passed, I not only saw, but possessed the largest, and one of the handsomest

members of the Bunting family; which, as I have said, I immensely appreciate, not only for his own sake, but more especially for that of the young donors, and I trust that he may long survive to remind me of their thoughtfulness and attention.

The Snow Bunting, *Emberiza nivalis* in scientific nomenclature, *l'Ortolan de neige* of Buffon, and *der Schneeammer* of Bechstein, is a fine plump bird, about the size of a Lark, but with a shorter tail: the feathers of the back and rump are black, edged, the former with white, and the latter with yellowish brown; there is a bar of white on the brown wings, and the outer feathers on each side of the tail are of the same colour, tipped with cinnamon brown: a small patch of brown marks the cheek; the face, throat and belly are greyish white.

The female is smaller and has more white about her than the male. The rather small beak is yellow, with a black tip in both sexes, but it turns uniformly black in the male in summer.

These birds are natives of the extreme north of Europe; breeding, it is said, within the Arctic Circle, and only moving south in search of food during severe winters: they are shy, and are scarcely ever seen in the vicinity of human habitations. The call is loud, but not unmelodious, resembling a sharp whistle, but the song is spoiled by an admixture of harsh notes.

The food of these birds consists principally of insects, seeds being partaken of only when animal food has failed. My bird was nearly starved when I first had him, and was so weak he could not fly, or, indeed, scarcely stand: he soon recovered his health and vigour, however, when a few mealworms were added to his daily bill of fare. Oats, hemp, and canary seed appear to be the seeds he prefers, but even these he will scarcely touch as long as he can find an insect of any kind: but he is not a large eater, on the contrary, he grew quite fat on a dozen or so mealworms a day. He is fond of bathing, and picks the tops off the blades of a sod of grass like the Lark.

The Snow Bunting seldom perches on trees, but appears to prefer resting on the ground, or rather on a stone or a little mound of earth. Bechstein relates that he kept a pair for six years in his aviary, and found them to be very tame and gentle, but extremely impatient of heat; which is not surprising, when one considers that the habitat of this bird is among the snows of Lapland, and more northern regions still.

I have omitted to state that the strong legs and feet of the Snow Bunting are black.

Little or nothing is known of the habits of these birds in their wild state, but from the fact of their breeding in high latitudes, where the summer is of short duration, it is presumable that there is only one brood of young in the season: there is no record of the Snow Bunting remaining to breed in this country that I am aware of.

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## CHAPTER LXVIII.

### THE PRAIRIE OWL.

THERE are few birds that bear so strong a likeness to each other as the Owls, that constitute, so to speak, such a distinct "natural family" as these nocturnal *Raptatores*, in all of which the body is small and compactly put together; small, that is to say for the height, and expanse of wing of the bird, but made to look ever so much larger than it really is by the strong pinions furnished with broad soft primaries, and the immensely thick covering of downy feathers with which it is warmly clad.

This lightness of body, large expanse of wing, and density of coating, enable the Owls to glide noiselessly, if not swiftly, through the stillness and gloom of the night, to creep silently and surely on their slumbering or unsuspecting prey, and to

secure it in the strong grip of their powerful talons before it has had time to wake, or make the slightest effort to escape from its enemy.

Flesh is the natural food of the Owls, although some of the smaller species partly feed on nocturnal insects, as well as on small quadrupeds and birds: but many of the larger sorts are so fierce and strong, that the hare, and even, it is said, young lambs not unfrequently fall into their clutches, from which, once seized, there is no possible escape for the victim, unless all-conquering man should chance to appear upon the scene, and, a veritable *deus ex machinâ*, put a summary end to the midnight marauder's career, by shooting a rifle bullet through his body.

The Owls, merciless as they are towards other birds, are admirable parents, and patterns of conjugal devotion and tenderness; they pair for life, and each couple keeps closely together, summer and winter, sharing all their joys and sorrows, their seasons of prosperity and times of scarceness and adversity; even in moments of direst distress one partner will not forsake the other, but rather perish with it, than survive to mourn its untimely end: whether the woods be clothed with verdure, or mantled in a garb of spotless white, you will never find an Owl alone, always two of them fly together, and for constancy they might indeed supplant the proverbial Dove, which really is anything but the model of connubial faithfulness it is popularly supposed to be.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Owl family is the eye, which is large and full, and placed more directly in the front of the head, than happens in the case of any other bird: an arrangement that adapts it for, or rather is suited to, its mode of life, which is strictly nocturnal; so much so that the majority of these birds are actually unable to face the light of day, but sit blinking and almost helpless in the sunshine, until the glare of midday has melted into the softer radiance of twilight: then, when the rest of the

feathered world has sunk into repose, the Owl sallies forth on downy wing, and expanding to the fullest the pupils of its wonderful organs of vision, or rather contracting the iris to its smallest compass, glides along silently, like an animated powder-puff, over the furrows, in search of lawful prey, namely, the field mouse, which, pattering among the stubble, is all unconscious of its impending fate, and never dreams that its every movement is being watched by the small fleecy cloud that hovers over the field, awaiting an opportunity to pounce upon a victim.

Nor has the Owl to wait very long: presently the mouse finds a plump ear of corn, left by the gleaners when they paced the furrows one by one to pick up all that the reapers and binders had left behind; but scarce has the small rodent squatted down upon its haunches, and borne the dainty morsel to its mouth with its handy fore-paws, than a fearful foot, emblematic indeed of destiny, is stretched down from the stars and clutches mouse in a grip that is never more relaxed, until the heart of the terror-stricken prey has beat its last; when it is either devoured on the nearest stone, or fence, or else borne away to the distant nest, where four clamorous Owlets are awaiting, with what patience they can command, the arrival of their parent with the evening meal, which to them is breakfast.

Ha! ha! he! he! they shout and hiss when he arrives, and struggle which of them shall be the first to receive his share: but the old Owl has no preference for one of his offspring to the prejudice of the rest, he loves them all alike, and equally divides the prey, which he conveys to each in turn: one, of course, must receive his portion first, but it is always passed by the impartial parent to the youngster that happens to be nearest to him at the time, for there is no favouritism, no rights of primogeniture in the Owl family, where all share and share alike.

The nest of the Owl, as might be gathered from the habits

of the bird, is generally placed in the darkest corner it can find; a hole far down in the trunk of a tree, in a ruined wall, the dark inside of a church steeple, or some similar spot, to which the obnoxious rays of the sun can not very readily penetrate: instances, however, are on record where an Owl has appropriated to its own use the deserted tenement of a Rook or a Magpie, and has even dived down into the bowels of the earth, and laid its four white eggs, and reared its callow brood in a convenient rabbit-burrow; but these are the exceptions to the general rule that is observed by these wise-looking and really sagacious birds in their choice of a nesting-place, at least in the old world, for in the new there is an Owl that never makes use of any other than a subterranean abode.

This curious bird, of which I possess a fine example, is the Prairie Owl, which is also named Coquimbo and Burrowing Owl; its scientific names are various, that of *Athene cunicularia* being a trifle less cacophonous than some of the others that have been imposed upon it: it is not a large bird, about eleven inches in length, but stands upon long legs, which are closely covered, down nearly to the tips of the toes, with short feathers so thin and narrow they are more like hair: the expanse of wing is considerable, quite two feet, and the general appearance of the creature indicative of large capacity for noiseless and powerful flight.

A native of several parts of America, many strange stories are related of the Burrowing Owl: how it shares the dwellings of the marmot amicably with no less a formidable reptile than the rattlesnake, but does not prey upon the offspring of its hosts, or neighbours, preferring to make its repasts off the many coleopterous and other insects that abound in the regions where it has taken up its dwelling; all of which may be received *cum grano*: at least in captivity it eats birds and mice, as well as insects, and does not by any means disdain a slice of "cats' meat" cold.

The general colour is brownish grey, regularly marked with whitish grey spots; the eyes are full and of a greenish yellow colour. It does not appear to be nearly as nocturnal in its habits as most of its congeners, but stands out boldly in the daylight, seldom retiring to its "dark chamber" unless frightened by the approach of a stranger, when it bolts quickly into the inner apartment of its cage, but soon returns to take up its station upon its log, or perch, and amuses itself by staring with alternately dilated and contracted pupils at the passers by, spreading out its wings until the tips cover its feet, and giving expression to its feelings by a series of squealing grunts, that are not by any means harmonious.

It is particularly fond of young birds, and will devour a Pigeon squab of a few days' old in the day-time, whereas I have not known it to touch anything else until the evening was well set in, except it was very hungry indeed: it is apparently fond of black beetles and large moths, which it eats wings, wing-cases and all, rejecting the latter, as well as the fur of mice, and the feathers and bones of small birds, in little pellets of an oblong form, after the manner of other Owls.

Yes, the Coquimbo is a bird with a history, as I have hinted, but it does not appear to be of a confiding temper, at least so far it has made no advance towards familiarity with any of us, which is, after all, perhaps not so very wonderful, seeing that it no doubt looks upon us as its enemies for having deprived it of liberty, and penned it in a narrow cage. I have noticed that it drinks freely, but so far have not seen it bathe, nor does it appear to scratch up the dry earth that has been placed upon the floor of its enforced domicile.

As I observed a while back, it has a history, more or less authentic, more or less tinged with a suspicion of romance. Hear the Rev. J. G. Wood upon this head: "The prairie dogs (marmots) and Burrowing Owls live together very harmoniously ;

and this strange society is said also to be augmented by a third member, namely, the rattlesnake."

What a charming as well as a strange society! Herbivorous rodents, carnivorous, or at least insectivorous birds, and reptiles—by-the-bye, what do rattlesnakes feed on? I confess my ignorance of their *menu*: young marmots possibly? baby Owls, perhaps? who can tell? or occasionally, appetite pressing, some of the adult members of the mixed colony, which also includes "lizards and other reptiles?"

Who are the original inhabitants of these prairie burrows? the marmots unquestionably: *ergo*, both Owls and snakes are lodgers, or perhaps "unwelcome intruders", as Mr. Wood seems to think; if not, do they pay any rent to the rightful owners in the shape of services rendered? it is very probable: the Owl is the night watchman, and the rattlesnake the Cerberus that strikes terror to the hearts of would-be oppressors of the rodent city, in the day-time, for they have an evil fame, those ophidian rattlers, when the sun shines, but are powerless for harm when night has cast her sable mantle over exhausted Nature, and that indulgent but somewhat careless mother has composed herself to sleep.

Do the Owls take toll from the marmots, in the shape of a succulent baby rodent now and then? Mr. Wood says not: "As the stomach of the Burrowing Owl has only been found to contain the wing-cases and other indigestible parts of beetles and various large insects, the bird may be pronounced guiltless on this charge."—to wit, juvenile rodenticide.

Mr. Darwin, on the other hand, found that "those specimens (of the Burrowing Owl) that inhabit the plains of Buenos Ayres feed on mice, small reptiles, and even on the little crabs of the sea-shore": a tolerably varied dietary, fully borne out by the accommodating appetite of my own Coquimbo, which (I do not know to which sex it belongs, and therefore prefer to speak of it in the neuter gender, which is less compromising than if I were to dub it "he" or "she", and

discover some day that I had made a mistake) if it evinces a preference for any one thing above another, it is for a fat young Pigeon of about a week old, as I have already stated.

“It is a lively little bird”, continues the Rev. Mr. Wood, “moving about among the burrows with considerable vivacity, rising on the wing if suddenly disturbed, and making a short undulating aerial journey before it again settles upon the ground. When it has alighted from one of these little flights, it turns round and earnestly regards the pursuer.”

Yes: I can quite believe it, for although I have not yet trusted my bird with the free use of its wings in the garden, or even in the house, the quick way in which it half opens them out, and with a little squeal of fear, or perhaps defiance, jumps into the dark part of its house, returning again almost directly to blink at its visitor, with its great greenish yellow eyes, is very suggestive of the movements described by Mr. Wood in the passage which I have just quoted. I shall let the Owl have a fly out some day, and then we shall see what it will do.

“The cry of this curious bird”, observes the same author, “is unlike that of any other Owl, and bears a very great resemblance to the short, sharp bark of the prairie dog.” I may as well at once admit that I have never heard the sound of this intelligent animal’s voice, but the noise made by my Owl is neither “sharp” nor “short”, but a long series of squealing grunts, intermixed with the well-known sibilant utterances common to other members of the family to which it belongs: of course it may give expression to the “sharp, short bark” by and by, and if it does, I shall be very glad to hear it and bear due witness to the fact.

Do the burrows of the prairie dogs, otherwise marmots, intercommunicate, as I believe those of their congeners the rabbits always do? If so, the fact mentioned by Mr. Wood that “marmot, Owl and snake come to be found in the same burrow”, is explainable otherwise than by supposing the bird

to "dive into one of the burrows, heedless of prior occupants", which certainly would point to some intellectual deficiency on the part of a bird that appears to be, if it is not, very wise.

Do Owls always swallow mice whole? Mr. Wood says so; but Coquimbo does not, at least my Coquimbo does not, he eats the head first, and then the body; but the latter portion of the animal, if not very hungry, he hides away in a corner of his cage for a future meal; but possibly he never does feel right hungry now, and in his wild state may swallow his prey entire in his haste to gratify the cravings of his appetite.

The female among the Owls, as happens also among the diurnal birds of prey, is nearly always larger, sometimes considerably so, than her mate; but whether this holds good with respect to Madame Coquimbo, I am not in a position to say, nor is the fact alluded to by any writer on ornithology to whose works I have at present access.

"If all had their rights", remarks the same author from whose account of this bird I have already freely quoted, "it would seem that the (burrowing) Owl is nearly as much an intruder as the snake, and that it only takes possession of the burrow excavated by the prairie dog in order to save itself the trouble of making a subterranean abode for itself. Indeed there are some parts of the country where the Owl is per force obliged to be its own workman, and in default of convenient 'dog' burrows, is fain to employ its own claws and bill in excavating a home for itself."

Well, if it is laziness that prompts the Burrowing Owl to force its company upon the much enduring prairie dog, such conduct on its part cannot be too highly reprehended; but when I look at Coquimbo's feet, it strikes me that they are not exactly adapted for digging: that is to say, they are not just the feet you would expect to find on a burrowing bird, for the toes are short, and the nails not immoderately long, while the legs are so decidedly tall for the size of their owner,

that they must of necessity be exceedingly inconvenient for it when it is obliged by the force of circumstances "to be its own workman", so that I can pardon its usurpation of the marmot's burrows, for I am sure it must be a terrible trial for the poor bird to have to excavate a dwelling for itself.

That this is really the case Mr. Wood goes on to prove, for a little further on he says: "The tunnel which is made by the Owl is not nearly so deep or so neatly constructed as that which is dug by the marmot, being only eighteen inches or two feet in depth, and very rough in the interior." To which I reply, that with the tools at its disposal, I think it is highly creditable to this little long-legged Owl that it manages to make a burrow even two feet deep, for it does not look as if it could mine to a depth of two inches. It makes a nest, however, at the bottom of the burrow, "a tolerably-sized heap of dried grass", says our author, "moss, leaves, and other soft substances, upon which are deposited its white-shelled eggs."

By-the-bye, all the Owls lay white, and rather round eggs, do they not? I think so: I hope my Coquimbo will lay an egg some day.

"While sitting on the little earth mounds, or moving among the burrows", continues our author, "the Coquimbo Owl presents a very curious likeness to the prairie dog itself, and at a little distance might easily be taken for the little marmot as it sits erect at the mouth of its domicile." Well, I have seen the marmots at the "Zoo", and I have a Coquimbo Owl before me as I write, and I must say I cannot trace the resemblance: the marmot is of a uniform yellowish grey, darker above than on the belly, and the Owl is brownish grey, with greyish white spots, the eyes again are not a bit alike in the two ill-assorted neighbours, and the marmot has ears, which the Owl—I was going to say has not, but which at all events do not display themselves externally. No, I

cannot see the likeness, not a bit of it, but possibly other people might: some, I know, are great adepts at this sort of thing.

Other Owls that I have seen contract the pupil of the eye to the merest point in full daylight, and seem blunt-witted and dazed even then, but Coquimbo does not, he looks boldly about him in the day-time, and very evidently sees all that is going on, recognizing a stranger directly, and especially a marauding cat, which he certainly does not confound with his quondam friend and neighbour the marmot or prairie dog.

I don't know that I should again choose an Owl for a pet, but chance having thrown Coquimbo in my way, I was taken by his funny habit of spreading out his wings and swearing at me when I looked at him, and as Mr. A. H. Jamrach asked me a reasonable price for him, I brought him home to add to my list of birds. By-the-bye I find I have called the bird "he" after all—so be it, perhaps he is a male.

Coquimbo develops new and peculiar qualities every day, he really is, as the late Artemus Ward used to observe of his "Kangaroo", "an amoosin little cuss"; the way he hops about and then comes back and stares at one is enough to cause the most melancholy Jacques to split his sides with laughing; then his appetite is so good, and all seems fish that comes to his net. For instance, our old cat kitted the other day, and her progeny met the usual fate of so many juvenile members of the feline race, an untimely end in the water-tub, but probably their after destiny was different to anything that had previously befallen kittens; for one of them formed a capital supper for my Burrowing Owl, which he seemed most heartily to enjoy, and he should have had the others only they were buried away out of sight before I thought of securing them.

It was a good-sized kitten, and fat, and was almost too much for Coquimbo to demolish at one sitting; however, he seemed to do his best to give it speedy and decent burial

beginning with the head, eating downwards as far and as fast as he was able, and when he could positively stow away no more, placing the remainder in that corner of his cage which he usually devotes to the same purpose. After a short rest, however, he returned bravely to the work, and succeeded in disposing of the last remaining morsel of the young "domesticated feline."

From the very strong partiality which he displays for young prey, to wit, Pigeons in the squab stage of their development, young Sparrows, and lastly newly-born kittens, I think we must consider it more than likely that the report which credits him with demolishing a young marmot now and then must be not very far from the truth, notwithstanding the fact that nothing but wings of beetles were found in his stomach on dissection: he prefers a young mouse to an old one, and will scarcely touch a full-grown bird, as for instance a venerable Canary I recently gave him, which had departed this life after a somewhat lengthened career. Possibly he found her carcase tough, for he would not touch it for three days, when it began to get "high", then he eat it, not as if he cared about it, but felt it to be a disagreeable duty which it was incumbent upon him to perform.

I have said I never saw him bathe, but I find he does, for the other evening when I went to give him his supper, his breast and wings were quite wet, and the water in his pan splashed about, as if he had been having a tub, and on taking out the pan to replenish it, I saw that what water was left was dirty, just as might have been expected, from his trampling about in it.

I believe these birds are not often brought to Europe, and that at this moment the Zoological Gardens of London are without an example of the Prairie Owl.

As I have said, my Coquimbo develops new traits of character every day: for instance, I wanted to have his portrait taken, but for reasons best known to himself he objected, objected

as strongly and as vehemently as he possibly could. You shall be drawn, I said: I sha'n't, he replied, and swore to it, a good round oath in his Owlish language; but I was determined: the artist had come out for the express purpose of taking a sketch of him in one of his most characteristic and striking attitudes, but he would not allow it to be done. On the contrary, far from stretching out his wings, he kept them even more tightly pressed against his sides than usual, and growled and swore, vowing that nothing would, could, or should tempt him to unfold them. In vain I poked him with a stick, he only jumped down to the bottom of his domicile, and, still swearing, thrust himself into its darkest corner, so that the artist could not even obtain a glimpse of him.

What was to be done? One of my old hens happened just then to pass that way, and the thought struck me that if I showed the old lady to him, the sight of her venerable face and still red and upright comb might tempt him to spread out his wings. I therefore caught her up in my hands, and placed her close to the bars of the Owl's cage; but he merely swore a little louder, as much as to say: Why the blank can't you let me alone! and his wings remained as tightly folded as ever.

What was to be done? The valuable time of the artist was not to be wasted: he had come out expressly to take a portrait of him as he stood on his log with expanded wings, and a mouse under his foot, but the Owl declined to be a party to the arrangement: possibly because the mice too had entered into the conspiracy, and absolutely refused to be caught. From mice to cats the transition is natural and easy; so, failing a mouse to tempt him from his resolution, I suddenly bethought me that a cat might do as well. One of my youngsters accordingly ran off, and soon returned with "Miss Taylor" under his arm. Now this lady, notwithstanding her maidenly designation, is the lawful wife of "Tim", and

the mother of the kitten already referred to as having found a tomb in Coquimbo's maw: I held her close to the cage, and as soon as the Owl saw her he became tremendously excited, more so than ever I had seen him before, made a terrific noise, and spread out not only his wings but his tail, as in the accompanying illustration; loudly, if not deeply, protesting the while his entire innocence of the charge he doubtless imagined was about to be preferred against him, that is to say, of having caused the death of the youthful offspring of the lady who then regarded him with two angry eyes not very much unlike his own.

So Coquimbo's portrait in the required attitude was taken at last: his resistance reminding me of a picture I have somewhere seen, entitled, "A Bashful Sitter", and representing a group of policemen attempting to photograph a prisoner who was violently objecting, and required at least six stalwart "bobbies" to hold him in position while the operator adjusted his camera and sensitized plate.

The fact is, I suppose, that my Prairie Owl is becoming accustomed to us, and though he still swears when we go near him, has given up trying to frighten us by spreading out his wings, as he always did at first, when anyone approached his cage; but the sight of a cat, to which he is not much used, no doubt aroused his anger, or his fear, and caused him to assume the position we desired, for it is scarcely reasonable to suppose that he is really capable of any feeling of compunction for having made a meal off a kitten he had not even killed.

I have a difficulty in providing my Owl with suitable food: beetles I find he does not care much about; fowls' heads and necks, the only parts my wife can spare him, he decidedly objects to: sheep's liver he will only condescend to taste when very hungry indeed; and of cats' meat he is not particularly fond, though he will eat it when he cannot find anything else: the supply of young Pigeons, Sparrows and kittens is

necessarily limited, and the mice have grown so cunning that they can be but very rarely caught. I apprehend therefore that I shall have to get rid of Master Coquimbo in the end; I shall be sorry, very sorry to have to do so, but on the other hand I cannot see the poor fellow slowly starve. If only I could catch more mice! there are plenty of them about, but they soon get to know all about the various kinds of traps, and will not go near them. Can anyone suggest a snare that will not frighten them away, one that will kill as well as catch them? I have tried many kinds, but after a few days they become useless, for the mice refuse to be tempted into them by the most enticing bait.

Without a doubt my Prairie Owl is "an amoosin little cuss", but I shall have, sooner or later, to get rid of him I fear. He starves on butcher's meat and the various delicacies I have enumerated; mice appear to be his favourite food, and he prefers them young and tender: birds he will eat, if not too tough, as he did two Budgerigars the other day, but these are not always to be obtained, and to buy them specially for his table would involve me in greater expense than I care to incur for his sake.

Since writing the above, I have heard my Prairie Owl give utterance to a sound that may be described as "a short sharp bark"—it is not unlike the impatient yelping of a young puppy, and is emitted, I find, when the bird is hungry: I have not noticed it at any other time, but invariably when he has barked, I have found that all his provisions were consumed, and that like Oliver he was "asking for more." The question here arises, when the Prairie Owl in his wild state utters this "short sharp bark" is he hungry? and, if so, to whom does he address his appeal for food?

THE END.



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