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THE RESIDENT
SONG BIRDS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN;

CONTAINING
DELINEATIONS OF SIXTEEN BIRDS
OF THE SIZE OF LIFE,
(TOGETHER WITH THE EGG OF EACH SPECIES,)

WITH
A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THEIR GENERAL HABITS, AND OCCASIONAL
DIRECTIONS FOR THEIR TREATMENT IN CONFINEMENT.

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The present publication is intended to form a portion of a volume on the Song Birds of Great Britain.

The remaining part will comprise the summer-migrant Song Birds of this country, and will contain figures and descriptions of about the same number of species as the present.

The figures have been drawn generally from the life, and are of the natural size.

P R E F A C E

TO THE FIRST PART.

IT may probably be expected that some apology should be offered for the present publication, which contains so little of novelty. There are few to whom the birds whose portraitures are here attempted to be faithfully given are not familiar : but who, that is thus acquainted with them, does not admire the cheerful melody of their little throats, and, thus admiring, would not acknowledge a humble tribute made at the shrine of gratitude for the delight and pleasure they afford him ?

There is no other class throughout the whole range of animated nature that affords such peculiar sources of wonder and gratification to man, whether in his youth or in the maturity of age, as that of birds. Who that has observed the bold daring of the Falcon, or the majestic stoop of the Eagle—the rapid evolutions of the Swift, or the tenderness of the Dove, can fail to admire these wonderful efforts of creative wisdom, and to adore the great Author of all things who called them into being ?

The birds of song seem more especially created to cheer man in his labour as tiller of the ground, by the music of their notes.

That heart must indeed be callous which is not

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awakened to feelings of tenderness and joy on hearing the gladsome warblings of these feathered songsters of the air. Ever more numerous and rich in song where the soil is most productive, they would appear to hold out an inducement to man to cultivate the ground by the increased delight he would obtain from their exhilarating presence.

The swarthy rustic who plods across the fields at early dawn, bearing his keg and frugal meal, and whistling as he goes, must feel his heart warmed to joy and thanksgiving when he hears the sweetly warbled orisons of the Skylark, which he sees mounting up, up into the celestial blue above, as if he would approach the very throne of Him who made him, and sing his praises *there*. His heavy toil finished for the day,

“The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,”
and by the coppice side hears the delicious vespers of the Woodlark.

In the dreary season of the year, when clouds and mists thicken the atmosphere, or snow spreads a mantle over the ground, the Redbreast haunts the cottage garden, and, perched on some leafless shrub or solitary stump, carols forth his cheerful ditty, and reminds the inmates that although his ordinary food is for a time lost to him, yet *they* can give him plenty. Amid the levelled timber, through which the woodman's axe resounds, he sings his sweetest song, and cheers the sturdy labourer in his toil.

Should the sun's brightening rays dispel the chilling mist, and warm the surface atmosphere, the

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Wren exerts its little throat and hops about the woodpile as if awakened from a dream to thoughts of nuptial bliss.

The sprightly Chaffinch is one of the first to indicate the approach of spring ; and who will therefore say its song is not delightful to the ear ?

Every coppice-wood and grove throughout the greater part of the year re-echoes with the sonorous whistle and melodious chanting of the Mavis and the Merle : and frequently amid the hedge in early spring the Dunnock's gentle chant is heard.

The golden-blossomed furze, which overspreads the waste and open common, is filled with melody by the Linnet's measured lay, and the more tender warble of Stonechat ; and many a fruitless search has been made by truant schoolboys for the nest and eggs, so well concealed beneath the prickly bush.

The Stormcock's early song foretells the rising tempest from a lofty perch in the wood or pine-forest, where the tiny Goldcrest flits about the twigs and sprays, uttering its delicately warbled lay.

The Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Siskin, though deprived of their liberty and pent within a cage, still retain their attractive qualities, and fill our homes with harmony and song. They return the attentions shown them by a reciprocal attachment ; are taught to pipe our favourite airs, or display amusing tricks. The Canary alone may strictly be called a domestic songster : bred for so many years in confinement, one might imagine it had lost all desire to roam,

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and would covet no other abode than its prison-house of wire.

There are several other birds resident amongst us, whose music-notes, though they can scarcely be called song, yet form a pleasing variety in the general chorus of the groves. Such are the Greenfinch (*Loxia chloris*), the Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), the Cornbunting (*Emberiza miliaria*), and some others. The Titmice and the Stares, the Woodpeckers, Rooks, and Jays, contribute their portion of delight, and animate the sylvan scene by their peculiar calls.

Most birds, however, give utterance to some notes or other, expressive of joyous feelings or social invitation, that seldom fail to delight the ear when the eye is contemplating the beauties of sylvan scenery.

It now only remains to add, that as the choicest resident song-birds of this country have been here selected for delineation, so have some of the most pleasing and authentic passages been culled from the writings of various authors in illustration of their history and habits.

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THE WREN.

SYLVIA TROGLODYTES, LATH.

THIS interesting little bird is a native of every part of Europe. It is familiarly called Cutty, Katy, or Kitty Wren. It measures about four inches from the point of the bill, which is full half an inch long, to the tip of the tail. In form it is short and dumpy, and carries the tail in an erect posture. It is found in hedges or trees in the vicinity of farmyards, and is often seen hopping, or creeping, mouselike, about an ivied stump, or the small twigs at the base of a willow, or other tree by the side of a stream. Like the Redbreast, this pretty warbler frequently approaches the habitation of man, and enlivens his garden with its song. Pennant says, it may be placed among the finest of our singing birds. The loudness of its note is remarkable, considering the size of the bird.

A contributor to Loudon's Magazine of Natural History (J. Main) well describes the Wren as "one of the smallest and most vivacious of birds: fami-

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liar without impudence, busy and bustling in action, and extremely gallant in manners; so much so, indeed, that every mild and sunny day in winter reminds him of '*le jour des nocés,*' and excites him to pour forth his gay and lively song. This, though short, is full of gaiety and sprightliness: it is a burst of joy, rapturous and loud; beginning high and graduated down to rather more than an octave, and repeated at intervals of about a minute or two." So audibly loud is the song, that it may be easily distinguished even in a full chorus. The Wren has also a curious note of fear, resembling the winding up of a clock, and a burring note of rebuke.

Though the Wren is far from being a timid bird—for it will allow one to come within arm's length of it, while it is hopping about in pursuit of flies—it is no less wary than other birds respecting its nest, and will scold most outrageously—calling "cheek! cheek!" in rapid succession, when any one intrudes within its boundaries; and will even pursue a boy or polecat to some distance with loud manifestations of anger—*tantæne animis exiguis iræ?**

It begins to make a nest early in the spring, but frequently deserts it before it is lined, and searches for a more secure situation. It is frequently made under the thatch of outbuildings, against the side of a mossy tree, or against an impending bank that secures it from the rain; sometimes in a low thick bush. But what is remarkable, the materials of the nest are generally adapted to the

* Ornithological Dictionary.

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place : if built beside a hay-rick, it is composed of hay ; if against the side of a tree covered with white moss, it is made of that material ; and with green moss, if against a tree covered with the same. Within, it is usually lined with hair and feathers.* The nest is of an oval shape, very deep and thick, with a small hole towards the top for ingress and egress. It is probably from the form of its nest, that this bird derives its specific denomination “ troglodytes.”†

Mr. Rennie observes, that the Wren does not begin at the bottom of its nest first, which is usual with most birds ; but if against a tree, first traces the outline of the nest, which is of an oval shape, and by that means fastens it equally strong to all parts, and afterwards encloses the sides and top, leaving only a small hole near the top for entrance. If the nest is placed under a bank, the top is first begun, and well secured in some small cavity, by which the fabric is suspended.

The eggs are seven or eight in number ; though some naturalists allege that it occasionally lays as many as eighteen eggs.‡ They are white, sparingly marked with small reddish spots, most commonly at the larger end.

The food of this species is insects, which it finds in abundance to support life even in the severest winters. Wrens, however, often perish in very

* Ornithological Dictionary.

† The Troglodytæ were an ancient race of people inhabiting Ethiopia, who are reported to have lived in caverns.

‡ See Pennant's British Zoology.

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severe winters, particularly when the ground is for any considerable period covered with snow. "Under these circumstances," says Selby, "they retire for shelter into holes of walls, and to the eaves of corn and hay stacks; and I have frequently found the bodies of several together in old nests, which they had entered for additional warmth and protection during severe storms."

The Wren is a difficult bird to keep in confinement. Bechstein says, he has never preserved one more than a year. In the house, he says, on account of its liveliness, it is given rather a large cage, the bars of which should be very near together. As soon as it is brought into the house, it should be plentifully supplied with meal worms, flies, elderberries, and then gradually add nightingales' paste, which will soon become its ordinary food. The nightingales' paste is composed of dried, or rather roasted ox-heart and carrot, both grated, and then mixed with dried ants' eggs.

THE GOLD-CRESTED WREN.

SYLVIA REGULUS, LATH.

THIS is the least of all British birds, its weight seldom exceeding eighty grains. Its length is about three inches and a half. It may readily be distinguished from all other birds, not only by its size, but by the beautiful golden-coloured crest on the head. The crest is composed of a double series of feathers arising from each side, and almost meeting at their points; the exterior are black, the interior bright yellow; between which, on the crown, the feathers are shorter, and of a fine deep orange. The female has the head rather less crested, and the crown is bright yellow where in the male it is orange. Though so small a bird, it endures the severe winters of our climate. It is seen in autumn as far north as the Shetland Isles, but quits that country before the cold season.

Bechstein informs us that these beautiful birds are spread over the whole of Europe and Asia; their favourite haunts being the extensive pine and fir forests of the north of Europe, from whence they migrate towards the south on the approach of winter. In the month of October, they are observed in Germany, passing towards the south, and returning again in the month of March towards the north. In that country, however, flocks of them

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reside during the whole year, uniting together as the year advances, and searching out those spots where their food, which consists of small insects, is abundant.

The song of this little chorister is a short strain repeated at intervals; weak yet agreeable; sung inwardly in such a manner, that though the tiny warbler may be in the nearest bush, the notes seem to come from a considerable distance; but it can only be heard when near, except in very calm weather. It sings only in the spring months; and it is most frequently seen in that season among the lower branches of fir-trees, where it seeks its food, and every now and then warbles its fairy strain.* Pennant says he has often observed this bird suspended in the air for a considerable time over a bush or flower, whilst it sung very melodiously. In winter it may be distinguished by its shrill squeak, which somewhat resembles the cricking of a grasshopper. It is very agile, and is almost constantly in motion, fluttering from branch to branch, creeping on all sides of the trees, clinging to them in all ways, and often hanging with its back downward like a titmouse.

Bechstein says these birds are easily taken, by cautiously approaching the branch on which they are perched, and touching them softly with a limed twig, attached to a stick of sufficient length to reach them, when the gentle creatures become unresisting prisoners. When taken, they are easily

* J. Main, in Magazine of Natural History.

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tamed, and will in a very short time take their food from the hand ; but such is their extreme delicacy, that many die before one can be reared : once accustomed to confinement, they have been known to live a considerable time.

The number of these birds indigenous to this country is at times considerably augmented during the autumnal and hyemal months by a body of strangers from the more northern provinces of Europe, making these shores their winter resort.

“The Gold-crested Wren,” says Professor Rennie, “appears to know how to accommodate its nest to the locality chosen. When it selects a spot where there is a natural canopy, it does not take the trouble to build one ; but when this is wanting, it forms as neat a dome, with a small side entrance, as any of the other British Wrens. It is the only native bird, I believe, which ever suspends its nest like so many of the tropical birds ; for though it is said not unfrequently to build against the trunk of a tree covered with ivy, I have always found it hanging under the broad bough of a spruce fir or cedar, or a yew tree ; the thick flat disposition of the leaves forming a sort of umbrella over the opening. The materials of the nest are the same as those of the Goldfinch and Chaffinch ;—namely, green moss, or lichens, felted together very neatly with wool, and lined with the down of willows and other plants, or very soft feathers.”*

The eggs are from seven to ten in number, of

* Architecture of Birds.

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a brownish white, rather darker at the larger end ; their weight, nine or ten grains.

In confinement, Bechstein says the Goldcrests are soon accustomed to the nightingales' paste, by throwing amongst it at first flies deprived of their wings or half dead, and at length they will be satisfied with bruised hemp-seed ; but they must have insects occasionally, flies, meal-worms cut small, ants' eggs, &c. : finally, to keep them healthy, their paste should be neither too stiff nor too moist ; and care must be taken to avoid their swallowing rape or camelin seed, which would immediately kill them.

They will likewise thrive upon a paste made of the crumb of white bread, dried in an oven and powdered : a tea-spoonful of this, with three tea-spoonfuls of hot milk poured over it, and made fresh every day.

THE DARTFORD WARBLER.

SYLVIA PROVINCIALIS, TEMMINCK.

THIS is one of the least known among the British Warblers. It is rather larger than the common Wren, but much longer by reason of its tail, which is one half its length nearly. It is called the Dartford Warbler from having been first discovered in England near that place.

Mr. Sweet says it is "one of the rarest of the British species of this tribe, but mentioned by Montagu as not uncommon about Kingsbridge, Devon, and in the neighbourhood of Truro, Cornwall: it is also occasionally met with on Bexley Heath, near Dartford, Kent; also on Blackheath, and on Wandsworth and Wimbledon Commons; where it is said to breed in the furze-bushes, and feeds on grasshoppers, moths, butterflies, caterpillars, ants, and various other insects.*

The habits of this bird are very little known. Dr. Latham informs us several were shot in the winter of 1783, on a common near Wandsworth in Surrey; from which circumstance that author very justly observes, that if it is found here only as a winter migrant, he cannot reconcile the circumstance of its breeding in France, (which has been said to be the case,) as all migratory birds go north-

* British Warblers.

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ward to breed, not to a warmer climate. In the month of September 1796, (says Montagu,) we observed many of these birds about Falmouth in Cornwall, frequenting the furzy hills, and killed several from that time to the 24th of December, when a sudden fall of snow, that covered the ground for some time, drove them from that part.

It has been found, however, to breed in this country; Montagu having discovered a nest on the 17th of July, on a large furze common. It was placed among the dead branches of the thickest furze, about two feet from the ground, slightly fastened between the main stems, not in the fork.

The nest is composed of dry vegetable stalks, particularly goose-grass, mixed with the tender dead branches of furze, not sufficiently hardened to become prickly: these are put together in a very loose manner, and intermixed very sparingly with wool. In one of the nests which he discovered was a single partridge's feather. The lining is equally sparing, for it consists only of a few dry stalks of some fine species of *carex*, without a single leaf of the plant, and only two or three of the panicles. This thin flimsy structure, which the eye pervades in all parts, much resembles the nest of the White-throat. The eggs are also somewhat similar to those of the Whitethroat, but rather less, weighing only twenty-two grains: like the eggs of that species, they possess a slight tinge of green, and are fully speckled all over with olivaceous brown, and cinerous, on a greenish white ground; the

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markings becoming more dense, and forming a zone at the larger end.

The song (says Montagu) is different from anything of the kind I ever heard, but in part resembles most that of the Stonechat.

An amusing writer in the Magazine of Natural History says: "If you have ever watched a common Wren, (a Kitty Wren we call her,) you must have observed that she cocked her tail bolt upright, strained her little beak at right angles, and her throat in the same fashion, to make the most of her fizgig of a song, and kept on jumping and jerking and frisking about, for all the world as though she worked by steam: well, that's the precise character of the Dartford Warbler, or, as we call it (at Godalming), the "Furze Wren." When the leaves are off the trees, and the chill winter winds have driven the summer birds to the olive-gardens of Spain, or across the Straits, the Furze Wren is in the height of his enjoyment. I have seen them by dozens skipping about the furze, lighting for a moment upon the very point of the sprigs, and instantly diving out of sight again, singing out their angry impatient ditty, for ever the same. They prefer those places where the furze is very thick, high, and difficult to get in."

Colonel Montagu, in describing the habits of some nestlings of this species which he reared in a cage, says, "Nothing can exceed the activity of these little creatures; they are in perpetual motion the whole day, throwing themselves into

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various attitudes and gesticulations, erecting the tail and crest at intervals, accompanied by a double or triple cry, which seems to express the words *cha, cha, cha*. They frequently take their food while suspended to the wires with their heads downwards, and not unusually turn over backwards on the perch."

Buffon, who appears to have been the first, if not the only person on the Continent who knew anything of the Dartford Warbler, as a naturalist, seems to have known very little more than that such a bird existed, and that it had been found in Provence (as his name of *Le Pitchou de Provence* evinces), but he knew nothing of its habits.

THE REDBREAST.

SYLVIA RUBECULA, LATH.

THE REDBREAST, or ROBIN, as he is occasionally denominated, is familiar with us from childhood. Before we can read we learn to repeat the fabled story of poor Cock Robin's death and burial. In all countries he is a favourite, and has what may be called a pet name. The inhabitants of Bornholm call him "Tommi-Liden;" the Norwegians, "Peter Ronsmed;" the Germans, "Thomas Gierdet;" and in England he is called by the more familiar appellation of "Bob." Wordsworth thus poetically addresses the Redbreast:—

Art thou the bird whom man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin;
The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing?
Art thou the Peter of Norway boors?
Their Thomas in Finland
And Russia far inland?
The bird who by some name or other
All men who know thee call thee brother,
The darling of children and men?—

The melodious notes of this little favourite are well known. Its song is sweet and well supported, and is continued almost throughout the year. During spring the Redbreast haunts the wood, the grove,

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and the garden ; it generally retires to thick hedges or other secluded spots to breed in, and is then seldom heard till autumn ; when, on the retirement of our summer visitors, he again makes his appearance about our houses, and awakens our former attachment by pouring out his soft liquid carol, perched on some neighbouring shrub. It becomes the companion of the gardener, or faggot-maker in the woods, fluttering around and chirping its slender "pip." But when the cold grows more severe, and thick snow covers the ground, or frost hardens its surface, it approaches our houses, taps at the closed casement, casting sidelong glances indoors, as envious of the warm abode. It is probably attracted to the habitations of man by the shelter that it there obtains from the rigour of the weather, and in search of the insects that are collected in great numbers by the same cause.

The bill of the Redbreast is slender and delicate ; its eyes are large, dark, and expressive, and its aspect mild. It is nearly six inches in length.

When wild, the Redbreast feeds on all sorts of insects, which are pursued with great skill and agility : sometimes, says Bechstein, this bird is seen fluttering like a butterfly round a leaf on which is a fly ; or if he sees an earthworm, he hops forward, flapping his wings, and seizes it. In autumn he eats different sorts of berries.

In confinement, by giving him at first some earth or meal-worms, and in the autumn elderberries, he soon gets accustomed to eat anything : he picks up

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crumbs of bread, the little fibres of meat, and the like ; but cheese appears his favourite food.*

The Redbreast is rather an unsociable bird with its own species, and drives away all others from his immediate neighbourhood. Obstinate battles are often maintained between the male birds.

The female builds her nest on the ground, at the roots of trees, and in other concealed places. It is formed of the same materials as that of the Wren, but not so elaborately put together, and without a dome to the nest. If, however, there is not a natural concealment of foliage, the birds contrive to form an artificial one of dry leaves, under which they may reach the nest without the precise spot being known ; and when the hen bird leaves her eggs, she sometimes covers them in the same manner ; so that the strewing of leaves mentioned in the old ballad of the Babes in the Wood is true to the habits of the Redbreast. The eggs are yellowish grey, mottled with chestnut colour, and rarely exceed seven.†

Grahame has poetically sketched the habits of the Redbreast in the following lines :—

High is his perch, but humble is his home,
And well conceal'd ; sometimes within the sound
Of heartsome mill-clack, where the spacious door,
White-dusted, tells him plenty reigns around—
Close at the root of brier bush, that o'erhangs
The narrow stream, with shealings bedded white,

* Bechstein's Cage Birds.

† Mudie's British Birds.

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He fixes his abode, and lives at will.
Oft near some single cottage he prefers
To rear his little home ; there, pert and spruce,
He shares the refuse of the good-wife's churn.

As the evergreen shrubs are seen in their greatest beauty when other trees have lost their verdant hue, so the Redbreast assumes a gayer dress, and his song appears more sweet to us, when most other birds are mute, and our summer visitors have fled. His melody is more generally heard when the arbutus, or strawberry-tree, is in all its beauty, exhibiting at once flowers and fruit ; the blossoms of the present, with the ripe fruit of the former year. Spenser has illustrated the exuberance of this beautiful shrub in the following lines :—

There is continual spring and harvest there
Continual, both meeting at one time ;
For both the boughs do laughing blossoms bear,
And with fresh colours deck the wanton prime,
And eke at once the heavy trees they climb,
Which seem to labour under their fruits load :
The whiles the joyous birds make their pastime
Amongst the shady leaves, their sweet abode,
And their true loves without suspicion tell abroad.

THE HEDGE-SPARROW.

SYLVIA MODULARIS, LATH.

THIS well-known species, sometimes called the Hedge-chanter, Hedge-warbler, Titling, or Dunnock, is found in all parts of England; has a pleasing song, and is one of the few birds of the warbler tribe that remain with us the whole year. It begins its song early in the year, if the weather is mild; breeds early, making a nest in March, composed of green moss and wool, and lined with hair, which is placed in some low evergreen shrub, thick bush, or cut-hedge; frequently builds in faggot-piles. The eggs are four or five in number.*

In form, (says Mr. Mudie,) the Titling has some resemblance to the Redbreast; though it is not nearly so energetic in its expression, or so lively in its motions. Its habits are also a good deal similar to those of the Redbreast: it comes about our farmyards and cottages, and into the gardens and shrubberies, in the inclement season,—not in flocks, but hopping about singly, and picking up any food, whether animal or vegetable, it may find. In these gloomy times it utters its peevish cry with an apparent feeling of suffering and desolation.†

The Hedge-sparrow, or Shufflewing, (Mr. Knapp observes,) not influenced by season or caprice to

* Ornithological Dictionary. † Mudie's British Birds.

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desert us, lives in our homesteads and our orchards through all the year, our most domestic bird. In the earliest spring it intimates to us, by a low and plaintive chirp, and that peculiar shake of the wing which at all times marks this bird, but then is particularly observable, the approach of the breeding season; for it appears always to live in pairs, feeding and moving in company with each other. It is nearly the first bird that forms a nest; and this being placed in an almost leafless hedge, with little art displayed in its concealment, generally becomes the booty of every prying boy: and the blue eggs of the Hedge-sparrow are always found in such numbers on his string, that it is surprising how any of the race are remaining; especially when we consider the many casualties to which the old birds are obnoxious from their tameness, and the young that are hatched from their situation. The plumage of this warbler is remarkably sober and grave, and all its actions are quiet and conformable to its appearance. Its song is short, sweet, and gentle; sometimes it is prolonged, but generally the bird perches on the summit of some bush, utters its brief modulation, and seeks retirement again. Its chief habitation is some hedge in the rick-yard, some cottage-garden, or near society with man. Unobtrusive, it does not enter our dwellings like the Redbreast, but picks minute insects from the edges of drains and ditches, or morsels from the door of the poorest dwelling in the village. As an example of a household or domestic bird, none can be found with

HEDGE-SPARROW.

better pretensions to such a character than the Hedge-sparrow.

In confinement it will eat anything that comes to table. It is fond of German paste mixed with the crumb of white bread, hemp, rape, and poppy-seeds, and refuses none of these things immediately on being imprisoned, and it soon seems as completely at ease as if accustomed to confinement.*

The Cuckoo frequently, it is said, makes choice of this bird's nest for the purpose of depositing its egg, which the Sparrow heedlessly incubates together with her own eggs. The young Cuckoo, on being hatched, destroys the young or eggs of its foster-mother, by turning them out of the nest. It is scarcely probable, however, that the female Cuckoo would be in a condition to deposit her egg in the Hedge-sparrow's nest during the incubation of her first brood, as that bird builds in March, and the Cuckoo does not arrive in this country till the latter end of April or the beginning of May.

* Bechstein's Cage Birds.

THE STONECHAT, OR CHICKSTONE.

SAXICOLA RUBICOLA, LATH.

THIS bird is about five inches and a half in length. The throat, head, and beak are black; from which circumstance it is sometimes known by the name of Black-top. The breast is orange brown, and the wings dark brown, with light edges to the feathers. The sides of the neck, wing-covers at the shoulders, and the under part, are white; but on the belly the white has a tinge of yellow. The female has less white, has the brown on the upper part lighter, the head and throat dark brown mottled with white and yellow, and the breast with more of a yellowish tinge.

Mr. Sweet says that they are very variable in their colours — scarcely any two are to be seen exactly alike; some of them being nearly all white, others having a large white patch on the wings and by the side of the neck, while others have it very slightly: the brightness of their colours also varies very considerably on different birds, some of them being particularly handsome.

The Stonechat frequents commons and furzy places, where it sits on the uppermost sprays, and darts at every fly that passes, frequently returning to the same place again.

STONECHAT, OR CHICKSTONE.

In the early part of the spring it sings very prettily, perched on the topmost spray of a furze bush, and at times while suspending itself for a short period on the wing a few yards above the bush. It is one of the first birds that makes its nest in the spring. Its song is heard but for a short season.

“In early spring,” observes Mr. Mudie, “these are very delightful birds. The furze brakes are mostly upon the northern slopes, and above the light fogs and exhalations of the spring; so that they are among the first places on which the sun of the young year shines out. The green and gold of the furze itself are exceedingly gay and cheering, and the scent of it breathes a vernal exhalation which never tires. The black, white, and brown of the little bird contrast beautifully with the colours of the furze, as he sits on the topmost and luxurious branch, which is too elevated for being clipped and rounded by the browsing of sheep, or the nibbling of hares and rabbits: and he is ever and anon flinging himself a few feet into the air, hovering over the bushes, flitting now here, now there, like a butterfly over a bed of flowers, or a dragon-fly over the margin of a brook, and chanting his little song, sweet and persuasive, but low, and tuned to the short distance at which it may be heard by his mate under the shade of the evergreen bower.”

In confinement, Mr. Sweet says, this bird will sing all through the winter, and a great part of the year: it will sing frequently by night as well as by day. It requires the same food and treatment as

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the nightingale, — bruised hempseed and bread mixed up together into a moist paste, and some fresh raw lean beef or mutton, cut in pieces small enough for them to swallow, mixed with it.*

Though the Stonechat (observes the author of the *British Naturalist*) frequents elevated and bleak places, it is not found in the northern parts of the country; but in the south it is resident, and found in winter in more situations and greater numbers than the Whinchat. Still it is probable that a portion, and a very considerable portion, do migrate out of the country in the autumn, as they are less abundant in the winter than in the spring; and, of the little birds that are wholly resident, the majority appear in by far the greatest numbers during winter; as both the coldness of the weather and the failure of food drive them from their summer retreats to the cultivated lands and the neighbourhood of houses, where they come in flocks, and of course attract more attention.†

Selby says, he is inclined to think that the greater part of the young of the year do migrate in the course of the winter; having repeatedly noticed (in places where the species is abundant) the disappearance of the young as winter approached, whilst the parent birds remained attached to their favourite spot. In very severe storms of snow, even those that winter here are sometimes compelled to quit their usual situations, and take refuge in more inclosed grounds or in plantations.

* *British Warblers.*

† *British Naturalist.*

STONECHAT, OR CHICKSTONE.

The nest is placed on or very near the ground, at the bottom of a furze, or some other bush, carefully concealed. It is composed of moss and bents, lined with hair, and sometimes mixed with small feathers. The eggs are five in number, of a blue colour, with small rufous spots at the larger end, which in some are faint—in which case they are scarcely to be known from those of the Whinchat.

THE GOLDFINCH.

FRINGILLA CARDUELIS, LINN.

THE gay little Goldfinch is very generally distributed over Britain. Elegance of form and beauty of plumage, docility of disposition and sweetness of song, together with its natural hardiness of constitution, all combine to render it a general favourite. It is known in some places by the names of Gold-spink, Goud-spink, or Gooldie. In Staffordshire it is called Proud Tailor; and is sometimes denominated Thistle-finch, from its fondness for the seed of that plant.

The Goldfinch is very partial to orchards and gardens, and shrubberies, especially if they are ill kept; as its principal food consists of the seeds of various weeds which grow chiefly in such situations: those of the different thistles, the burdock, and the dandelion are its favourite food, as well as the oily seeds of many of the cruciform plants. To obtain the former, it may be commonly observed clinging in various constrained and grotesque attitudes, often with the head downward, whilst the pappus, or vegetable down, is made to fly in all directions. It also feeds much upon various green leaves, more particularly on those of chickweed and groundsel. It is also very partial to the unopened blossoms of furze, and to the flowers of various other plants.*

* British Cyclopædia, Natural History.

GOLDFINCH.

The song of the Goldfinch is brisk and lively, continuous, well kept up, and extremely musical and cheerful; and its common chirrup and call-notes are more pleasing than those of most other birds.

It flies in flocks or companies, but these are never very numerous, their societies rarely exceeding twenty in number. Its flight is straightforward and smooth, without any undulations or jerks, though from its habit it never flies at any great elevation above the ground. "They seldom," as is observed by a distinguished naturalist, "alight on the ground unless to procure water, in which they wash with great liveliness and pleasure; after which they pick up some particles of gravel and sand. So fond of each other's company are they, that a party of them soaring on the wing will alter their course at the call of a single one perched on a tree." It is by means of the wild birds being so readily attracted by this call that so very many of them are taken by the bird-catchers.

The song of the male (says Mr. Mudie) generally begins in March, and continues improving till the middle of May, at which time it is in the greatest perfection. He sings from the perch, but prefers one which is not very lofty; begins at daybreak, and continues with little intermission till sunset.

The female is rather smaller than the other sex, and has not so much red round the bill; but does not differ much in plumage, except that the colours are not so bright. She begins to build in April, when the fruit-trees are in blossom. Her nest is small: the outside consists of very fine moss, very

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closely and neatly interwoven with other soft bedding, such as wool, &c.; the inside is lined with delicate fine down, wool, and a few hairs and feathers. She lays five or six eggs. The nest is usually found in apple, pear, plum, or other fruit trees, at a time when it cannot be approached without the hazard of damaging the bloom or young fruit. It is sometimes found in thorns and hedges.

It is said that this bird is particularly fond of admiring its gay plumage in a mirror, and of preening its feathers before a glass. A better trait in its character is exhibited in the following stanzas by Cowper on

THE FAITHFUL FRIEND.

The greenhouse is my summer seat;
My shrubs, displaced from that retreat,
Enjoy'd the open air;
Two Goldfinches, whose sprightly song
Had been their mutual solace long,
Lived happy prisoners there.

They sung as blithe as Finches sing,
That flutter loose on golden wing,
And frolic where they list;
Strangers to liberty, 'tis true,—
But that delight they never knew,
And therefore never miss'd.

But Nature works in every breast;
Instinct is never quite suppress;
And Dick felt some desires,
Which, after many an effort vain,
Instructed him at length to gain
A pass between his wires.

GOLDFINCH.

The open windows seem'd t' invite
The freeman to a farewell flight ;
 But Tom was still confined ;
And Dick, although his way was clear,
Was much too generous and sincere
 To leave his friend behind.

For settling on his grated roof,
He chirp'd and kiss'd him, giving proof
 That he desired no more ;
Nor would forsake his cage at first,
Till gently seized, I shut him fast,
 A prisoner as before.

Oh ye, who never knew the joys
Of friendship ; satisfied with noise,
 Fandango, ball, and rout !
Blush when I tell you how a bird
A prison with a friend preferr'd
 To liberty without.

Goldfinches in confinement are fed on poppy, hemp, rape, and canary seed. A young Goldfinch brought up under a Woodlark, Canary-bird, Nightingale, or other fine singing bird, will take their song very readily.

The young bird, before it moults, is grey on the head ; and hence it is termed by the bird-catchers a Grey Pate.

The Goldfinch is as well known on the Continent as in this kingdom. It breeds in France and Italy, and also in Spain ; comes in prodigious flocks early in winter to Gibraltar, and disperses in the spring : few are seen there in summer. It is said

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to be found in Africa and Asia, but much less common.*

Mule birds may be bred from the male Goldfinch and female Canary. These preserve generally the markings of the Goldfinch, with the yellow tint of the Canary; and their song most resembles that of the former, but is much more powerful.

Goldfinches are not generally subject to vary much in plumage, but individuals are occasionally taken with the throat white, and sometimes with a white spot on each side of this: these are termed by the bird-catchers Cheverels, and are often sold at a high price.

* Latham.

THE ABERDEVINE.

FRINGILLA SPINUS, LINN.

THE ABERDEVINE, or European Siskin, is somewhat less than the Goldfinch, and the tail is much shorter in proportion. Its true habitation appears to be the more northern parts of Europe; but it is said to breed sometimes in Westmoreland, and likewise in Scotland. It descends southwards on the approach of winter; and in the neighbourhood of London, numbers of them are regularly taken every autumn by the bird-catchers, though in much greater abundance in some seasons than in others. Early in the month of March,—though in some seasons not until the middle of April, at which time their plumage has acquired its full summer brightness,—the Aberdevines leave the south of England for the pine-forests of Scotland, in some of which they have been ascertained to breed. They begin to reappear in the south about the middle of September. They may generally be found during winter in most situations where the alder grows plentifully; associating with the smaller Linnæus, and subsisting, like that species, on the seeds of various trees, especially on those of the alder and birch. They fly in flocks in successive undulating courses, alternately rising and falling,

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and generally utter a chirp at each propelling motion of the wings; as may be also observed in the Linnet and Goldfinch, and in most other birds of this family.

In Germany they appear about October, when they do a great deal of damage to the hop-plantations; and the places where they have been are easily known by the number of leaves that are found lying on the ground. They visit France during the vintage, and even earlier in the year, when they injure the blossoms of the apple-trees: they also eat the seeds of burdock and elm. They are said to fly very high, and may be heard before they are seen.*

The prominent colours of the Aberdevine are black, bright yellow, sulphur yellow, and a peculiar shade of green, which is so unlike any named shade of that colour, that it is generally known by the appellation of Siskin-green.

In the female the markings are not so decided as in the male; the upper part is rather brown, and the lower more inclining to greyish white in the general tint.

The Siskins are healthy, mild, and docile birds; and will pair well with the Canary—either the hen Canary with the cock Siskin, or the hen Siskin with the cock Canary. They are on this account highly prized by amateurs, as the progeny generally inherit the same good qualities.

Bewick tells us that one which he kept many

* Ornithological Dictionary.

ABERDEVINE.

years in a cage had a pleasing and sweetly varied song, and that it imitated the notes of other birds. Its song, however, is not so musical and sweet as that of the Goldfinch ; it is sharper and more piercing, and finishes always with a remarkably harsh jarring note. It is almost perpetually singing ; and though by no means a loud songster, its voice may often be heard over those of much more powerful song from the peculiar sharpness of its notes.

Sepp has delineated the nest placed in the cleft of an oak tree, built with dry bent, mixed with leaves, and amply lined with feathers ; the base being neatly rounded, and the feathers projecting above the brim, and concealing the eggs, which are three in number. According to Bechstein, this bird has two broods in the year, each of five or six eggs. Temminck says it builds in the highest branches of the pine ; which accounts, perhaps, for its having escaped the researches of the earlier naturalists.

This bird is known in Sussex by the name of Barley-bird, because it comes to them in barley-seed time.

In the cage its food is poppy-seed and a little hemp-seed bruised. It is a complete glutton, and though so small, eats more than the Chaffinch : it is at the seed-drawer from morning till night : it does not drink less, and requires abundance of fresh water ; yet it bathes but little, only plunging the bill in the water, and thus scattering it over

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its feathers; but it is very assiduous in arranging them. It is constantly running along the wires of its cage; and when tame, if anything it is fond of is held to it, it is taken always with the head downwards.

THE CHAFFINCH.

FRINGILLA CŒLEBS, LINN.

CHAFFINCHES are well known by their sprightly strain, which is heard early in spring, and continued till the middle of summer. The lively yet somewhat monotonous song of these birds has given rise to the proverb "as gay as a Chaffinch." They have a peculiar and well-known call of "Twink, twink," by which name they are sometimes known. They have several other provincial names; such as Spink, Beechfinch, Pink, Kelly, Shellapple, Horsefinch, Robby, Shilfa, &c.

The Chaffinch is about the same lineal dimensions as the House-sparrow, but more lightly and elegantly formed. It runs with a swift and even motion, without hopping, and skips very gracefully among the twigs of trees; but when reposing, it squats on the ground as often as it perches.* It is mild and familiar in its disposition; and its strongly marked plumage is elegantly varied in colour, particularly in the breeding season, when the head of the male bird is of a fine bluish grey. The Chaffinch is remarkable for cleanliness and the trimness of its plumage.

In summer these birds live chiefly on insects, with which they likewise feed their young. They

* Mudie's Feathered Tribes of the British Islands.

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may often be observed perched on the twig of some tree overhanging a running stream, where weeds abound, and whence ephemerae are constantly rising. Every now and then they will dart out upon one of these new-born insects; on nearing which they often check themselves in their flight, and if successful in its capture, will return to the same perch to enjoy the dainty morsel, having first snapt off the wings.

In winter they become gregarious, and feed on seed and grain. In Sweden the females migrate in September to a more southern clime, and return to their mates in spring; which circumstance induced Linnæus to designate them by the name of "coelebs" (bachelor). Selby says that these birds, in a general point of view, obey the same natural law in the North of England. In Northumberland and Scotland this separation takes place about the month of November; and from that period to the return of spring, few females are to be seen, and those few always in distinct societies. The males remain, and are met with during the winter in immense flocks, feeding with other gregarious birds in the stubble land, as long as the weather continues mild and the ground free from snow; and resorting upon the approach of storm to farmyards, and other places of refuge and supply.

The female is of a dull green above; the breast and under parts of a brown or dirty white: the wings have the same markings as the male, but less brilliant.

CHAFFINCH.

The male birds frequently maintain obstinate combats, and fight till one of them is vanquished.

The Chaffinch's nest is curious from the workmanlike manner in which it is constructed. The exterior framework of this pretty nest is composed of materials which vary considerably according to the opportunities the birds have of procuring them. Some are formed of the finer sort of green moss from trees, small grey or yellow lichens; in others the nest-webs of spiders, or small tufts of cotton-wool, are stuck over the outside. But the indispensable substance of all these nests is fine wool, with which the other materials are carefully and neatly felted into a texture of wonderful uniformity. In many cases it has been found that greater strength is given to the fabric by binding the whole round with dry grass-stems, or with slender roots, which are partly covered by the staple felt-work of moss and wool. The nest is always bound firmly into the forks of the bush, where it is placed by twining bands of moss, felted with wool, round all the contiguous branches. The softness of the interior is secured by a lining of hair, smoothly woven, and a few feathers. The trees and bushes most commonly selected by the Chaffinch for her nest are the elm, oak, crab-tree, hawthorn, silver fir, elder, &c.*

The Chaffinch appears to attract a considerable degree of attention in Germany, and to be a great favourite there.

* Architecture of Birds.

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The passion for this bird (says Bechstein) is carried to such an extent in Thuringia, and those which sing well are sought for with so much activity, that scarcely a single Chaffinch that warbles tolerably can be found throughout the province. As soon as one arrives from a neighbouring country whose notes appear good, all the bird-catchers are after it, and do not give up the pursuit till they have taken it.

In confinement, these birds (says Bechstein) are fed all the year on rape-seed, dried in summer, or, which is better, soaked and swelled in water. Every day a sufficient quantity should be soaked for the next, and given them fresh every morning. In the spring, a little hemp-seed, or the seed of the nettle-hemp (*Galeopsis tetrahit*), is given them to enliven their song: but these seeds should not be mixed with the rape. It must not be omitted to supply them with green vegetables, chickweed, lettuce, and the like; and in the winter, a piece of apple, mealworms, and ants' eggs agree with them.*

* Bechstein's Cage Birds.

THE LINNET.

FRINGILLA CANNABINA, LINN.

THE LINNET is generally a favourite as a cage bird on account of its excellent song. It has various names. By some it is called the Greater Red-pole, by others, Lintwhite, or Lintie; and, according to the state of the plumage, it is further denominated Grey Linnet, White Linnet, Brown Linnet, and Rose Linnet.

It is subject to much variety with respect to the red markings which at certain ages and seasons are found upon the head and breast. It is probable (says Montagu) that the full plumage of this bird does not take place till the second or third year. The young for some time after they leave their nest resemble the female, and if taken into confinement in that state, rarely, if ever, throw out the red spots, or become so rufous upon the back; and even those that are taken in full maturity most frequently lose all the red feathers in the first moulting, which never return.

The song of this bird consists of many irregular notes tastefully put together in a clear and sonorous tone, called jerks.

The Linnet is among the least solitary of birds. It frequents open commons and grassy fields, where several pairs, without the least rivalry or conten-

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tion, will build their nests and rear their offspring in the same neighbourhood.

The Linnet (says Mr. Mudie) is partially a migrant within the country, though the sexes do not separate in the same decided manner as the Chaffinches. During the inclement season, the birds resort to the lower grounds, especially to those near the sea-shore. They appear in considerable flocks: the young birds appear earliest, then the females, and lastly the mature males; which may be said to be the order of movement with all autumnal birds, how limited soever may be the distance to which they do migrate.

In the flocking time, against which the male has lost the red on the breast, Linnets fly very close and crowded, but with a smooth and straightforward flight. On the ground, they hop, and have not so much command of themselves as Chaffinches; and they accordingly spend more of their time on the wing. They wheel about in masses, and perch on trees; and though they have no song in the winter, they all chirp at the same time in one general chorus. When the weather begins to get warm, their short but pleasant song commences before they retire to the breeding grounds, or the plumage of the male changes; and though their song is not so full then as after they have betaken themselves to the wilds, the crowds that are in song on the same tree make a lively concert.*

The Linnet commonly builds in a thick bush or hedge, and sometimes among furze bushes on

* Mudie's British Birds.

LINNET.

open commons and waste lands. The outside of the nest is composed of bents, dried weeds, moss, and straw, all matted together : the inside is lined with fine soft wool, mixed with down stuff gathered from dried plants, with a few horsehairs, made exceedingly neat and warm. The female lays four and sometimes five eggs, of a bluish white, with red or purplish specks at the blunt end. It has young ones by the middle of April or beginning of May, and has two broods in the year.

The female, which is considerably smaller than the male, is more brown in the general tint of the plumage, and varies little with the seasons.

In the cage, these birds (says Bechstein) should be fed on summer rape-seed only. It is not necessary always to give them hemp-seed with it, and they must not be fed abundantly ; for, taking little exercise, they easily become fat, and sometimes die from this cause : but a little salt mixed with their food is useful, as it preserves them from many diseases, and they like it.

The Linnet is a very common bird throughout Britain, extending as far as the Orkneys, where it is abundant.

The male bird will pair with the hen Canary, and their progeny can scarcely be distinguished from the Grey Canary. They are birds of very gentle dispositions, easily tamed, and capable of very considerable attachment to those who feed and attend them.

THE CANARY FINCH.

FRINGILLA CANARIA, LINN.

CANARY birds are now become so common in this country and all over Europe, and have continued so long in a domestic state, that they may reasonably be included amongst those native birds that contribute so much delight to us by their song. They came originally from the Canary Islands, as their name indicates; but are now bred in immense numbers, both for amusement and commerce, in France, the Tyrol, Germany, and in this country.

“In its native islands,” says Goldsmith, “a region equally noted for the beauty of its landscapes and harmony of its groves, the Canary is of a dusky grey colour, with a tinge of green.” The song of the Canary bird is greatly esteemed: it is a high piercing, quavering pipe, continued for some time in one breath without intermission, and raised higher and higher by degrees with great variety.

Buffon says in his elegant manner, that “if the Nightingale is the chantress of the woods, the Canary is the musician of the chamber: the first owes all to nature, the second something to art. With less strength of organ, less compass of voice, and less variety of note, the Canary bird has a better ear, greater facility of imitation, and a more retentive memory; and as the difference of genius,

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especially among the lower animals, depends in a great measure on the perfection of their senses, the Canary, whose organ of hearing is more susceptible of receiving and retaining foreign impressions, becomes more social, tame, and familiar; is capable of gratitude, and even of attachment; its caresses are endearing, its little humours innocent, and its anger neither hurts nor offends. Its education is easy: we rear it with pleasure, because we are able to instruct it. It leaves the melody of its own natural note, to listen to the melody of our voices and instruments. It applauds, it accompanies us, and repays the pleasure it receives with interest; while the Nightingale, more proud of its talent, seems desirous of preserving it in all its purity,—at least it appears to attach very little value to ours, and it is with great difficulty it can be taught any of our airs. The Canary can speak and whistle; the Nightingale despises our words as well as our airs, and never fails to return to its own wild wood-notes. Its pipe is a masterpiece of nature, which human art can neither alter nor improve; while that of the Canary is a model of more pliant materials, which we can mould at pleasure, and therefore it contributes in a much greater degree to the comforts of society: it sings at all seasons, cheers us in the dullest weather, and adds to our happiness by amusing the young and delighting the recluse, charming the tediousness of the cloister, and gladdening the soul of the innocent and captive.”

There are said to be upwards of thirty varieties

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of the breeds of Canaries, which can be easily distinguished. Canary birds are very prolific, and sometimes breed all the year round; but they most usually begin to pair in April, and to breed in June and August.

A small breeding cage is all that is required for rearing these birds; but where a room can be allotted to the purpose, it ought to have shrubs for them to roost and build upon, with plenty of water to drink and bathe in, that being indispensable for all birds. The floor of the apartment ought to be strewed with sand or white gravel, and on that should be thrown groundsel, chickweed, or scalded rape-seed; but when breeding, they should have nothing but hard chopped eggs, dry bread, cake without salt, and once in two or three days a few poppy-seeds. Some bird-fanciers give their breeding birds plantain and lettuce-seed; but this should be done sparingly, and only for two days together, lest it should weaken them.

About the 15th of April they ought to be furnished with flax, soft hay, wool, hair, moss, and other dry materials, for building the nest, which usually occupies three days: but when the hen has sat eight or nine days, it is necessary to examine the eggs, holding them carefully by the ends against the sun or a lighted candle, and to throw away the clear ones. Some bird-fanciers substitute an ivory egg until the last is laid; when the real ones are replaced, that they may be hatched at the same time. The female lays five or six eggs. When the young are to be reared by the stick, they must

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be taken from the mother on the eighth day, taking nest and all. Prior to this the food should consist of a paste composed of boiled rape-seed, the yolk of an egg, and crumbs of bread or cake unsalted, mixed with a little water. This must be given every two hours. This paste ought not to be too wet, and must be renewed daily until the nestlings can feed themselves.

The process of moulting, which takes place five or six weeks after they are hatched, is frequently fatal to them. The best remedy yet known is to put a small piece of iron into the water they drink, keeping them warm during the six weeks or two months which generally elapse before they regain their strength.*

The nest of the Canary in its native regions, it is said, is built in the fork of an orange tree. When kept in a greenhouse in this country, it will make a similar choice, seeming to be pleased with the perfume of the orange-flowers, as well as of the myrtle.

This bird is supposed to have been first brought into Europe in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It feeds on various seeds, chiefly on those of hemp and canary-grass: it is prolific with most of the other species of the Finch, and even with some which are usually considered as belonging to a different genus—such as the Yellow-hammer (*Emberiza citrinella*). The Canary male is, however, more shy than the female, and will associate with no female but his own species. The age of this

* Ornithological Dictionary.

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bird extends to fourteen or fifteen years.* The female can scarcely be distinguished from the male ; but the latter has generally deeper and brighter colours, a head rather larger and longish, a longer body, a more elegant form, neck not quite so short, and higher shanks.

The length of the Canary is five inches, of which the tail measures two and a quarter.

Those Canaries that have the upper part of the body of a dusky grey or linnet brown, and the under part the yellowish green of the green bird, with dark brown eyes, are the strongest, and most nearly resemble the primitive race. The yellow and white often have red eyes, and are the most tender. The chestnut are the most uncommon, and hold a middle rank for strength and length of life between the two extremes. But as the plumage of the intermediate ones is a mixture of these principal colours, their value depends on the pretty and regular manner in which they are marked.

The most wholesome food for these birds, according to Bechstein, is summer rape-seed. This seed alone, he says, agrees with Canaries as well as with linnets ; but to give them the pleasure of variety, a little bruised hemp or canary, or poppy seed is added to it, especially in the spring, when they are intended to breed. A mixture of summer rape-seed, oatmeal, and millet, or canary seed, may be given them as a great treat. But, whatever

* Jennings' Ornithologia.

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seeds they may have, they equally require green food; as chickweed in spring, lettuce and radish leaves in summer; endive, water-cress, and slices of sweet apple in winter. The more simple and natural the food is that is given to them, the more wholesome it will be; and, on the contrary, the more it is mixed and rare, the more injurious and productive of disease.*

* Bechstein's Cage Birds.

THE THROSTLE.

TURDUS MUSICUS, LINN.

THE THROSTLE is one of the finest singing birds of this country. Every wood and every grove re-echoes with its melodious notes in the spring—frequently as early as February, if the weather is mild. Its strain is often kept up for hours without cessation. Its tone is loud, sweet, and varied, though not so deep and mellow as that of the Blackbird. Its note of anger is very loud and harsh, between a chatter and a shriek.

The Throstle is generally termed by poets Mavis, as the Blackbird is called the Merle :

Merry is it in the good greenwood,
When the Mavis and Merle are singing.

SCOTT.

This bird is found in various parts of Europe ; and is said to be migatory in some places, but continues in England the whole year.

The food of the Thrush in a wild state is insects and berries of various kinds ; and it appears particularly fond of shell snails, especially the *Helix nemoralis*, whose fragile tenement it breaks by reiterated strokes against some stone. It is not uncommon to find a great quantity of fragment

THROSTLE.

shells together, as if brought to one particular stone for that purpose.*

The song of the Thrush (says Mr. Mudie) is unquestionably the finest of any of our permanent wood songs, and superior in power and clearness, though not in variety, to that of any of the warblers. But the very abundance of it perhaps makes it less prized than it should be. The Nightingale heard in the depth of groves, and during the soft and balmy stillness of the summer's night, may have more of the lusciousness of romance about it; but there is a bold, natural, and free feeling of rustic vigour, enjoyment, and endurance about the Thrush, which gives it a more home and hearty interest in all parts of the country, than can be possessed by any bird of passage, whatever may be its charms while it stays. The Thrush is especially one of the birds of plenty: its blithe and varied song is never heard amid desolation; and if you hear a Thrush, you have not very far to go ere you come to a human dwelling. When its animal food, which it at all times prefers to that which is vegetable, fails, the Thrush may commit more depredations among the fruits than many other birds; but when the snail shells by the hedgeside are counted, and it is gravely considered how completely these and their broods would have eaten all the early vegetables as they got above ground, and the strawberries and peaches as soon as they began to ripen, it is at least an undetermined question,

* Ornithological Dictionary.

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whether the good done by the Thrush may not far more than counterbalance the evil. The creatures on which the Thrush feeds *are* destructive: they have no song, and they are at least not more pleasant to look at than Thrushes.*

The Thrush builds her nest early in spring, generally in March, in a thick bush, hawthorn, holly, silver fir, furze, ivied tree, or sometimes in a dead fence where the grass grows high; but it has occasionally been found to nestle within out-buildings. Fine and soft moss, interwoven with dried grass or hay, forms the outside of the nest; and the inside is curiously plastered with cow-dung, or horsedung, as Mr. Rennie observes, intermixed with rotten wood. The eggs are five or six in number, of a bluish green colour, speckled with a few dark spots, chiefly at the larger end.

In confinement, oatmeal moistened with milk is a very good food; and it requires also a great deal of fresh water, as well for bathing as drinking.

* Mudie's British Birds.

THE MISSEL THRUSH.

TURDUS VISCIVORUS, RAY.

THIS is the largest species of Thrush; measuring eleven inches in length, and weighing near five ounces. It is by no means plentiful in England, observes Montagu, and seems to be less so in winter. Bewick says it begins to sing early, often on the turn of the year, in blowing stormy weather; whence in some places it is called the Storm Cock. It likewise bears the appellations of Throstle Cock, Screech or Skrietch Thrush, Holm Thrush.

Montagu says the song is much louder and very superior to that of the Thrush (*Turdus musicus*): frequently, perched upon the uppermost branch of a tall tree, it sings while the female is making her nest, and during incubation; but becomes silent as soon as the young are hatched, and is no more heard till the following year. Mr. Knapp seems to entertain a very different opinion of its vocal powers. He observes, "The approach of a sleety snow-storm, following a deceitful gleam in spring, is always announced by the loud untuneful voice of the Missel Thrush, as it takes its stand on some tall tree, like an enchanter calling up a gale. It seems to have no song, no voice, but this harsh predictive note; and that in great measure ceases

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

with the storms of spring.”* Several writers in the Magazine of Natural History maintain with Montagu that it has a perfect song, and is far from a contemptible musician.

The Missel Thrush is a very bold bird during the breeding season, drives all others from the neighbourhood of its nest, and will even attack the Magpie and Jay. Its food, like the other species of Thrush, is insects and berries, particularly those of the misseltoe (whence its name). It has been observed to take up its station on some tree near to a favourite holly-bush, to guard it from the depredations of other birds, which on their approach he immediately attacks, chattering and screaming, chasing them to a distance, and striking at them in the air with hawk-like fury.

The nest of the Missel Thrush is constructed with considerable ingenuity. After it has reared a rough scaffolding of the withered stems of plants, dry grass, and moss, which are placed in great quantity and with little art, it constructs a substantial wall of clay. The masonry is not much better finished than the scaffolding, being inferior perhaps to that of the Blackbird, and decidedly so to that of the Song Thrush; but the rudeness of the scaffolding, and the clay-walls built upon it, is amply compensated by the ingenious basket-work by which these are subsequently concealed. The nest itself is usually placed in the fork of a tree, such as the pine in wilder districts, or

* Journal of a Naturalist.

MISSEL THRUSH.

an apple-tree in an orchard.* The eggs are four or five in number, of a flesh colour, marked with deep and light rust-coloured spots. There are two broods in the year.

The male of the Missel Thrush (observes Mr. Mudie, in his interesting book on British Birds,) is not a mere idle songster. He takes turn with his mate in the labour of incubation; he feeds her, and assists in feeding the young; and he is equally vigilant and bold in the defence of his family. The call-note which he utters in case of danger, and which is answered by the female as if she were expressing her confidence of safety while he is on the watch, is harsh and grating, and has the tone of a note of defiance. And, with the Missel Thrush, the defiance is no idle boast; for the sneaking Magpie, the light-winged Kestrel, and even the Sparrowhawk, are at those times compelled to keep their distance, as the Thrush is too vigilant to be surprised, and under the sprays, where those birds must contend with him upon equal terms, he keeps them all at bay. Nor is he the guardian of his own family only—he is in some measure the warder of the whole grove; and when the harsh but shrilly sound of his bugle note of alarm is heard, all the warblers take heed of the danger, and the chorus is mute till he again mounts the highest branch and raises the song of deliverance.

The habits of the Missel Thrush appear to vary according to circumstances; for Temminck informs

* Architecture of Birds.

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

us it prefers black forests situated upon mountains ; while in England, Mr. Knapp tells us, it keeps generally in open fields and commons, heaths and unfrequented places, being of a wild and wary nature, and only approaches our plantations and shrubberies in severe weather and in breeding-time. It begins to breed, he says, in April.

These birds will feed in confinement upon plain oatmeal, or even bran moistened with water. But although this meagre diet is sufficient to keep it alive, it will hardly serve to enliven it and make it sing : for this purpose it must be better fed, with bread and milk, meat, and other dishes served at table, none of which it refuses ; and it must also be allowed to bathe, since nothing does it more good, or enlivens it so much. The cage in which it is confined must be at least three feet and a half long, and nearly as many high : a size necessary for it to take the exercise suited to its vivacity and petulance, without injuring its feathers.*

* Bechstein.

THE BLACKBIRD, OR MERLE.

TURDUS MERULA, LINN.

THIS is one of the largest of our song birds. The male, as is well known, is wholly of a deep black when it has attained maturity, which is not till after its second moult, or towards the spring of its second year, at which time the bill and orbits of the eyes are yellow. Its form and also its plumage are remarkable for compactness; and it is very quick-sighted and lively in its motions.

The song of the Blackbird has much less variety, compass, and spirit than that of the Thrush. He commences his song with the morning light, and continues it from hour to hour without effort; its deep-toned, clear, and sonorous notes being heard at a considerable distance.

When snowdrops die, and the green primrose leaves
Announce the coming flower, the Merle's note,
Mellifluous, rich, deep-toned, fills all the vale,
And charms the ravish'd ear. The hawthorn bush
New-budded is his perch; there the grey dawn
He hails, and there with parting light concludes
His melody.*

The Merle is a solitary bird, and fond of retirement; yet it does not altogether shun the dwellings of man, for it nestles close to his house.

* Grahame.

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

It is one of the earliest birds to hail the morn,
and its note is heard till late in the evening. Unlike most other birds, it will sing in wet weather. Mr. Bowles pleasingly illustrates this in the following lines :—

As some lone bird at day's departing hour
Sings in the sunbeam of the transient shower,
Forgetful though his wings be wet the while.

When wild in the fields, the Blackbird feeds promiscuously on berries and insects, snails, earthworms, &c. The female is of a brownish black, with the breast of a reddish hue, and the belly greyish: the throat is spotted with dark and light brown. She builds her nest and hatches her young sooner than others of the feathered tribe in spring; the first brood being hatched by the end of March. The nest is placed in ivied walls, old trees, and thick bushes, at a moderate height from the ground. The outside or framework is composed of moss, slender twigs, bents, and the fibres of roots, all strongly cemented together with moist clay; the inside is lined with a thick bedding of dry hay, bents, hair, or other soft matter. She lays four or five eggs, which vary sometimes considerably in colour. It is sometimes found (says Mr. Rennie) that the masonry of the clay is carried round the branch of the bush where the nest may be built, in order to make it fast; which circumstance, as it is not of usual occurrence, shows that the little architect was guided by intelligence akin to rationality, and not by what is usually understood by blind instinct.*

* Architecture of Birds.

BLACKBIRD, OR MERLE.

There are usually two and frequently three broods of Blackbirds in the year; and thus the song continues through great part of the season, though it is not heard so continually, so long at a time, or from so lofty a perch, as that of the Thrush. Notwithstanding its solitary and hiding habits, the Blackbird is more easily tamed and more patient of restraint than the Thrush.* It is an excellent cage bird, carolling delightfully all the spring and summer; but it should not be placed in an aviary, as it pursues and harasses the other birds. It will eat readily crumbs of bread, and flesh, either raw or otherwise, and is likewise fond of bread mixed with milk or water.

Young birds (says Albin) of twelve days old or less, may be raised with little trouble, by taking care to keep them clean, and feeding them with sheep's heart, or other lean unsalted meat, cut very small and mixed with a little bread. While young, they should have their meat moist, and be fed about every two hours. At full growth, they thrive on any sort of fresh meat, mixed with a little bread. When sick or drooping, a house-spider or two will help the bird. They love to wash and preen their feathers; therefore, when full-grown, water should be set in their cages for that purpose.

* Mudie's British Birds.

THE SKYLARK.

ALAUDA ARVENSIS, LINN.

THE length of this bird is about seven inches. The feathers on the head are rather long, and erectable in the form of a crest. The hind claw is very long and straight—a characteristic in these birds which enables them to run on the surface of thick-matted grass, or rise from it, or alight on it, with much less inconvenience than almost any other birds.

Who does not know this joyous songster of the free air? It is distributed over the greater part of the kingdom, and is universally a favourite. It does not frequent the bleak wastes; but wherever man cultivates the soil, from Devon to the Shetland Isles, the Lark is there “to beguile his labour with a cheerful song.”

The song of the Skylark is heard early in the spring: it is poured forth while the bird is on the wing, and never fails to warm the heart of the listener, when carolling, far, far in the blue air above, his hymn of joy and gratitude at the return of the vernal season.

He not only ushers in the spring, but with the first dawn of day he is up, and appears “the herald of the morn.” His song is heard in the evening

SKYLARK.

as well as the morning, and is continued during eight months of the year.

The time when the Lark is first in song, and the general appearance and habits of the bird, endear it to the countryman; and even the boys in their nesting excursions hold the humble couch of the Lark in a sort of veneration.

And it merits the esteem and protection which it receives from the country people, not only on account of the gentleness of its manners, and the sweetness and enlivening character of its song, but from the actual service which it renders to the cultivator, in the destruction of both animals and vegetables which are injurious to him. These are, during the nesting-time, earth worms, earth larvæ, earth insects; and also the winged ones, when they alight on the roots of plants, for the purpose of depositing their eggs. At other times they are of vast service in picking up the seeds of plants which are equally injurious to arable and to pasture lands.

The Skylark ascends almost perpendicularly and by successive springs into the air, and hovers there at such a vast height as often to be invisible, though its notes are clearly heard, pouring forth from its agitated throat, and filling the whole surrounding air with cheerful melody.

On an open stubble field, or rough fallow, one has the best chance of hearing the matin song of the year. The Lark is peculiarly the bird of open cultivated districts, avoiding equally the open

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

wilds, and the immediate vicinity of houses, woods, and coppices. The small annual weeds that ripen their seeds upon stubble after the crops are removed, are its favourite food. In winter it shifts its quarters. From September to February, the time that Larks are mute, they collect in very large flocks, and the bird-catchers destroy them in great numbers for the tables of the luxurious. Abundant as they are, however, in Hertford and Northampton, and some of the open cultivated counties of England, they are not near so numerous as on some parts of the Continent. The plains of Germany swarm with them; and they are so highly prized as an article of food, that the tax upon them in the city of Leipzig produces nearly a thousand pounds yearly to the revenue.*

The Lark builds its nest upon the ground without any concealment. The nest, though simple, is constructed with a good deal of care. The outside is composed of small twigs, bits of creeping roots, and coarse grass; and the interior, of softer grasses, sometimes, but not very often, mixed with long hairs.

The daisied lea he loves, where tufts of grass
Luxuriant crown the ridge: there with his mate
He founds their lowly house of wither'd herbs,
And coarsest spear-grass; next, the inner work
With finer and still finer fibres lays,
Rounding it curious with his speckled breast.†

It generally has two broods in the year. The eggs are seldom more in one brood than four

* British Naturalist. † Grahame's Birds of Scotland.

SKYLARK.

or five. The bird, and indeed the eggs, resemble in colour the clods among which they are placed; and as the sitting-time for the second brood, which is in July, and even for the first, which is in May, happens when the herbage is long, the nest is not discovered by the rising of the old bird, as the grass is very little agitated. The head of the bird when sitting on the nest is always, it is said, turned to the weather: the feathers of the breast and throat completely prevent the rain from entering the nest at that side, while the wings and tail act as penthouses on the other.*

The ill-fated Shelley has some exquisite lines to a Skylark :—

Hail to thee, blithe spirit !—
Bird thou never wert,—
That from Heav'n, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
Higher still and higher
From the cloud thou springest :
Like a cloud of fire
The deep-blue thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

The common German paste is the food of Skylarks when in a cage. Poppy-seed, bruised hemp-seed, crumb of bread, and plenty of greens, as lettuce, endive, cabbage, or watercress, according to the season, must be added. A little lean meat and ants' eggs are favourite delicacies, which make it gay and more inclined to sing. These birds are fond of dusting.

British Naturalist.

THE WOODLARK.

ALAUDA ARBOREA, RAY.

THIS bird has a considerable resemblance to the Skylark in its appearance, and some of its habits ; but it is not above two-thirds of its weight, the tail is much shorter, the body more slender, and the crest larger and more capable of being erected. The principal differences in the markings are, that the feet are yellow,—the male has a general yellowish tinge underneath, and a whitish band on the head ; and the exterior feathers of the tail, instead of being edged with white, as in the Skylark, are black.* The neck and breast are yellowish white, tinged with brown, and marked with narrow dusky spots.

The female, more beautiful, (says Bechstein,) is of a paler ground, with darker ornaments ; her breast more spotted ; the crest on her head more prominent, and the line round the cheeks more distinct.

The Woodlark is by no means so plentiful as the Skylark, but it is met with in most parts of the kingdom. It usually lives and breeds on the ground, like the latter species. Its hind claw is as long as that of the Skylark, and straighter ; yet it often perches on trees, and sometimes sings

* British Naturalist.

WOODLARK.

from its perch, especially in the evening. It sings delightfully on wing, (says Montagu,) describing its flight in widely extended circles, and often pouring out its song a whole hour without intermission. The song is much more melodious than that of the Skylark, but does not consist of so great a variety of notes. It sings almost throughout the year, and all day long. The only months of the year when the Woodlarks are altogether silent, are June and July; though the precise time varies with the latitude and season, when both the male and female are busied in finding food for their young progeny.

The female, like other Larks, sings also; but her strains are shorter and less sustained. She begins to build in March. The nest is placed on the ground, most commonly in rough and barren land, under a tuft of high grass, furze, or some low bush, and is made of dry grass, lined with finer grass, and sometimes with a few long hairs. The eggs are generally four in number, pale brown, mottled with grey and brown, chiefly at the larger end: they are sometimes laid as early as April. The incubation and nursing occupy about a fortnight each; and when the first brood are able to shift for themselves, a second is immediately set about.*

In the early parts of the autumnal months, the Woodlark's carols may be heard in the air commonly during the calm sunny mornings of this season. They have a softness and quietness, perfectly in unison with the sober, almost melancholy stillness

* British Naturalist.

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

of the hour. The Skylark also sings now, and its song is very sweet, full of harmony, cheerful as the blue sky and gladdening beam in which it circles and sports, and known and admired by all; but the voice of the Woodlark is local, not so generally heard,—from its softness must almost be listened for, to be distinguished, and has not any pretensions to the hilarity of the former. This little bird sings likewise in the spring; but at that season, the contending songsters of the grove, and the variety of sound proceeding from everything that has utterance, confuse and almost render inaudible the placid voice of the Woodlark. It delights to fix its residence near little groves and copses, or quiet pastures, and is a very unobtrusive bird, not uniting in companies, but associating in its own family parties, only feeding in the woodlands, on seeds and insects. Upon the approach of man, it crouches close to the ground, then suddenly darts away as if for a distant flight, but settles again almost immediately.*

Woodlarks generally congregate in the cold months; though their assemblies are small compared with those of the Skylarks, being rarely composed of more than six or seven birds. Their food is grain and seeds of various kinds, as well as insects.

These birds are taken with clap-nets in great numbers in September; they are likewise taken in January, at which time they are very stout, good birds. They should be fed with hemp-seed,

* Journal of a Naturalist.

WOODLARK.

bruised very fine, and mixed with bread and eggs hard boiled, and grated or chopped as small as possible. The bottom of the cage should be strewn with fine red gravel, and some of the meat scattered upon it, if the bird is fresh caught, until he eats out of the trough freely. He does not require turf, like the Skylark. Ants may be given him as a change of food, or a few meal-worms. He will eat any kind of flesh meat minced fine; which should be given him occasionally for change of diet, always leaving some of his constant meat in the cage at the same time. The Woodlark is a tender bird, and requires great care.

Bechstein says these birds appear to be subject to whims. Some will never sing in a room, or in the presence of an auditor. These perverse birds must be placed in a long cage outside the window.

THE BULLFINCH.

LOXIA PYRRHULA, LINN.

WHEN at its full growth this bird measures, from the point of the bill to the tip of the tail, six inches, of which the tail is two. The bill is remarkably thick and strong in proportion to its length, somewhat resembling that of a parrot; and the head and neck are large in comparison with the size of the body, which was probably the origin of its name.

Every one (says Mr. Mudie) is familiar with the Bullfinch as a cage bird; but as a wild tenant of our woods it is perhaps more rarely seen or heard, at least for the greater part of the year, than any other bird which is generally distributed, and as numerous in all its localities.

In the summer it mostly frequents woods and the more retired places; but in winter it approaches gardens and orchards, where in spring it makes great havoc among the buds.

It has a good mellow voice, is very docile, and the hen learns to pipe a tune as well as the male.

The Bullfinch is gregarious; seldom more than one brood is seen together, and they are most commonly observed in pairs. According to Latham, it is common to most parts of the continent of Europe, and extends to Russia and Siberia, in which latter place it is caught for the use of the table.

BULLFINCH.

The female differs considerably from the male, except in the crown of the head, which is black : the whole bird besides is of a dirty brown, the rump being white.

The Bullfinch breeds late. The nest, which is not of very elaborate construction, is not begun till the end of April or the beginning of June. The male bird (says Mr. Mudie) sings at that time ; but his song, though mournfully soft, is so low that it is not heard but in the close vicinity ; and the bird is so apt to drop into the bush and be silent on the least alarm, that to scramble through the trees in order to hear the native note of the Bullfinch, is almost the surest way of being disappointed.

The female generally builds in an orchard, wood, or park, preferring the thickest places for that purpose, where there are plenty of trees ; or on heaths. The nest is often found on the flat branch of a spruce pine, or silver fir, about four feet from the ground. It is formed of small tender twigs, and flexible fibrous roots, intertwined into a sort of basket-work, rather loose, and only sufficient to hold the eggs and young, and prevent them from rolling out. The inside is wholly lined with fine roots, without any hair or feathers.* The eggs are four or five in number, of a bluish colour, with dark brown and faint reddish spots.

The Bullfinch (observes the author of the *Journal of a Naturalist*) has no claims to our regard. It is gifted with no voice to charm us (in its

* Architecture of Birds.

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

wild state); it communicates no harmony to the grove; all we hear from it is a low and plaintive call to its fellows in the hedge. It has no familiarity or association with us, but lives in retirement in some lonely thicket ten months in the year. At length, as spring approaches, it will visit our gardens, an insidious plunderer. Its delight is in the embryo blossoms wrapped up at this season in the bud of a tree; and it is very dainty and curious in its choice of this food, seldom feeding upon two kinds at the same time. It generally commences with the germs of our larger and most early gooseberry; and the bright red breasts of four or five cock birds, quietly feeding on the leafless bush, are a very pretty sight, but the consequences are ruinous to the crop. When the cherry buds begin to come forward, they quit the gooseberry, and make tremendous havoc with these. Having banqueted here a while, they leave our gardens entirely, resorting to the fields and hedges, where the sloe bush in April furnishes them with food: May brings other dainties, and the labours and business of incubation withdraw them from our observation.

When wild, the Bullfinch does not often suffer from the failure of its food, observes Bechstein; for it eats pine and fir seeds, the fruit of the ash and maple, corn, all kinds of berries, the buds of the oak, beech and pear trees, and even linseed, millet, rape and nettle seed.

Rape-seed is a healthy food for these birds in confinement. The hemp-seed is too heating,

BULLFINCH.

sooner or later blinds them, and always brings on decline. A little green food, such as lettuce, endive, chickweed, watercresses, a little apple, particularly the kernels, the berries of the service-tree, and the like, is agreeable and salutary to them.

Although the song of the male and female Bullfinch in their wild state is very harsh and disagreeable, yet if well taught while young, as they are in Germany, they learn to whistle all kinds of airs and melodies with so soft and flute-like a tone, that they are great favourites with amateurs. There are some of these little birds which can whistle distinctly three different airs, without spoiling or confusing them in the least. Added to this attraction, the Bullfinch becomes exceedingly tame, sings whenever it is told to do so, and is susceptible of a most tender and lasting attachment, which it shows by its endearing actions.

