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BIRDS OF NEW ENGLAND.

BY

A. HENRY HIGGINSON.

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# Birds of New England

By A. Henry Higginson.

**A**MONG the first of the feathered race to appear in the early spring are the Bluebirds. Sometimes they arrive before the first of March, willing to brave its cold and bitter winds, so eager are they to return to New England. They are found almost everywhere in inhabited districts; in old orchards, along the country roadsides, and even at times in the parks of the great cities. About May fifteenth the bluebirds build their nests in some concealed place, choosing by preference a hollow post, or a deserted woodpecker's nest. Within it they build one of grass, seaweed, rags, or anything near at hand, and there are laid four pale blue eggs. About June fifteenth the young birds are flying about with their parents.

Another early comer is the Cowbird. He has no song to speak of and little to bring him to our attention, except the fact that he is too lazy to build

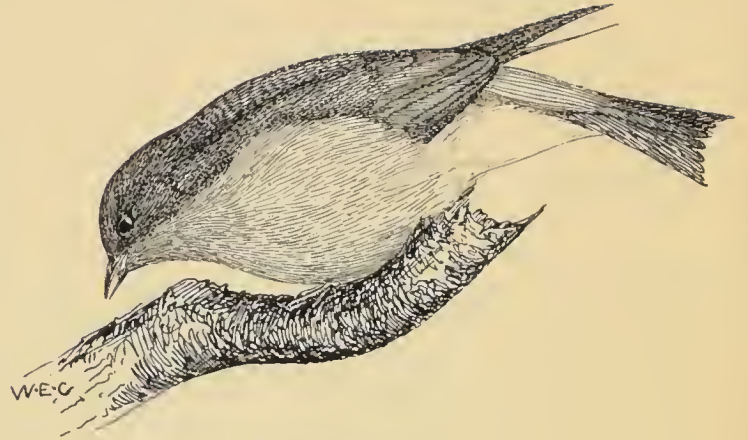
a home of his own in which to rear the young, and hence his mate lays her eggs in the nests of other birds. As Cowbirds' eggs hatch more quickly than those of other birds, the young interloper has generally two or three days' start of his nest fellows, with the result that he, being stronger and better developed, throws the lawful inmates out. At any rate, whatever happens, he always fares well. The eggs of the Cowbird are white, thickly dotted with reddish brown, and she usually lays them in the nests of the Yellow Warbler, Pewee, or Indigo Bird.

About April first, or a little later, some interesting birds will be met with in the thickest cedar-swamps. There the Screech Owl may be seen, blinking as if he could not quite make you out. Upon penetrating into the deepest recesses of the swamp, one may suddenly hear a guttural croak, and looking upward the eye encounters

what appears to be a pile of brush on every tree, and on each pile a dumpish bird with a long bill, more like a hen than anything else. This is the Black-crowned Night Heron, and it is likely that there may be a hundred or more nests in the colony. Each nest contains four blue eggs about the size and shape of a bantam's egg. In similar localities the Great Blue Heron, or the Green Heron make their nests.

A little later the edges of the swamps will be found alive with small birds. Near the border of some pool or brook, the Maryland Yellow-throats build their home and one may hunt for hours before it is discovered. The beautiful little nest is usually well hidden in some tussock or clump of grass, and contains three or four white eggs, dotted with brown. The parent birds will do everything in their power to divert your attention and it will be hard to resist the wiles of the handsome black-headed little yellow male.

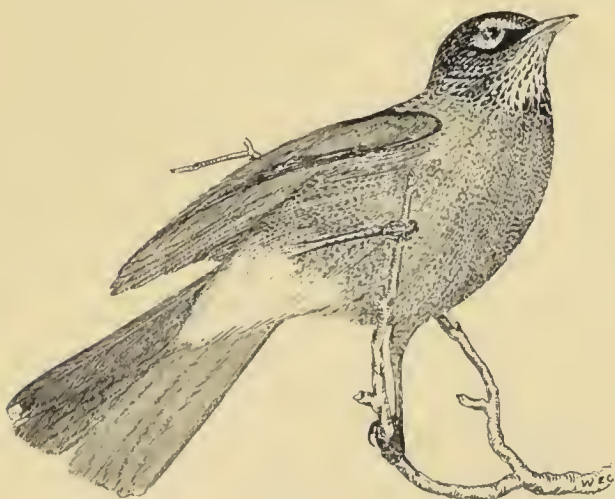
The Black-poll Warbler and the Water Thrush will be there also, the former noticeable by his black head. Then, too, the Red-start may be found. He is a strange little chap, sometimes building his nest in low bushes, some-



BLUE BIRD

times in trees forty or fifty feet from the ground. The Redstart's plumage is not of the hue that his name implies, but of orange and black, a good deal like a Baltimore Oriole on a small scale. This latter bird will come from the South about May first, or a little earlier, and flash like a ray of sunlight from tree to tree. Presently his more sombrely dressed mate will put in an appearance and the pair will begin about the end of May to construct, at the tip of some branch overhanging the roadside, one of the nests with which we are all so familiar. It is a beautiful nest, woven out of fibres, with here and there a bit of string or gaudy cloth for ornament. Upon one occasion a patriotic person hung red, white and blue worsted near his home, hoping that an oriole, which was building near by, would use some of it; and he was highly gratified when on July Fourth, a brood of young orioles resplendent in their orange and black liveries of Lord Baltimore, for whom the bird was first named, chirped noisily from a red, white and blue nest.

Leaving the wet haunts of these birds and coming into the dry woodlands, where the ground has a peren-



AMERICAN ROBIN

nial carpet of leaves and pine needles, one will find the Water Thrush's near relative, the Oven-bird. He makes his appearance after May the first, sneaking about the woods like a burglar, a noisy one it must be said, for his song, beginning low and gradually becoming louder, ends abruptly at the top of his vocal strength. He begins to build his nest about June the first. Unless the bird is flushed suddenly, it is very difficult to discover, and one must look very closely for the four little eggs in their carefully roofed resting place.

Up in the tall pines are the rarer Wood-warblers. Oftentimes, in tramping through the woods, we hear an



BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER

apparently insignificant chirp from some tree-top, and find on careful investigation that it has come from some bird of the Warbler family for which, perhaps, we have been looking all day. Early in the spring, before the trees are well leaved out, is a very good time to see these little fellows. The Blackburnian Warbler, beautifully ar-



YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER

rayed in orange and black, the tiny Parula Warbler, with its Quakerlike dress of blue gray, set off by a saddle of old gold, the Pine Creeping Warbler and the Black-throated Green Warbler will all become familiar to you in time. The one last mentioned nests in the tallest pine trees and its nest is so tiny that you will hardly find it, unless you happen to see the bird fly off.

The Yellow is the commonest of all our New England Warblers, and is known by half a dozen names—Yellow Warbler, Summer Warbler, Yellow Wren, Yellow Spar-

row and Yellow Bird being the ones most frequently heard. The female is olive green and is most quiet and retiring, but the male bird in his suit of yellow sprinkled with brown, is a familiar figure on the roadside shrubbery. It nests anywhere, often in barberry bushes, when they can be found, and never over six

feet or so from the ground. The nest is strongly built of plant fibres and lined usually with fern down, or some other soft material. There four white eggs are laid, splotted and dotted about the larger end with purplish brown. This is one of the birds most frequently burdened with the eggs of the Cowbird, and it often happens that the little warbler roofs over her first nest and builds on it a second one in her efforts to be rid of such an unwelcome guest.

The other familiar member of this family is the Chestnut-sided Warbler, and is one of the most beautiful—black and white, with a yellow cap, and yellow wingbars set off by its distinguishing mark of bright chestnut: this bird makes the hillsides and wooded places cheerful by its song. Its nest, generally found in some low bush on a hillside, is suspended between

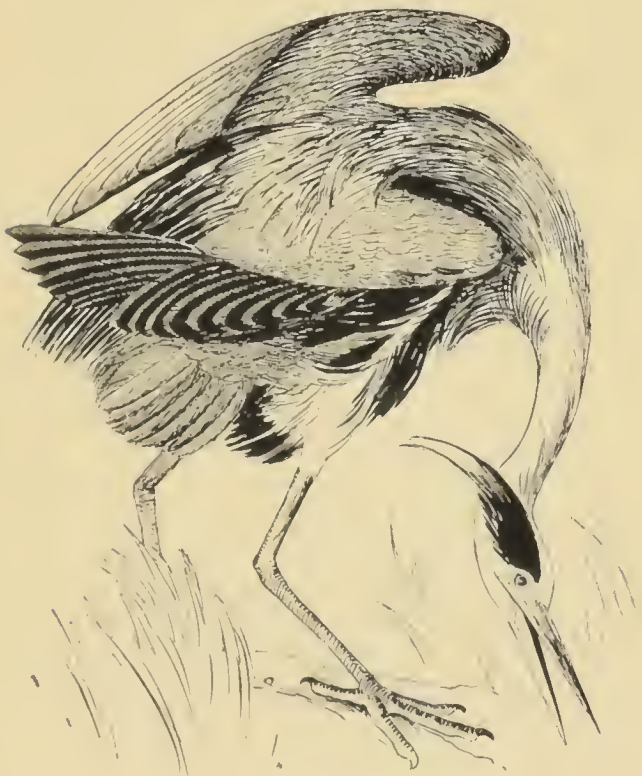


CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER

two branches, or a small fork of a shrub, and contains usually four eggs very much like those of the Yellow Warbler in size and marking. It is one of the most perfect examples of bird architecture and does not easily escape the notice of the ornithologist.

Another variety of Warbler often seen in large numbers during the spring migration, is the Yellow Rump, a showy little bird in blue, gray and yellow. It breeds but seldom in New England, except in the more Northern States, and then sparingly.

The Warbler family is very large, and in addition to those birds already mentioned, one may see in the spring the following: Canadian, Wilson's, Hooded, Maryland Yellow-throat, Mourning, Connecticut, Prairie, Pine Creeping, Yellow Palm, Yellow Throated, Bay-breasted, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Cape May, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Worm-eating, Prothonotary, and Black and White. The last named, sometimes known as the Black and White Creeper, is familiar to many lovers of the woods. He is often to be seen



GREAT BLUE HERON



running up and down the bark of large trees, looking for the larvae and bugs that form his diet. The nest, usually on the ground at the foot of some large tree, is a slight structure of grass, and contains, when complete, four small white eggs, with reddish brown dots all over their surface.

Leaving the uplands and wandering



BLACK AND WHITE WARBLER

down toward the river, along its banks Blackbirds will be discovered looking about for a suitable bush in which to build their nests, or if it is fairly late in May, one may see the male bird perched on some branch overhanging the stream, while he sings to his heart's content. Within the thick bushes, or perhaps in the long grass, the little brown female is quietly sitting on her substantial nest. In the reeds the marsh wrens are busily twittering and excitedly peeping forth at anyone who intrudes. Their nest is a wonderfully made structure, carefully woven of dead reeds and fastened to living ones. It looks more like a gourd than a nest. A tiny hole in the top ad-

mits the parent birds. It is carefully lined with feathers and soft material, in which six or eight chocolate colored eggs are deposited. This little nest of the Marsh Wren's is one of the most perfect of bird homes.

But what is that form that scuttled away so suddenly, hardly giving one a chance to determine its character? A careful search will reveal a Rail's nest, with its complement of seven or eight buff eggs speckled with black. In the northernmost state of New England may be found the Coot, which lays its eggs on a tussock in the middle of some marsh. The eggs resemble in color those of the Rail, but in size are as large as those of the bantam.



CAT BIRD

In marshy borders of lakes or ponds are found the nests of the Horned, or Pied-billed Grebes (Hell-divers they are called when they appear along the sea coast in winter). They build a platform of dead weeds, which they anchor to living ones. The Loon constructs a similar resting place for the two eggs (as large as those of the



BELTED KINGFISHER

goose) which it lays each year, their ground color being chocolate, with black dots sparingly distributed over the surface.

Some birds build their summer homes in strange places. For instance, one would never think of finding the Kingfisher, so familiar to all who live near water, sitting on seven white eggs at the end of a burrow which would do credit to a woodchuck or rabbit, yet this is the form of seclusion which is sought. There is a gravel pit on the banks of the Sudbury River in Massachusetts that is the home of hundreds of Swallows and two pairs of Kingfishers. The steep walls of this pit are honey-combed with the little holes of the Bank-swallows that live there and each year raise their broods to add to the numbers that skim over the smooth surface of the river. One may take a trowel and dig into the bank for three feet before coming to the end of the burrow, where on a few grasses will be found at nesting time four white eggs. These are the only

two New England birds, I believe, that conceal their eggs in the earth, but often birds use holes in trees for that purpose. Many of them are lazy, though, and have a habit of appropriating the deserted nests of woodpeckers which make their own excavations often to the depth of eighteen inches in sound green trees. There at the bottom of the hole thus made, on a few chips, they lay their eggs, always white, but varying greatly in size according to the variety. The Woodpeckers found in New England are the Red-headed, Hairy, Downy, Pileated, Yellow-bellied, Red-naped, and Golden-winged. In winter some of the Arctic species come to us.

Along the sea-coast near fishing grounds, may be seen the common Terns hovering about, waiting to pick up any bits of fish thrown from the fishermen's boats, and sometimes taking a hand themselves in the fishing. Their near relatives, the Caspian, Arctic, Roseate and Least Terns may be met with them. These birds all breed



WHIP-POOR-WILL



COOPER'S HAWK

in the various islands of the Vineyard Sound group, particularly Muskeget, where they are protected. Some of the Hawks will be seen there also, notably the Marsh Hawk, which in his quest for mice and shrews flies low over the wet meadows. The Red-shouldered Hawk and the Sharp-shinned Hawk are the ones that do the damage; the Marsh Hawk, distinguishable a long way off by his white rump, will not invade the poultry yard.

Toward the mid-

dle of May the Whip-poor-wills put in an appearance, as do also their near relatives the Night Hawks. The Chimney Swallows are close connections of these two, and if you can manage to see the nest of one, you will observe an odd provision in nature which furnishes these birds with a kind of glue to fasten the basket-like nest against the side of the chimney. The Pewee is known by the constant reiteration of his own name, and you may look for his nest under old bridges and in similar places. Then the Swallows will come and build on some old barn, and if one has time to watch their nest grow bit by bit, it will be found most interesting.

Vireos nest in the woods, but as they come a little later than most birds, they may be reserved for the next article.

That gaudy woodland bird, the



BLUE JAY



REDWINGED BLACKBIRD

Blue Jay, will make himself familiar with you whether you want to meet him or not. He will imitate all the other birds in addition to his own cat-like call, and at times give a cry like the squeaking of an old door on a windy day.

Sparrows without number come from the South, the early arrivals being the Fox Sparrow, the largest of his kind, and the White-throated Sparrow. Both of these pass on to the Northern limit of New England, closely followed by many others.

A calendar of the birds of New



BOBOLINK

England during the months of March, April and May is appended. This is taken from "The Birds of New England," by H. D. Minot. These dates are only approximate, as the birds come far earlier to Connecticut and Rhode Island than to the Northern States of New England.

The space allowed will hardly permit the enumeration of more than half the names of the birds which may cross one's path in the spring season.



CARDINAL GROSBEEK

March 1st-15th.

Song Sparrows and Snow Birds begin to sing. The Bluebirds and Blackbirds come from the South, and the Song Sparrows and Robins become more abundant.

March 15th-31st.

The Robins, Cedar-birds, Meadow Larks become more numerous. Blackbirds, Fox Sparrows, Bay-winged Buntings, Cow-birds, and Pewees arrive.

April.

The Kingfishers, Swallows, Chipping Sparrows, Field Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes, Pine Warblers, Red-poll Warblers,

Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and sometimes White-throated Sparrows appear.

May 1st.

About the 1st of the month the Barn Swallows, Black and White Warblers, Least Flycatchers, Night Hawks, Purple Martins, Solitary Vireo, Towhee Buntings, Yellow-rump Warblers, and Yellow-winged Sparrows make their appearance.

May 5th.

The Baltimore Orioles, Black-throated Green Warblers, Catbirds, Chimney Swallows, Wilson's Thrushes, Yellow Warblers.

May 10th.

Blackburnian Warblers, Black-cap Warblers, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Parula Warblers,

Bobolinks, Chestnut-sided Warblers, Oven-birds, Golden-winged Warblers, House Wrens, Humming-birds, King birds, Maryland Yellow-throats, Nashville Warblers, Redstarts, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Warbling Vireos, Water Wagtails, Wood Thrushes, and Yellow-throated Vireos arrive.

May 15th.

The Bay-breasted, Magnolia, Black-poll, Canadian, and Mourning Warblers arrive, also the Olive-sided Flycatchers, Traill's Flycatchers and White-crowned Sparrows appear.

May 20th.

About the 20th the Tennessee Warblers, the Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and the Wood Pewees may be looked for.



LARK BUNTING

# A Century of Choral Singing in New England

By Henry C. Lahee

THE cause of music in New England has always received its greatest impulse from the enthusiasm of men who, while possessed of comparatively small technical ability or musical education, put the whole force of their souls into the work of helping the masses of people to a higher enjoyment of music than that in which they found them. Their accomplishments to this end must always be regarded with respect, for he who does the most for the cause of music in a nation is the man who inspires the greatest number with a love for the art and a desire for some knowledge of it, and as choral singing affords the surest foundation, we naturally look to those men who have been foremost in its cultivation.

Until the latter part of the eighteenth century there was practically no choral singing except in the church, but an enthusiast arose who not only initiated important reforms in church choirs, but also established that peculiar institution of olden times generally known as the "singing skewl," and who is said to have originated, in New England, the concert.

This enthusiast was William Billings, born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, a tanner by trade, who has been described as a mixture of the ludicrous, eccentric, commonplace, active, patriotic, and religious elements, with

a slight touch of musical and poetic talent. He was deformed,—one arm somewhat withered, one leg shorter than the other, and blind of one eye, and he was given to the habit of continually taking snuff. He had a stentorian voice, drowning that of every singer near him. He was an advocate of the "fuguing tunes" then being introduced into the country from England, and he wrote many such tunes himself, using the sides of leather in his tannery on which to work out his musical ideas with a piece of chalk. With the compositions of Billings, crude as they were and amusing, we have nothing to do. Let a single sample, and that a poem (?) stand for all. This verse was written as a dedication ode to his "New England Psalm Singer," published in 1770:—

O, praise the Lord with one consent,  
And in this grand design  
Let Britain and the Colonies  
Unanimously join.

Billings introduced the bass viol into the church and thus broke down the ancient Puritanical prejudice against musical instruments. He also was the first to use the pitch pipe in order to ensure some degree of certainty in "striking up the tune" in church. Billings gradually drifted away from tanning and became a singing teacher. As early as 1774 he began to teach a class at Stoughton, and as a result of









