

Scott, W. E. D.

Bird pictures.

(1897)

A-S [cott,
W.E.D.]

1897

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March 7, 1922.

OL. XXI. No. 4.

MAR 7 1922

APRIL 1897

PRICE 25 CENTS.

58,821.

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE

Bird Pictures.
By W. E. D. Scott.



PUBLISHED MONTHLY
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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*Park Types.*

park. This was a sure sign that it was lunch-time, and I was finally left alone, with here and there a dingy loafer walking between long rows of little green chairs, looking for any trinket that might have dropped during the morning from the rich man's table.

The farther away from these shady paths the sadder London is. Among them foreigners feel at home. Little home-sick law students from India may mope in Piccadilly, but in Hyde Park they look happy. Once there the British soldier is no longer warlike; he becomes helpless and happy, surrounded by nature and under the influence of some pink-cheeked domestic.

In the early part of the day the parks

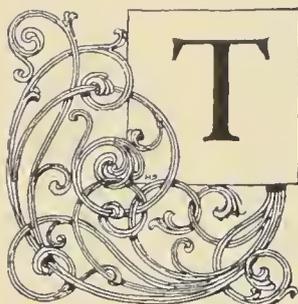
are occupied by very young people; the visitors become older with the day. The nurses and their charges leave, and evening finds an old lady leaning on her husband's arm, walking slowly along their favorite path, while their carriage follows at a little distance. And as night comes on they roll back into the great city among the never-ceasing tread of feet, past the sidewalk artist sitting by his pictures on the pavement, looking anxiously at the passers-by—and the park's day is done—a curtain of darkness falls on the great stage; the peacocks go to roost in its trees; the ducks are undisturbed by wet dogs, and the Serpentine's small fish are no longer in danger of bent pins; and the park, London's kind friend and good physician, is resting.

C. D. G.

BIRD PICTURES

By William E. D. Scott

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUFFED BIRDS BY A. R. DUGMORE, ESQ.



THE Germans have an old proverb likening any person or object embodying stiffness and grotesqueness to a stuffed bird. It seems a fair comparison, looking at

the multitude of specimens on the shelves of the cases in our great museums, both here and abroad, and having at the same time in mind feathered acquaintances of the forest, meadow, river, and seashore. Or, referring to more intimate friends, though it seems almost a sacrilege to attempt to preserve them, who has been at all satisfied with the effort to reproduce the form of the pet canary known for years, or the parrot who has become a familiar daily friend?

It is not difficult to give sufficient reason for this. The people who come into our daily life rarely get portraits, whether

by painter or camera, that please. The critic most difficult to deal with is the close and old friend, who has idealized the personality, has seen something the artist failed to discriminate or the camera to detect. The subtle attribute that goes to make the personality of the individual is what we expect, what we hope for, what we rarely realize.

The silent birds and beasts of our great collections, having their due share of beauty and grace, of high and low attributes, in short, or their individuality, are in the main dealt with from the mechanical side, by mechanics, with the result of a certain set conventionality of position and expression, that being duplicated many, many thousand times, has become a thing proverbial for stiffness:

“Er sieht wie ein ausgestopfter Vogel aus.”

The writer wishes fully to recognize whatever steps have been taken in the British Museum, in the American Museum, and by many professional and amateur ornithologists to raise the standard of this kind of work, and the special attention of the reader is called to an article entitled “Ornithology at South Kensington,” by R. Bowdler Sharpe, in *The English Illustrated Magazine* for December, 1887, pp. 165-175. Nor must the efforts in the same direction at the American Museum at Central Park, or the recent writing of Dr. R. W. Shufeldt on this subject, be overlooked, and yet all these are but steps in the right direction, leaving much to be desired.

Not wishing in any way to disparage the many patient workers whose lives have been given to the preservation of birds and other animals, yet one must seek in these



Florida Clapper-rail.
Rallus longirostris scottii (Senn).

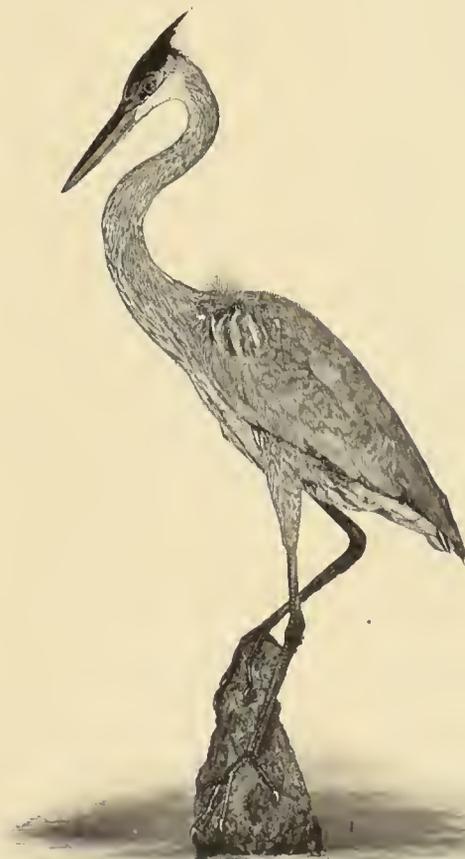


Blackburn's Warbler.
Dendroica blackburnie (Gmel.).



American Sparrow-hawk.
Falco sparverius (Linn.).

workers themselves some of the causes for much that is bad in this art, for art it is. They have been, largely of their own fault, mechanics, and treated as such. Poorly paid, the love of their work has often been their chief reward; the stipend of the best has rarely reached the wages of a good carpenter or mason. If working for a boss they have been required to turn out about so much result per diem, and he, taking this canary or that hawk to *stuff* at so much a head, from a commercial stand-point, must protect himself and is really not to be blamed. Painters and sculptors are paid as the world appraises their efforts, and the plea here is that art work in attempting to reproduce life-like birds can only be attained when it ceases to be looked upon and treated as mechanical work, so and so many pieces to be turned out in a given time.



Ward's Heron.
Ardea wardi (Ridgw.).

Whether they go properly before or after this view of the subject, two great and vital reasons for the bad results existing are to be found in the lack of general knowledge and special training. To consider the first of these requisites, it seems to the writer that general and wide knowledge and cultivation is fundamental to all good art. The mechanic, the craftsman, the artist is each so much greater for it; so much more able to see, to discriminate, to execute, to convey to the mind of others the impression of his senses through the work of his hands.

The other factor is special training. Great painters serve for years learning to draw and color, to see, to observe, to discriminate, to execute. Constant study of live models is indispensable to the great sculptor or figure painter. Does the man who is to make the

bird live hope to approach that goal less easily? And where are his models? In the trees, in the bushes, in swamps, on lake and stream, on the ocean, and in the air; out of doors. Wild and elusive models, and just so much more difficult to photograph on the mind of the observer. Patience and eternal striving may hope for a reward.

It would seem obvious that to make a bird look as nearly alive as possible when stuffed (and this is art) adds much to the scientific value of the specimen. Nevertheless, if we are to judge by the overwhelming majority of results, almost any bird reasonably smooth, and not on the face



American Robin.

Merula migratoria (Linn.).



Little Blue Heron.

Ardea herodias (Linn.).

(Intermediate Plumage.)

of it grotesque, is good enough in the eyes of most curators to show to the public what this or that bird is like. Again, the reasons are not obscure. Quantity seems to overshadow quality in the minds of those who have charge of amassing collections.

The conventional T-shaped perch on which all perching birds are placed, or the painted or varnished board that suffices as a stand for such birds as habitually walk on the ground or swim on the water, have made nearly impossible a faithful life-like reproduction. Recognizing this, in recent years there

have been attempts, and some very successful, to reproduce the natural environment of the birds exhibited. These are often very attractive and instructive, but generally overwhelming. The frame has become greater than the portrait. The bird, so environed, is in many cases the same conventional, stiff, even grotesque acquaintance, who suggests strongly in his new surroundings the long rows of T-shaped perches on overcrowded shelves. Composition in a picture is fundamental; and in a portrait it hardly seems good art to overshadow the central thought, the individual, by a too detailed background. Perhaps it may be hazarded here that suggestions of environment are all that we can hope to present, and that often a single twig, a bit of grass land, a hint of sandy beach, marsh, river, or ocean, will convey to the public an idea of the life-habits of this or that bird, leaving the bird the great central figure, not overshadowed by an entire limb with all its leaves, or an elaborated section of landscape. *Suggestions* of impressions from nature, not portrayals of its infinite details, should be the aim.

To the worker the advice is ventured—beware of the photograph. The camera sees what you do not. If you attempt to copy its results, the end attained will not



Screech-Owl.

Megascops asio (Linn.).

Bittern.

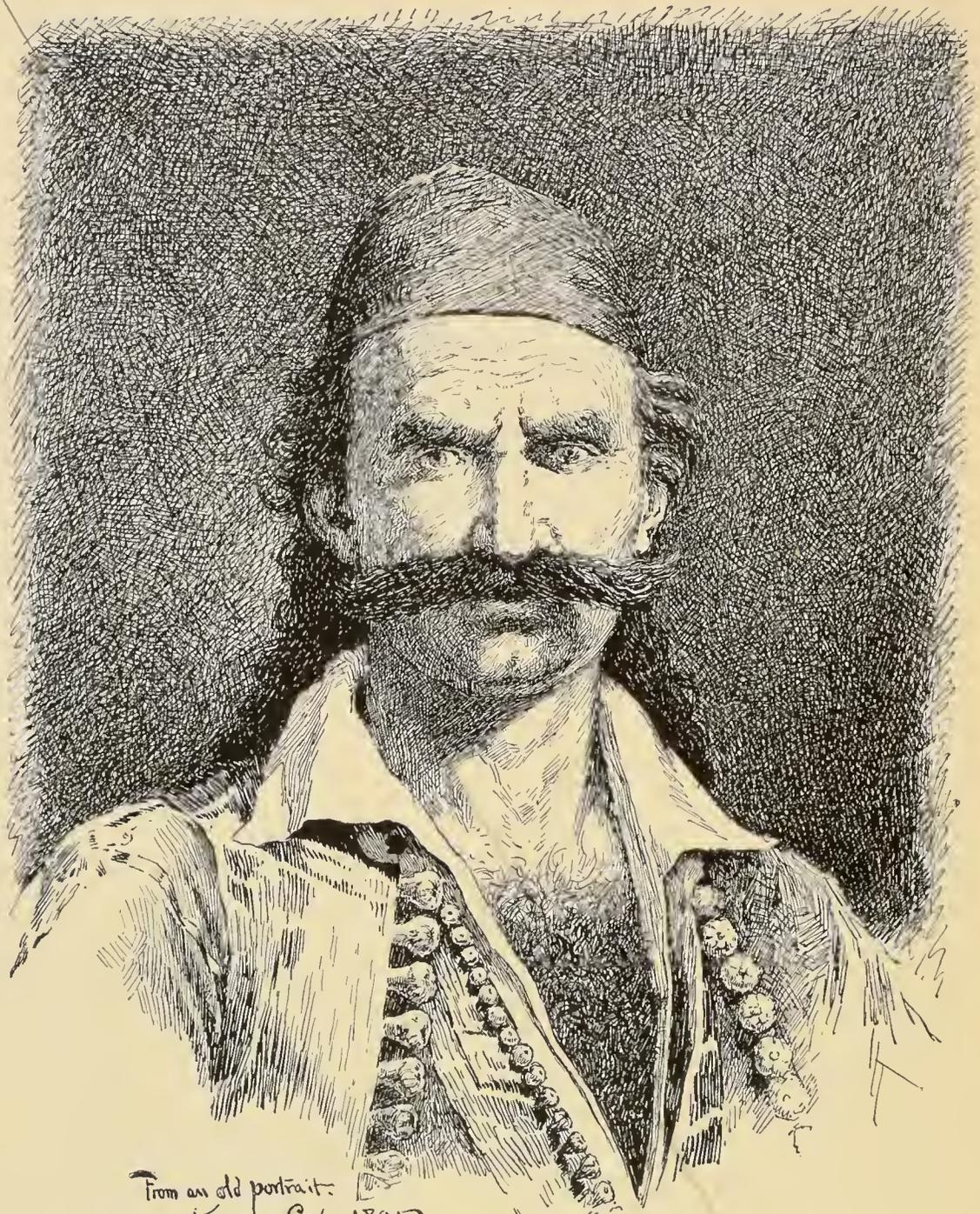
Botaurus lentiginosus (Montag.).

appeal to those who have not seen with a camera, but who have observed and retained certain impressions of birds through their unaided senses.

Do not imitate. Copy no other man's idea of how a bird looks. It is at its best how he thinks it looks. His impression, not yours. The bane of this work has been copying and imitating, not observing and originating; so that we have the duck, the heron, the hawk, eagle, owl, and thrush of tradition in positions much oftener learned in the house from stuffed birds or pictures than from the real model, which is free to every one who cares to try to reproduce his impression of it gained out of doors.

You can never tell where or when your chance will come to meet and get a vivid picture of this or that one. Therefore be always ready. Store observation upon observation away in your brain. They will all come into play. The results will come to the persistent observer, and the stuffed birds of the future will do much to escape the ridicule cast by common consent on most of those of to-day.

The illustrations accompanying this article are presented with the hope that they represent some of the ideas which are fundamental in it, and that they record a step toward a higher place for this kind of art work. They are reproductions of *photographs of stuffed birds*.



From an old portrait.
Kenyon Cox, 1895.

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By F. B. Sanborn



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