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1892

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CONCORD. BALL'S HILL.

1892
January 29

Large flock
of
Goldfinches

[Down to Ball's Hill this forenoon, returning to dinner. About midway of the lane which leads to Bensen's we started an immense flock of Goldfinches from a field of weeds. There must have been over 100 of them. They rose all together in a perfect cloud and alighting in the top of a leafless tree completely filled it, crowding the branches and twigs like clusters of fruit. Returning through this lane an hour or two later we found the Goldfinches gone but startled a flock of ten or twelve Tree Sparrows from the weeds. I also saw here three Blue Jays and a Downy Woodpecker. On Ball's Hill I flushed a Grouse from under a bushy oak on the summit and heard Crows cawing and Jays screaming. In Bansen's Pines I found two Chickadees. George (Carroll) saw a Shrike in Bensen's orchard, describing it to me afterwards very accurately.

In the woods on the north side of Ball's Hill and the pines along Bansen's ridge the ground was covered about two inches deep with dry powdery snow. This everywhere was thickly tracked on by Rabbits and Mice and a few Foxes had also left their footprints.

The ice boomed at frequent intervals while I was at the hill. More than once I was struck by the resemblance of the sound -- when coming from a distance -- to the pumping of the Bittern. The river is now frozen over everywhere.]

8
"Damsdale".

1892
January 30

After the snow had quite ceased falling, I started for the Damsdale(woods) following the Estabrook road. There was perhaps an inch of new snow, fine and powdery, but it had blown off many places in the road and in the fields the tips of the grass blades rising through and above it gave the surface a decided tinge of pale straw color.

Damsdale
Woods

[Near the entrance of Derby' s lane I came upon three Chickadees accompanied by a Golden-crest, the first I have seen this month. I also started a very large adult Red-tailed Hawk from the top of an apple-tree in the meadow opposite.]

Chickadees

and

Golden crest

Following the brook up through the Damsdale meadow I looked closely among the tussocks and bushes for tracks of small mammals. In two places I found the fresh trail of a mouse leading from one bunch of grass to the next, six or eight feet across open snow, thus proving that these animals expose themselves to some extent by day. There were no other tracks of any kind. Turning back and climbing the slight ridge to the south I found on the sheltered edge of the woods a merry party of Tree Sparrows, 24 in number and with them

Field Mice

Junco

Tree Sparrows

one Junco. They were feeding among some weeds. Every now and then the musical tweedle, tweedle call would start and run through the flock. They had covered the fresh snow with braided trails, the foot prints in pairs or one slightly in advance, thus: ~~~~~~~~~. A Downy Woodpecker near them

Foot prints

in a wild cherry.

CONCORD.

1892.

February 2

Ball's Hill

Buteo

borealis

Chickadees

Large flock

of Tree

Sparrows

One sings.

Partridge

calls




during flight

The morning was delightfully soft and warm without a breath of wind, the sun peeping through a thin curtain of clouds at intervals. The roads were muddy and the snow melted rapidly on the northern slopes. On reaching Holden's I got out of the buggy and cut across the intervening fields and wood-lots directly for Ball's Hill. [The first bird I saw was a fine old Red-tailed Hawk soaring over the woods on Holden's hill. Soon after entering these woods I heard a Chickadee giving the phoebe notes at regular intervals. On reaching Ball's Hill I found a large flock (I counted 43 birds and certainly missed some) of Tree Sparrows in the bushes on the edge of Bensen's cranbury meadow. There was a Downy Woodpecker with them. One of the Tree Sparrows was in nearly, if not quite, full song when I first came within hearing and afterwards when I was following the flock either the same or other males sang a dozen times or more, making the woods ring with a mild, sweet strain.]

When I first approached the edge of this ^{The} meadow a Partridge rose from the wood edge on the opposite side, flying back into my maple swamp. Just after it left the ground it began calling, keeping it up until it was out of sight beyond the crest of the ridge. I noted the sound on the spot thus: Kr-r-r-uck, kr-r-r-uck, kuk, kuk; this repeated. The bird flew rather slowly but made quite as much whirring as usual although it went only a short distance

and acted as if undecided whether to immediately realight or not, making as it were a halting flight. I have frequently heard the vocal sounds just described on similar occasions and also when a bird has started to run a little way before flying. I doubt if they are ever given by a bird in swift flight or by one which rises strongly. They are perhaps oftenest heard from a wing-broken bird just roused from its place of concealment.

Rabbit
tracks

On my way across country from Holden's I saw innumerable Rabbit tracks wherever there was enough snow to show them well. Doubtless a single Rabbit will make many tracks in a night but there was sufficient variation in the size of the foot-prints to convince me that each cover where I saw them contained several of these animals. The tracks followed more or less well-beaten paths in places, in others wandered about, crossing and recrossing openings in the bushes and winding about among their stems. The Rabbits had even visited small, exposed thickets of willows and cornels on the river banks or meadows several rods from the woods. There was much variation in the tracks that I saw to-day but as a rule the foot-prints were squarely in pairs thus:  Sometimes the four prints were nearly or quite amalgamated, thus:  . Those of the hind feet were always in advance. I did not see a single track of this style  . Why? Most of the tracks were on ice covered with thin damp snow and the impressions were

Moles or
Shrews

so distinct that usually **not** only the toes but their claws as well had left a clear cast. Besides Rabbit tracks I saw only those of Mice and perhaps of Shrews, also.

On a sunny slope of Ball's Hill where there was no snow and where the ground was covered thickly with dry leaves a small, dark slaty Mole or large Shrew crossed a narrow path within six feet of me, darting across as swiftly and quite as silently as a shadow. On going to the spot I found that it had a tunnel above the ground but under the leaves which were soggy and more or less frozen together in a mat of several inches in thickness. The tunnel was broken by the foot-path and in many other places was more or less open above, forming a deep trench not quite roofed over. I see many similar tunnels in the snow. Miller thinks they are the work of Field Mice but the animal I saw to-day was certainly either a Mole or a Shrew, I think the latter.

{After cutting down some small trees (where my hut is to stand) and burning the brush on the river ice, I started for town ? at 4 P.M. It was beginning to snow and by the time we reached the house the ground was quite white in the fields. Jays were screaming on Ball's Hill this morning and Crows cawing in the distance.}

white
copy used

CONCORD.

Damsdale and Estabrook Woods

1892

February 4

Snow-laden
trees

It snowed all day yesterday, and the night before as well, but at no time very heavily, only about six inches falling in all. The snow was moist and heavy and as there was no wind it clung to every twig, loading the trees with a burden of spotless white. I walked up through the Damsdale late yesterday afternoon before the storm had quite ceased. The woods were very beautiful everywhere, but especially where there were evergreens intermixed. Under some of the pines the ground was perfectly bare, the branches having intercepted literally every snow-flake. The gray birches, almost without exception, were bent down so that their tops nearly or quite touched the ground. They looked like great ostrich plumes. The broad wood-path through Mr. Derby's woods was completely closed by them so that I had to leave it and follow the margin of the brook. Saw no tracks whatever.

This morning I went to the lime kiln, riding up the Estabrook road on a wood sled. The scene, after we had fairly entered the woods, was simply one of bewildering beauty. I can find no words to describe it but I do not think I have ever seen it equalled, before. The forest had put on an ermine robe. Not a tree or a bush of whatever species that was not clad wholly in purest white. Even the

CONCORD.

1892

February 5

To Ball's Hill by sleigh at 10 A.M., taking lunch and spending the day.

Crows -

Buteo borealis

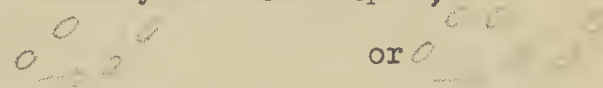
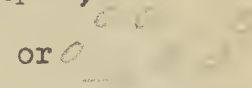
On the road saw a flock of sixteen Crows and a fine Red-tailed Hawk. The latter started from the top of a living pine, shaking down a shower of fine snow as it took wing.


Walked down to the Hill from Bensen's along the back side of the pine ridge. The trees still bear much snow and the young pines in the glacial hollow were loaded with dazzling masses, presenting a beautiful appearance.

Golden crests

Two Kinglets and a Chickadee or two on this ridge.]

Fox tracks

Spent most of the forenoon trying to burn my big brush heap but the snow which covered the top melted as soon as the flames reached it and quickly put out the fire. Jays screaming in my woods and Tree Sparrows chirping in the swamp. Heard Snow Buntings in the air but did not see them. A Fox had crossed the eastern side of my lot in the night. He made two kinds of tracks sometimes putting a fore and hind foot on exactly the same spot, sometimes a little apart, thus:  or 

The longest stride I could find was only twelve inches. The pad marks measured 2 inches in length by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in width. The single tracks were ~~never~~ ^(never) exactly in line (thus: ) but always in two parallel lines.

Fox signs

Once in about fifty yards, on the average, the animal had voided a few drops of yellowish or pale orange urine, usually on the top of a slight mound but sometimes on a level surface. This led me to infer that it was a female.

Intestines
of
Partridge
killed by
Fox

In the middle of my largest clearing, within a few rods of my brush heap, the Fox had stopped and trampled down the snow over a space of perhaps a yard square. On this trampled place lay most of the intestines of a Partridge. There were no feathers, bones or other fragments whatever. The intestines were frozen solid. I opened the coecum and found it filled with unmistakable Grouse excrement, quite fresh and having the usual pungent smell. The Fox had come from the Hill. Consequently I was following the back track. I traced it step by step back across the east spur of the hill and out over Holden's meadow to the river where it had apparently crossed the ice from the Bedford side. Where had it killed the Partridge? Certainly not on my land for I found no trace of a struggle anywhere not even a single feather and the testimony of that blank sheet of soft snow was conclusive. The Fox had visited a large burrow on my hillside into which a Rabbit track led and had dug out a little sand then had peeped into a smaller burrow near. After this it descended the hill and in a small opening about 100 yards before it came to the place where the Grouse entrails lay had dug down through

Fox digs out
a Mouse

the snow and captured a mouse (Arvicola), the fur of which with a little blood was smeared about the edges of the hole. There was no hole in the ground and the mouse must have been merely hiding beneath the snow which, curiously enough, showed no trace of its tiny foot-prints. It must have worked out to the spot where it was captured, under the snow. The Fox evidently scented it from a distance of several feet and turned sharply out to one side from his previously straight course. There was no sudden spring or stealthy stalk on his path. He merely trotted to the spot at his usual gait and began digging.

[I spent the afternoon sitting on the south side of the hill near the landing, where my men were digging a hole in the bank for my prospective log house, building a small fire and enjoying the afternoon light on the snow-clad river and meadows to the south and west. George and I drove home a little before sunset.]

CONCORD.

Damsdale

1892

February 8

[Off on foot at 3 P. M., walking through Mr. Derby's lane up the Damsdale meadow, and beyond to the grove of Scotch pines on the Pratt farm, returning around the west base of Punkatasset and through Pratt's nursery.]

Buteo lineatus

Saw a Red-shouldered Hawk, a fine adult bird, in the Damsdale and Chickadees in four different places, never more than three together and usually only two, a Kinglet with one pair. Among some dense pines I came suddenly on two Goldfinches hopping about on the snow under a prostrate, snow-laden birch, picking up the fallen seeds. They were very tame and interesting.]

Kinglet

Goldfinches

Gray and Red

Squirrels

out in

force

During the last autumn and winter Squirrels have been exceedingly scarce, apparently, but I begin to suspect that like the Rabbits they are changing their habits and becoming more wary and retiring. At least since the last snow came I have found their tracks in nearly every piece of woods and this afternoon I saw and heard no less than six, three Red and three Gray. One of the Red Squirrels was running along a wall, another was "chittering" and making a gnawing sound (precisely like a Rat gnawing a board) in a pasture oak, while the third "wound his clock" in a grove of white pines, the only time that I have heard this sound since last October. The Gray Squirrels were all together in the woods at the base of Punkatasset, at first in some leafless chestnuts, where they galloped about over the ice-coated

copied

"Damsdale"

branches without so much as slipping in the least, as far as I could see. Often all three would be in the same tree at once. Two of them were continually engaged in chasing the third. Is it their mating season? They were exceedingly noisy, making a great variety of sounds none of which were familiar to me. One was a loud huc uttered at regular intervals and very bird-like in quality. Besides this, they gave frequently a low but penetrating squealing cry which was not unlike that of the Long-eared Owl. There were many other sounds which I cannot describe but which were mainly of a growling or whining character.

From the bare chestnuts they made their way through the tree-tops into a grove of white pines. Here their mad gambols ceased and they separated, one betaking himself to the very topmost shoot of a tall pine where he sat for a long time balancing on the slender spray, which bent under his weight, like a bird. I have rarely if ever had so good an opportunity to watch Gray Squirrels before, at least in the North. These were very tame, allowing me to keep directly beneath them although at ^{every} ~~any~~ step my foot broke through the crust with a loud crashing sound. Pratt tells me that he has seen nine Gray Squirrels in his elms at one time. He protects them on his farm.

I spent much of the afternoon in studying Fox tracks. These animals appear to be literally swarming in this region. Their favorite hunting grounds are, evidently,

"Damsdale"

Tracks and

food of

Foxes

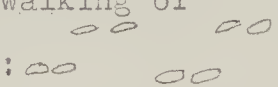

the open tussocky meadows bordering brooks. They had quartered nearly every square rod of the Damsdale meadow and had dug innumerable holes through the snow to the ground in pursuit of Mice. In one place I found the entrails, in another the entrails and back with some skin and fur, of a Mouse by the side of one of these holes. In a third hole was a Mouse's nest torn open and scattered about on the crust.

Many tracks on a pine-clad hillside led into a beautiful little bower formed by the snow-laded branches of a young bushy pine touching the ground on every side, leaving within, about the stem of the tree, an open space so high that I could stand erect there. Under this bower the snow was trampled down perfectly hard and smooth. It was smeared over with blood and sprinkled with minute pieces of hard, jagged bones which were certainly not those of any bird nor of any of our small mammals and which I took to be fragments of beef or mutton bones. There were no other animal remains whatever but in a neighboring opening within about eight feet of a small, dense pine the surface of the snow was covered with the wing and tail feathers and some of the breast feathers, also, of a Blue Jay. The wing and tail feathers had all been bitten off near their bases. I examined every one and there was not a single exception. How did the Fox catch this bird? I found two tail feathers directly under the pine but the wind

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4

"Damsdale"
Tracks and
habits of
Foxes

may have blown them there. Some of the branches of this tree were, however, bent down to within two feet of the snow. Hence it is possible that the Fox may have sprung up and seized the Jay on its roost. I followed all the tracks that led into the opening a considerable distance back but did not find a single feather or drop of blood along any of them.

This afternoon's experience convinced me that our Fox never gallops or lopes unless when startled or pursued. Indeed every track that I saw was that of a walking or trotting Fox. The normal track is like this:  suggesting a pacing gait but occasionally the foot-prints alternate thus:  like those of a Cat from which they can be distinguished only by the larger size of the Fox's feet. Neither the Fox nor the Cat ever dots the snow in a perfectly straight line. Both usually (and I think the Cat invariably) put down the hind foot exactly or approximately so in the footprint of the fore foot but the Fox sometimes departs from this rule as I noted a few days since.

Partridge
roosting in
the snow

In Pratt's meadow fully thirty yards from any cover whatever I found a hole in the snow where a Partridge had apparently roosted under the slight crust. There was one small neat hole where she had entered it, probably flying down to it with great force, and another larger hole where she had come out bursting ^{up} through the crust and scattering broken pieces of it about. There was only one dropping in the burrow. A Fox track led by the spot within 25 feet!

CONCORD.

1892

February
21-25

Ball's Hill

During these five days the weather has been uniformly warm, the thermometer ranging from 40 to 45° at noon and seldom falling much below 30° at night. The wind has remained constantly in the E. or N.E. Monday (22nd) was clear, the other four days have been cloudy but we have had no rain or snow. The snow which for the preceding two or three weeks has covered the ground to the depth of a foot or more has melted so gradually that the brooks and river have not been perceptibly swollen although now the ground is bare in many places (the S. side of Ball's Hill is entirely bare) and the sleighing is all gone.

I spent all of the five days just mentioned at Ball's Hill, superintending the erection of my log house. Spelman and Hayward with me on the 22nd when we found a number of water beetles, including six specimens of the ^{Beetle} large Dytiscus verticalis (Yellow-bordered Water/), in or near holes in the ice which the pickerel fishermen had cut. On this day I also saw the first Skunk tracks. On the evening of the 24th I saw a beautiful adult male Golden-eye flying over a space of open water just above Bensen's landing. It had apparently just risen from the water and after circling a few times flew off up river, its wings whistling loudly. There was a Brown Creeper in the pines on Ball's Hill on the 25th (the first I have seen there since December) and a Hairy and Downy Woodpecker in the oaks on the back side of the hill.

Dytiscus

(Water Beetle)

Golden-eye
Duck

Creeper

Hairy and Downy
Woodpeckers

2/21/9
2

By evening of the 25th, the river was entirely
open from the Manse to Ball's Hill.]

write
used

CONCORD.

Ripley's Hill.

1832

February 28

Did not go out until half-past five o'clock P.M. when I walked to Ripley's Hill via the Manse grounds. The evening was gloomy and forbidding and I saw no birds until, on my return from the hill, I was approaching the Simmons house when a Screech Owl began wailing, apparently in the pines that shade the avenue, where I have heard one several times before this winter. Quickening my pace, I was walking down Monument Street towards the entrance to this avenue when the bird came flying across the open field on my left and alighted in a large maple directly over my head. It sat very still and looked, against the sky, like a black ball about as large as one's fist. On the other side of the same tree I now perceived another small black ball, apparently the duplicate of the first. While I was wondering if it could be another Owl the first ball opened its wings and flew across the triangular field to the large trees on the lane at the foot of the hill, flapping pretty rapidly and very steadily until near them when the wings were set and the line of flight inclined first downward and then sharply upward, the bird pitching upward at the last precisely like a Buteo (Red-shouldered Hawk) when about to alight, & again choosing a perch high in the tree. The next instant the other black ball followed and alighted again in the same tree with its mate, for they were evidently a pair, just starting out on their evening hunt

Screech Owls

together. After the first few wailings which came from the direction of the pines, both birds were perfectly silent. They looked rather large when flying and the wings appeared (as they really are) disproportionately broad especially at the ends. I could not make them out very well when the trees or hill formed the background for the light was dim, although it was not nearly dark night at the time (6 P.M.). I longed to follow them on their evening prowl but certain circumstances prevented. It is evident that these Owls (I did not know before that there were more than one bird) roost regularly each day in the pines over the avenue to the Minute Man.

CONCORD.

Ball's Hill.

1892

March 9

A strange
bird voice

To Ball's Hill by boat at 10 A.M. On the way down I saw a Shrike (just below Flint's Bridge) a Blue Jay and two Crows. As I was rounding the turn of the "Holt" I heard a bird in the air over the Great Meadows uttering a cry which I did not recognize. This sounded much like the whirt of the Least Flycatcher but was repeated at short and perfectly regular intervals. It was evidently a flight note but of what bird I cannot imagine. I stopped repeatedly to listen for Bluebirds but heard none. Where can they be? The time is surely ripe for them, and nearly or quite half of the open country is now bare of snow.

Shrike kills
a Field Mouse

Soon after landing, which I did just below Bensen's line, I went to my log house and found Peter and Glover at work on the door. Afterwards I walked around behind the hill and had the rare good fortune to see a Shrike catch, kill and hang up a Field Mouse. This episode I fully described in my systematic notes so I will not repeat it here.

Creepers

A Creeper, two Chickadees, and two Blue Jays were seen or heard on Ball's Hill. I expected to see Muskrats on my way up river at sunset but none appeared.

CONCORD.

1892

March 10

First spring
day

Bluebirds
arrive

Also
Song
Sparrows

House
Sparrows noisy

Mink track

[Stepping out of doors just after breakfast I heard a Bluebird warbling in the direction of Mr. Derby's and soon afterwards this or another bird flew overhead, giving the sad call-note. A Song Sparrow was singing steadily in the maples over the rock on the river bank and the phoebe note of the Chickadee came from two different directions at once. There were also Crows cawing and Jays screaming while the House Sparrows were making a great din in the pine hedge and cocks crowing in the barn yard most lustily. The first spring-like day was the 6th. Since then each day has been more and more spring-like but to-day for the first time it has been real spring.

As I crossed the meadow on the way to my boat-house, I saw the fresh tracks of a Mink in the snow on the edge of a large pool of surface water which covered a hollow in the ice. Garfield tells me he has seen tracks about Flint's bridge all winter.

The Song Sparrows sang to me as I was launching my boat but I listened for others in vain on my way down river nor did I hear any additional Bluebirds. Nevertheless the trip was very exciting for I started no less than seven Ducks, first a pair of Hooded Mergansers, next a pair of Wood Ducks, and last two adult male Golden-eyes accompanied

Holy flight
on Ducks

by a female or young male Gooseander. The Mergansers swam out of some button bushes near the "tent" and rising about 100 yards away flew first down, then up, and finally down river again, passing me twice, over, within gun range.

Hooded
Mergansers
Wood Ducks, etc

Both looked nearly alike in the water but flying the male showed his white markings conspicuously. Their wings made a clear whistling sound audible in the still air four or five hundred yards away.

Wood Ducks

The Wood Ducks were also among flooded brush. I came suddenly on them just as I turned the bend at "Hunt's Pond" and they rose before I saw them, flying a few yards directly towards me before they could clear the bushes and then turning down river. The male, a superb bird, uttered the oek, -oeeek and the female the Guinea-hen-like ker-a, ker-a. I started both Wood Ducks and Mergansers again before I reached Ball's Hill.

Golden-eyes
Gooseander

The Golden-eyes and Goosander rose together from the Beaver-dam rapid, the Gooseander croaking hoarsely as he flew.

At about noon a single male Hooded Merganser flew up river past Ball's Hill.

I saw very few birds at the hill to-day, a Junco, a Tree Sparrow and two Chickadees, comprising the list. Visited the alder thicket and found the Mouse gone. As

there were no tracks on the snow beneath where the Shrike suspended him I concluded that this bird returned and took him away.

Pair of
Ruffed Grouse
together

From a belt of alders on the N.E. side of my maple swamp I started a pair of Ruffed Grouse. The female, a small bird with a very rufous tail, flew first, the male, a large gray-tailed individual following her closely. The snow everywhere in and about this swamp is covered with their tracks. They evidently follow the lines of bushes as a rule but in one place the tracks crossed a wide opening, the bird showing by the length of its stride that it felt the need of haste in crossing so exposed a place.

Field Mice

I burned the large brush-heap to-day and watched it to see what would come out. Nothing appeared but a Field Mouse which to my surprise seemed very little alarmed and clung to the slight shelter afforded by the outer fringe of brush until I left the spot. One of these Mice inhabits the wood-pile at my cabin and has become so tame that it will almost eat from my hand. To-day I threw it several pieces of cake which it ate fearlessly while three or four of us were standing in a circle about it within three or four feet. Its eyes look precisely like black beads and have scarcely more expression. In form and motions, especially the strongly arched back, it reminds me of a Musk-rat.

Musk-rat.

On my way up river in the evening I saw a Musk Rat sitting on the ice eating a large whitish root. I also started three Black Ducks from the mouth of Holden's Brook.]

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CONCORD. Walk to "Damsdale" Woods.

1892
March 14

Late in the afternoon I took a walk to the Damsdale. Passing across Derby's meadow I saw two Bluebirds and two or three Song Sparrows, all silent and looking discouraged enough. Among the birches in the Damsdale I got the odor of a Skunk, very strong indeed. Working up wind for a few rods I suddenly lost it. I then turned back and beat about over the ground but could find nothing. I always got the scent at about the same place and lost it at another certain place, perhaps 20 yards from the first. There was certainly no Skunk there, although the smell was very strong, in fact chokingly strong at one place.

As I was walking through Derby's Lane I started a large Owl which I took to be a Barred Owl although I could not make sure. It flew from a low branch within 15 yards of me and struck out over the open meadow to the North, alternately flapping and sailing and making slow headway against the strong wind. Just as it started, a Red Squirrel sprang up the trunk of the tree from which it flew. The two creatures must have been within a yard of one another for a moment. Was the Owl watching the Squirrel or the Squirrel the Owl? There was a Brown Creeper among the hemlocks.

Barred(?)
Owl

CONCORD.

Progress of the Season

1892

March 26

[By far the warmest and pleasantest day of the spring thus far and, for those of us who have braved this long, hard winter in the country, a red letter day, as genial as March ever gives us in this latitude and filled with the promise of still better things in the near future. The almost total absence of wind and the bright sunshine reflected from the snow which still covers much of the ground or from the calm surface of the river made the heat at times really oppressive. Of course the snow and ice wasted very rapidly under these conditions. The brooks ran bank-full and the river was covered with cakes and small fields of floating ice mingled with pieces of boards, old railroad sleepers, logs, rafts of dead rushes, and every other conceivable flotsam and jetsam, all whirling down towards the sea in the strong current. Although the water is low for the season the Great Meadows are, of course, flooded. They are still for the most part covered with ice but this is interspersed with ponds of open water and near the river banks there are deep bays which extend back for varying distances into the gray, water-soaked ice. The fields, where the ground is bare, are still cere and brown with no trace of green on the sunniest slopes. There is still much frost in the ground and the roads and ploughed lands are morasses of soft, sticky mud. The pines, as I noted yesterday, have already assumed their bright, lively spring coloring.

To Ball's Hill

To Ball's Hill by boat at 9.30 A.M. The paddle down river was delightful. Scarce a minute passed when I did not hear the tender warble of a Bluebird or the sweet chanting of a Song Sparrow. Both species have evidently quadrupled in numbers since yesterday although some allowance must obviously be made for the peculiarly favorable conditions to-day.

●
Bluebirds
and
Song Sparrows

Crows and Jays

Crows and Jays were unusually numerous and noisy but I still see no reason to think that either species has yet received any accessions from the South.

Musk-rats

I passed two Musk-rats swimming about among submerged bushes but saw no Ducks or other water-fowl.

Slaughter of Musk-rats

Soon after reaching Ball's Hill I heard a succession of shots along the river above and presently Warren appeared in a small canoe. He had nine Musk-rats and I heard him five times afterwards. I fear he has left few of these interesting animals in this stretch of river. He came very near shooting a mink which Bensen started from a stone wall on my land and which plunged into the water and dove near Warren's boat.

Mink

Brown Creeper

Early in the forenoon I walked through the woods to Davis's Hill, where I found a Creeper and three gray Purple Finches among the pines. From the northern extremity of the hill I could see that the river was open as far, at least, as Carlisle bridge, but the meadow ice

●
Purple Finches

✓

Water Fowl
●
in the river

on both sides extended quite out to the edges of the channel. This comparatively narrow and nearly straight canal of calm water was fairly swarming with water-fowl. I counted thirty Ducks in sight at once and there were doubtless others that were hidden by projections of the ice. Some were sitting on the ice but the greater number were scattered about diving. I think most of them were Gooseanders but the nearest were half a mile away. I identified only three -- Whistlers -- two old drakes and a duck -- which flew past me on their way to join the big flock. There were two Herring Gulls and several Crows on the ice near these Ducks.

Gooseanders
Golden-eyes

Ruffed Grouse

On my way back I started a pair of Ruffed Grouse on the knoll where the big hickory stands. I also started a Rabbit in a thorny thicket and found the skin, entrails, and one hind leg of another which a Fox had doubtless killed. There were Song Sparrows along all the brush-grown walks and Blue-birds warbling in the air overhead. Of Chickadees I saw several pairs acting as if looking for nesting places.]

Rabbit
killed by
a Fox

copied

Just as I was pushing off from shore on my way up river at 5 P.M. the sound for which my ears have been constantly on the alert these last three days came suddenly from the further shore and looking in the direction I at

copied

once saw a Red-wing Blackbird swinging on the topmost spray of a maple. Out went his shoulders and another Koukeree came to my ears. At the bend above the Beaver-dam reach I found two more Red-wings and higher up still others scattered about on the maples singing until, by the time I reached Flint's bridge I had counted ten. It was a clear case of "first arrival" for there were certainly none about during the earlier part of the day. Several Robins were sitting on trees near Flint's bridge, calling, but none sang.

Arrival of
the Red-wings

CONCORD.

2

1892

March 29

[Cloudless but cool with blustering N.W. wind. Birds did not sing freely owing to the high wind, but I heard Song Sparrows, Bluebirds, and Meadow Larks near the house in the early morning and occasionally later.]

Mink

Copied

I spent most of the day in superintending the moving of my boathouse from the Manse to the Buttricks' landing. We floated it down. During my first trip in my boat between the two points just mentioned, I started a Mink from a bunch of dead grass on the west bank a little below the "Minute Man". He galloped for a few yards along the shore ice, then stopped and sat up on his hind legs like a Squirrel, looking at us. Apparently reassured, he continued on his way, now moving very slowly with a crawling gait, his body lengthened and flattened, his belly brushing the ice, reminding me of the movement of a toad creeping towards a fly. On reaching the bridge he sprang nimbly from stone to stone and on reaching the top of the bank crossed the roadway and disappeared. I rowed under the bridge and found him lying curled up in the sun on a stone on the south side of the western abutment. Here he spent an hour or more lapping and dressing his fur and sleeping. He would let me get within ten yards, then rising would blink at me in a sleepy way and turning disappear into a crevice immediately popping out his head again, and resuming his original place as soon as I moved away. When sleeping, he lay curled in a circle

lof...

like a bat. He had a weasel-like way of moving the head from side to side when looking at me. The expression of the face was at times keen and cruel, at others stupid or perhaps silly. The tips of the short, round ears just showed above the fur. This Mink was of small size and peculiar coloring -- a faded yellowish-brown about like that of an old sable muff. In no light did he look black or even dark brown.

Damdsdale

[Late in the afternoon I walked to the Damdsdale and back through Derby's lane where, to my surprise, the tracks of my snow-shoes made on the afternoon of the last heavy snow were still quite distinct in the path, so little has the snow melted under the shade of the hemlocks. I saw many Song Sparrows and the first Fox Sparrows -- two

First Fox Sparrows

of them, each in company with two or three Song Sparrows, both silent. Robins were scattered about in the orchards calling but ^{none} never sang. Meadow Larks flying about over the ~~bank~~, brown fields [?] singing and calling. Bluebirds were numerous (for them) and I saw the first female -- with her

Absence of Juncos and Tree Sparrows

mate, of course. It is strange there are no Juncos nor Tree Sparrows here now. I suppose our winter birds have gone and the migrants have not yet come.

Appearance of the Season

The country looked very spring-like this morning. The stems of the willows and cornels are getting deeper or rather brighter-colored every day. A poplar (*Populus grandidentata*) was covered with pussies, the downy white exposed ends projecting from their sheaths (X) an inch or more.]

CONCORD.

1892

April 4

[Purple Finches were singing this morning in the direction of the Manse and Grass Finches in the orchard. Robins singing fitfully, Bluebirds and Song Sparrows vigorously.]

At 10 A.M. I started for Ball's Hill by boat. As I was paddling down the swift reach near "the tent" I saw a Shrike, a fine old gray bird, sitting on a maple sapling. As I approached he took wing and flying very swiftly down to the ground dashed into a clump of maples driving out a Song Sparrow which started across the river. The Shrike overtook this Sparrow about mid-stream when the Sparrow dodged several times, eluding its pursuer each time with apparent ease. As it neared the thicket of willows for which it was making, however, it kept a perfectly straight course when the Shrike again overhauling it rose a little above it and dealt it a vicious downward blow wither on the head or back, I could not tell which, knocking it down four or five feet into the water. It immediately fluttered clear of the surface, however, and before the Shrike could check its speed and turn back the Sparrow skimmed in under the willows and disappeared. The Shrike followed and perching only a few feet above the ground was on the watch for the reappearance of its prey when I approached too closely and scared it away.

Copy

Shrike
chases and
knocks down
a Sparrow

2

[At Ball's Hill I saw nothing of interest save a Red Crossbill flying about among the pines above my house.] Taking a walk behind (the hill) ^{Ball's Hill} I heard Wood Frogs in two different pools and saw many of them swimming about. Through my glass I could see that they were much greener than they are in autumn. They were shy as usual. One of the pools had the bottom covered with ice.

Copied

All day long the rolling croaking of Leopard Frogs was incessant on the river meadows in every direction. There must have been hundreds croaking at once. Late in the afternoon I heard the greatest number. The sound is certainly most like the drumming of a distant Woodpecker. Towards evening the Hylas were in full cry in every meadow and swamp. Truly it was a great day for the frogs but I heard no toads. It was also a great day for Turtles. Every floating log and board and many of the leaning trees were clustered all over with Painted Tortoises. I also saw a great many fish leaping and swishing, and paddled through a school of what I took to be Suckers. Minnows were darting about in the shallows.

[As I paddled up river a little before sunset I saw two Yellow Palm Warblers in the maples below Hunts' Pond and a flock of about 40 Tree Swallows flying over the meadows. Red-wings literally swarmed. There were a few blossoms of the red maple out last evening and to-day both red and white maples were in full bloom. I saw fully developed hazel catkins yesterday. One Toad trilling at 11 P.M.]

CONCORD.

1892

April 5

[Spent an hour or more after breakfast in directing some work on a boathouse by the river. While thus engaged I heard the rich notes of a Purple Martin and looking up saw the bird sailing directly overhead, Presently three others appeared and then all four flew off towards the Great Meadows. A pair of Nuthatches, doubtless those which breed at the Manse, came to an apple tree near the willows and inspected all its holes and crevices and a Yellow Palm Warbler flitted through the orchard singing freely.]

At 10.30 A.M. I started for Ball's Hill in my decked canoe, paddling down. Heard Swallows over the meadows and once a Martin. Song Sparrows and Red-wings swarming. Bluebirds not diminishing in numbers as yet. Four Kingfishers at the Holt very noisy and acting queerly, flying about two together high in air, making in addition to the rattle a harsh, grating scold exceedingly like that of a Jay. At times one would sail on motionless wings, at others beat the wings rapidly with a fluttering motion like a butterfly. As nearly as I could make out through my glass, all four birds were males. I have never seen Kingfishers act in this way before.

[I saw in all four Palm Warblers along the river and heard a Ruby-crowned Kinglet sing once. As I was passing Holden's Hill a Carolina Dove began cooing in some pines. Afterwards a dog started four of these Doves all together from the ground among some oaks on the west side of the swamp.

Copied

Queer
behavior of
Kingfishers

Phoebes were unusually numerous along the river and at Ball's Hill alone I saw no less than three. Flickers have also arrived in some numbers since yesterday for I heard five different birds "shouting".

Chickadees
building

In the swamp behind Ball's Hill a pair of Chickadees were at work on their nest in a birch stump. The hole had already been dug deep enough for the working bird to be out of sight.

About noon I heard Wild Geese and presently saw a large flock flying very high. As nearly as I could count them there werw about 45.

An Osprey was flying about over the meadows near Davis's Hill and I saw either the same or another bird higher up the river.

I sailed home early in the afternoon. On the way heard two Field Sparrows singing and also a number of Tree Sparrows the latter all in one place -- a flock of a dozen or more. Heard Crossbills in no less than four places to-day. One bird sang a few notes feebly.

At 6 P.M. walked to the Damsdale via Derby's lane. Robins in full summer numbers for first time this spring and singing fairly freely and well. Three Grass Finches singing in the pastures in the twilight. The swamps ringing with Hyla voices. Started a Junco from a little

bushy pine where it had evidently gone to roost.

The grass is fast greening on southern slopes and in springy runs. Winter wheat fields are now as green as our summer lawns.]

CONCORD.

1892

April 18

Spent the morning about the place. At 3 P.M. started in my Rob Roy canoe for ^{Ledum} ~~hedman~~ swamp. Sailed the entire distance excepting two short reaches.

Saw little of interest until I reached Clam Shell Hill where several Savanna Sparrows were flitting over the meadow. As I returned at evening one of them was singing. A little beyond this hill two Purple Martins and a particularly fine Barn Swallow were flying about over the river in company with eight White-bellies.

While I was digging up plants in ^{Ledum} ~~Ledman~~ swamp I heard a Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) singing in the spruces. Crossing a pasture I came upon a flock of ten Yellow Palm Warblers skipping about on the smooth turf hundreds of yards from any cover. Also saw two Juncos. A fox terrier which had been following and barking at me flushed a Partridge from the edges of the woods.

As I started down river a little after sunset Swamp Sparrows were singing in the button bushes. About 30 Red-wings were assembled in the top of a large oak on the meadow singing in medley. This is the only large flock I have seen.

I counted nine Musk-rats before I reached the Assabet . One came within four feet of me, evidently taking the canoe for a log and intending to land on it. I saw another dive and bring up a "clam".

Dendroica
palmarum
hypochrysea

Musk-rats

CONCORD.

1892

April 20

Copied

Drove to Rhodora pool on the Estabrook road at 9.30 A.M. and spent an hour or more digging some of the Rhodora bushes to take to Ball's Hill. [A solitary Vireo was singing by spells in the woods near the pool. Sent George to Ball's Hill and struck through the woods on foot to a wood-road north of Punkatasset Hill where I noticed some young Black Birches last autumn. Dug up about thirty. Several Golden-crests and two Creepers (Certhia) were in the pines near me.]

Returned to the Buttrick's by the shortest route across the fields, [carrying the rather heavy bundle of birches on my back.] As I came out of the bushes on the edge of Pratts' nursery I saw a Fox standing on the crest of a knoll in the open field not 100 yards off, although it was mid-day and the sun shining clear and hot. The Fox was a very large one. He looked faded and worn as to fur and appeared to be of a bleached yellowish color, tail and all. He saw me at once, pricked his ears and looked at me steadily, standing quite still with brush lowered. I squeaked and he started directly towards me at a quick skulking trot. When he dipped out of sight in a hollow I squatted, but he did not come out in sight again on my side of the hollow; the next instant I caught sight of him 200 yards

Fox abroad
at noonday

or more to the right running at full speed, with great elastic bounds, for the woods. No cur with a bunch of fire-crackers at his tail could have fled more swiftly. His motions were exceedingly light and graceful. I never saw a Fox really run before. A puff of east wind which struck me on the back just as the Fox disappeared in the hollow must have taken my scent to his keen nose.

[Immediately after dinner I started for Ball's Hill in my Rob Roy, sailing all the way down. Counted four forest fires, one big one just beyond Bedford. The woods are as dry as tinder for there has been no rain for nearly or quite a month.

Planted my trees and shrubs at the hill and after the men had gone ate my supper sitting in the door of my house. Two Carolina Doves cooed for half an hour in the pines on the hill. There is no bird note to be heard in our ^{Massachusetts} ~~Mass.~~ woods for which I care so much.

Started up river a little after sunset. A Bittern, the first I have heard, pumping in the Great Meadow. As I was passing the Holt a Snipe hummed once overhead very near me. There was a Great Blue Heron flying about ^{over} ~~(me)~~ in the marsh ^{hawking} ~~honking~~ and I saw three Night Herons flying high over Dakin's Hill towards the West.

The willow catkins are still in their full glory. The maple blossoms are falling fast and the surface of the river is covered with them.]

White
copy used

CONCORD.

1892

April 22

Snapping
Turtle on
Land

To Ball's Hill by canoe at 10 A.M., paddling down. Opposite Holden's Hill saw a large Snapping Turtle crawl out of the water and start off over the meadow towards the woods. It stood surprisingly high on its legs and raised and put down its feet with ludicrously awkward care, feeling about with the foot to be sure of getting a firm footing. Yet it moved over the rough boggy ground with remarkable ease and celerity for so heavy and chunky a creature. The loose skin between and about the hind legs hung down in flabby folds reminding me of the appearance of an elephant when viewed from behind. The shell of the back as well as the skin of the head and neck was covered with shiny water "moss". I suppose it was seeking the dry land to lay its eggs. I ran the canoe ashore within ten feet of and directly behind it but it showed no alarm and probably did not discover my presence at all.

CONCORD.

1892

April 25

[To Ash Swamp at 10.30 A.M. driving up with George, and sending the horse back by a stable boy.

Spent the entire day digging spice bushes, horn-beams, and yellow birches in the pasture on the northern side of the swamp. A Robin and Song Sparrow the only ^{singing} birds/within hearing.]

Estabrook
woods

at sunset

Copied

At 5 P.M. started to walk home through the woods . I have never, I think, seen the country more beautiful at this season. The late afternoon light was wonderfully pure and strong yet very soft and tender. The air was perfectly still. Hylas peeping and Robins and Song Sparrows singing. A loud squealing outcry in a maple copse near the old orchard north of the swamp attracted my attention to a female Hairy Woodpecker which was flying from tree to tree. As I was passing through Hubbard pasture I was startled by another and different squeal, short, sharp and metallic. It came from under a young pine within a rod of me and I heard something jump in the dry leaves. The next instant a Rabbit (*Lepus sylvaticus*) dashed out and bounded across a space of open, hard, turfy ground, thumping as it ran. It will be remembered that I heard one utter a precisely similar squeal near Ball's Hill in the winter.

A Rabbit
squeals

[I followed the lime-kiln ridge south and then crossed to the path through the "Common Lot". As I came out into Pratt's pasture a Hermit Thrush began singing

Hermit
Thrush
singing at
sunset

among the Scotch pines. It uttered three or four bars and
then ceased. I never heard a migrant sing in ~~Mass.~~ ^{Massachusetts} before.]