

bBr 97.41.2a (6)

1892

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CONCORD.  
To Ball's Hill.

1892  
July 16

*Copied*

I started for Ball's Hill at 9 A. M. under reefed sail. The high wind had driven the birds to shelter and I saw but few and heard only Song Sparrows singing. As I was passing Hunt's landing, a pair of adult Red-tailed Hawks started from the same tree, a tall elm, and soared upwards, balancing on the wind. The male bore something in his claws which looked like a half-devoured snake.

Red-tailed  
Hawks

At the Holt a Cooper's Hawk shot past, skimming down wind with great swiftness, yet a Red-wing pursued and actually overtook him, giving him a succession of vicious pecks on the head and finally forcing him to seek shelter in a tree.

Red-wing  
overtakes  
Cooper's  
Hawk

[I have seen Carolina Doves frequently of late (as well as occasionally in May and June) at the base of Dakin's Hill, where they perhaps go to drink as they are usually on the bare mud at the water's edge. July 14 a pair rose from this mud and took to the pines where the male cooed once. Yesterday three started all together and alighted in the same tree. I think one was a young bird.

Carolina  
Dove

Bittern

As I came out of the woods near Benson's landing this afternoon (at 5.30), a Bittern passed, flying low down over the channel of the river and finally dropping into the belt of pickerel weed on the edge of the meadow opposite my landing. I have not noted this species before since it stopped pumping (very abruptly) in early June.

Cetion of  
bird singing

It is doubtless the rule that birds which sing regularly and freely now rear two broods in a season. Such are the Robin, Bluebird, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Chippy, Field Sparrow, Grass Finch, Towhee, Pine Warbler, and Carolina Dove. All these certainly rear two broods. I am doubtful about the Cat-bird and Veery, both of which are still singing well. Obvious exceptions to the rule are the Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireos which certainly do not breed twice but which sing late into the summer. A male of the latter species, which brought off its young successfully late in June and then left them to the care of the mother, has thus far sung continuously, since his arrival in early May, in the trees about the house. I heard him least often at the time when he was assisting the female in the care of the young, just from the nest, but he has not been wholly silent for a day this season and he is now singing as freely as he was in early June.

Warbling  
Vireos

Red-eyed  
Vireo

The Red-eyed Vireo breeds very irregularly and I have often found nests with fresh eggs in July but this is probably due to the fact that the first nests are nearly certain to be plundered by Jays or Squirrels. On the whole, I do not think that this bird habitually if ever rears two broods in a season in this state. Nevertheless it regularly sings later into the summer than does almost any other bird.]

At 3 P. M. I visited the Dove's nest again, The female was on, facing north, head raised decidedly above the line of the back but not so high as on the 9th. I stood

Dove's  
nest

nearly under the nest for three minutes (by my watch). During this time the Dove did not wink once, while I was forced to close and open my eyes just thirty-six times! At length I stretched my hand slowly up towards the nest and the bird started off. She flew in her usual manner, fluttering noisily through the foliage and descending in a half circle but when within about four feet of the ground she alighted abruptly on the branch of an oak, where she sat looking at me quietly for a moment and then, taking wing again, disappeared among the trees. My theory that, having tried the wounded-bird performance and found it futile or unnecessary, she has now abandoned it, gathers probability.

I was mistaken in supposing the runt egg to be infertile for it has hatched. The young bird is at least a third smaller than the one which hatched first. I was also mistaken in regard to the color of the skin of the young. The light was good to-day and having my glass with me (I cannot get nearer than within 15 feet of the nest) I saw distinctly that in both young the skin of the entire body <sup>and head</sup> is of a dark purplish brown. This shows conspicuously on the head, which is nearly or quite naked, but elsewhere is partially concealed by a rather dense coat of hair like down, of a pale straw color. The younger bird had the down still wet and plastered to the skin in places. The egg-shells have been

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removed from the nest and I could not find them under it.

Evening in Dutton's Swamp.

[I returned to the Buttricks' in time for tea and as soon as it was disposed of started out again for a walk up the Estabrook road. The evening was delightful, the air brilliantly clear and so cool that a heavy coat was not uncomfortable. Robins were singing more freely and vigorously than at any time within the past week but I heard fewer small birds than usual. The Grass Finches and Song Sparrows were among the number which seem to have been partially silenced by the change of weather.

Turning into Dutton's lane, I followed it to the alder swamp by the brook and then, diverging to the right, entered a long narrow meadow surrounded on every side by woods which presented a gracefully curved outline of solid foliage. The meadow had near its center a thicket of bushes and young maples, but over most of its extent there was only the tall, wiry grass with here and there a stalk of rue rearing its creamy white head high above the rest. A more retired or beautiful spot than this it would be difficult to find in all Concord.

Twilight was falling when I entered it, but many birds were still singing: three Wood Thrushes, a Maryland Yellow-throat, a Tanager, a Towhee, a Cat-bird and, at intervals, a Black-billed Cuckoo, I heard Wilson's Thrushes

Wood Thrushes

calling but none sang. The Cat-bird sang for three minutes, and one of the Wood Thrushes for fourteen minutes, / after the first Whippoorwill began. The last song of the

Whippoorwills

Wood Thrush was heard at precisely 8.01 when it was nearly dark. There were two Whippoorwill, both in the woods on the ridge near Bow Meadow. The number of repetitions of their notes varied from three to twenty-five. They did not seem to move about as much as usual. The Chestnut-sided Warbler which sang here regularly a week ago was silent this evening.

Odd Song  
of  
Chippy

A Chipping Sparrow which has passed the entire season in our orchard and which during May and June sang in the normal manner, began some two weeks ago splitting his song into three sections, thus .... .... .... The result has pleased him so much that he now divides it into from four to seven sets of notes with a slight but very marked interval between. I remember a Junco at Mt. Watabic which did the same thing.]

Young  
Orioles

The Young Orioles still give the here-we-are call but less and less frequently as the season advances. I watched an old female of this species eat cherries yesterday. She operated on them in a deliberate, somewhat fastidious manner, piercing the skin with her sharp bill and then slowly tasting and ~~swallowing~~ <sup>no</sup> the pulp also. In ~~one~~ instance was the cherry removed from the stem. This was in marked contrast to the behavior of the greedy Robins about her, the Robins first plucking the cherry and then swallowing it whole, not without some difficulty.

CAMPING TRIP UP SUDBURY RIVER.

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July 17

[At 4 P. M. I started up river alone in my "Stella Maris" canoe, taking my tent and camping outfit. The wind had just before hauled into the south-west so that I had no chance to sail until I reached Clam Shell Hill. A Red-shouldered Hawk was soaring over the French farm and a Marsh Hawk beating Heath's meadow. Both were adult males.

I heard few birds until I passed Heath's Bridge between which and Fairhaven I noted Robins, Red-wings, Towhees (3), Swamp Sparrows, Black-throated Green Warblers, a Bluebird, a Tanager, a Savanna Sparrow, a Quail and a Red-winged Blackbird, all singing freely.

Landed at Lee's Cliff and drew my canoe out of water and into the grassy opening at the foot of the cliff.

Here I made the following brief notes:

Birds  
singing at

Lee's Cliff  
at sunset

- 7.30 P. M. A Pine Warbler and Solitary Vireo singing in the woods on the Cliff, a Chestnut-sided Warbler (only a few times) in the alders near me, Song and Swamp Sparrows along the edge of the meadow.
- 7.51 " " Last Swamp Sparrow. A Cat-bird and Veery still singing. The Veery closes the concert of diurnal birds.
- 8.00 " " First Whippoorwill.
- 8.05 " " No Frogs as yet. I hear only crickets and an occasional Whippoorwill now.
- 9.00 " " Bull and Green Frogs begin and sing at intervals as long as I am awake.

Meteor  
startles fish

At 8.30 a large and most brilliant meteor shot across the Bay from south-east to north-west, apparently very low down, I could hear the splash of dozens of startled fishes as it passed.]

CONCORD.

*copyist*

Sunrise at Lee's Cliff.

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July 18

Robins were singing at day-break. They were closely followed by Swamp Sparrows and next by a Cat-bird. I arose just as the sun was appearing over the hill to the east. It was one of those brilliant mornings which seem too perfect to be real and indeed, when I looked out over the bay, I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was awake, for in place of the water was what seemed to be a level plain of spotless snow. It was, of course, fog lying close to the water and nowhere encroaching on the shore even where this was meadow. A little later when a light air started from the earth the wintry effect was heightened, for the fog began driving across the Bay just as the drifting snow drives. I have rarely seen anything more beautiful. Just before sunrise there was a grand chorus of Red-eyes rolling all around the wooded shores. [It seemed as if dozens were singing at once; there were no other bird voices at this time, but a little later I heard Robins, Veeries, a Cat-bird, a Pine, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Green Warbler, a Black and White Creeper, a Chickadee, a Solitary Vireo, Swamp, Song and Chipping Sparrows, and a Field Sparrow. As far as the species just named are concerned, the singing was quite equal to that of early June but I missed the voice of the Oven-bird and Tanager and there was only one Red-wing singing. I suppose the last-named species was not really present in any numbers.]



[After a hurried breakfast, I spent an hour strolling through the woods along the neighboring hillside. In the pines I saw a small mixed flock (the first I have noted this summer) consisting of two Red-eyes, two Creepers (Mniotilta), two Pine Warblers, one Yellow and one Black-throated Green Warbler and several Chickadees. A Wood Pewee was singing in some oaks. I visited the slippery elm and found it still alive, although much injured by "barking".

Cat-bird

When I returned to the landing, the Cat-bird was in full song. He is a rare performer, quite the best I have ever heard and nearly equal to a Mocking-bird.

Pantry Brook

At 8 A. M. I launched the canoe and, alternately paddling and sailing, reached Pantry Brook in about an hour and lunched there, sitting in my canoe at the foot of the sluice. A Marsh Hawk pursued by several irate Red-wings skimmed past me. Bobolinks were chinking (or pinking) in the meadow -- at least forty of them. Only Song and Swamp Sparrows singing. The large hill to the south-east has been recently burned over and many trees are dead or dying. I found there to-day upwards of fifty canoe birches of fair size. Looked for the round-leaved cornel but saw only two plants. Dwarf cornel on the north slope -- a good bed of it.

At 1 P. M. set sail and started back, making very quick time to Fairhaven. Three Red-tailed Hawks were soaring

in company over the meadow above Lee's Bridge, a fine sight. One was a red-tailed bird, the other two uniform dark brown above and evidently young. One of these Red-tails, a young bird, I thought, uttered a prolonged, wheezy me-e-ow-w-w- very like the meow of a kitten. I heard the same sound in the pines at Lee's Cliff but saw no bird there. This cry is, I think, a modification of the call of the adult when anxious about its nest.

Red-tailed  
Hawks

The flight-song of the Swamp Sparrow is tr-wee, tr-wee-tee-tr-e-e-e-e-e-e-, the additional notes being at the beginning -- a prelude, as it were. I heard the ordinary song last night at about ten o'clock.

Flight-  
song  
of

Swamp  
Sparrow

The white water lilies have not passed their prime. I never saw a finer display than they made this morning around the shores of the bay and along the river above. Some of the indentations or little coves were white with them. The pickerel weed is also about at its best now.

Cessation  
of  
bird songs

The singing of some species of birds ends very abruptly. One day you hear the usual number, the next not one and after several more days have passed it suddenly dawns on you that the bird has ceased singing for the season. The Yellow Warbler is a good example of this class. I heard three males on the 14th but not one has sung within my hearing since. I think that an abrupt cessation of singing

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is perhaps the rule with our Mniotiltidae ( Wood Warblers ),  
and that most of the Fringillidae ( Finches, Sparrows, etc. )  
and Icteridae (Blackbirds, Orioles, etc. ) "drop out"  
gradually (that is, as individuals).

Heard my first Cicada to-day, in oak woods. What  
a heat-suggesting sound!

I reached home at 6 P. M., sailing all the way  
from Fairhaven and meeting no adventures worth recording on  
the way.]

Evening Walk to Sunset Pasture.

*copy*

After tea I walked up the Estabrook road to  
Clark's pasture, where I smoked a cigar and watched the sun  
set and darkness fall, sitting on my favorite boulder near  
the middle of the field.

The evening was calm and peaceful but the life  
and sparkle of the morning were gone and in their place a  
dull apathy possessed all nature. The influences which  
work such a change are often subtle but in this case they  
were apparently a bank of gray clouds rising in the west  
and the presence of much smoky haze in the atmosphere.

Birds singing  
at and after  
sunset

There were intervals, sometimes of a minute or  
more in length, when not a bird sang. Then I would hear,  
one after another, Robins, Song Sparrows, Field Sparrows,  
Chippies, Grass Finches, Meadow Larks, Quail, and occasionally

a Black-billed Cuckoo. At 7.40, when the light was failing fast, a Tanager sang a few times and just five minutes later the first Whippoorwill began. Five minutes after this Grass Finches and Field Sparrows were still singing. One of the former closed the diurnal concert at 7.53.

Tree Toads

[There were no Tree Toads to-night and I heard none last evening at Fairhaven. Have they ceased?

cease  
singing

Soon after leaving the house this evening I saw a Goldfinch singing on wing. It flew very slowly on a perfectly level plane, the wings-beats deep and regular. The bird looked nearly double its real size.]

Goldfinch  
singing on  
wing

King-birds

I now see many broods of young King-birds accompanied by their parents, sitting on bushes along the river and usually well out over the water. The young are more active and animated than most birds of their age and already show much of the irritable, quarrelsome disposition so characteristic of their species. The parents are feeding them largely on Dragon-flies and I see them chasing these insects continually, not always with success for the dragon-fly is a good dodger and King-bird's stock of patience small. A bird to-day pursued a dragon-fly upwards to a height of more than a hundred feet and after snapping at it vainly four or five times in quick succession gave up the chase in evident great disgust and sailed back and down to its disappointed brood, which were sitting in a button bush.

CONCORD.

Evening at Ball's Hill.

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July 19

[Spent most of (the) day in the house, writing, but] late in the afternoon started for Ball's Hill, having a glorious sail down in my decked canoe. On reaching my cabin I left my things there and walked to Benson's by way of the river path, returning past Davis's Hill and through my swamp. [At 6 P. M. I had tea in my cabin and at 7.30 started for home, paddling most of the way.

Birds singing  
at and  
after sunset

The high wind had its usual effect on the birds and I saw but few and heard fewer still until near sunset when the wind abated and many began singing. I heard Robins, a Bluebird, and a Field Sparrow near Benson's; a Black-throated Green Warbler in the pines above the glacial hollow; and at 7 P. M., as I stood on the shore in front of my cabin, Robins, a Veery, an Oven-bird (flight song), a Short-billed Marsh Wren, Maryland Yellow-throat, Song and Swamp Sparrows, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (singing continuously and with great vigor and spirit), a Quail and one Red-winged Black-bird. Most of these were on the opposite (Bedford) side of the river.]

Rose-breasted  
Grosbeak

Dove's nest

Visited the Dove's nest at 5.30 P. M. Female on. When started, she fluttered downward in a half circle as usual but alighted on a branch a few feet above the ground and did not repeat the wounded bird performance. After sitting quietly for a moment, she rose and flew off through the trees. Young of apparently equal size and about as large as Bluebirds, their shoulders and wings covered with sprouting

feathers of a bluish-ashy color but no trace of any real feathers elsewhere, the beak being still clothed with the yellowish down which was also sparsely scattered over the head and neck. Eyes open to-day. These young sit perfectly motionless.

Roost of  
Red-wings

As I approached the Beaver Dam Rapid a little after sunset, I again heard the Red-wings singing in their roost among the tall grass. It was a most perfect reproduction of the early spring concerts and I repeatedly got the "Wild Goose" effect, described by Bolles. At least a dozen males, all old birds, were thus engaged. As I drew nearer I could hear a multitude of birds fluttering and talking to one another among the reeds. Others were continually arriving, usually in parties of from three or four to seven or eight, never more than a dozen or fifteen. They came from every direction and as a rule flew at a great height (300 to 800 or even 1000 feet) until they were directly above the roost when, setting their wings, they shot down almost perpendicularly with great swiftness, each bird acting independently of its companions during its descent and many describing most beautiful curves, while others simply dropped as straight, nearly, as so many falling stones. There was no preliminary circling to reconnoiter the ground. When a yard or two above the grass, the wings were beaten forcibly to check the speed and the bird disappeared into the grass.

After the flight had nearly ceased, I struck the water with my paddle and instantly, with a perfect roar of wings, at least six hundred birds rose into the air. Only

a few returned, the greater number breaking up into parties of fifty to one hundred birds each and seeking other resting-places. [As on the 15th, there were Barn and Bank Swallows flying about over this roost but I saw none actually alight there.

Eave  
Swallow  
feeding  
young on  
wing

The Eave(♂) Swallow feeds its young on wing, the two birds meeting in the air and rising straight upward six or eight feet face to face until the bills finally come together, one or both uttering the tcha note rapidly the while. I saw this to-night shortly after sunset when the two birds engaged were fully 300 feet above the earth.

Where are  
the young  
Bank Swallows?

Where do the Bank Swallows take their young? The large colony on Dakin's Hill is dwindling fast, yet the number of birds which frequent the river meadows is also decreasing and I have not as yet seen a single young bird. Of course it is possible that no young have been reared in this bank, but most of the holes have certainly not been molested by man.

Flight note of  
the  
Bittern

As I was sailing down river this afternoon, a Bittern rose from the pickerel weed on the margin of the water, uttering, as it flew off, a series of short, hoarse croaks (ōc-ōc-ōc or āc-āc-āc).

Pickerel  
weed

The pickerel weed (Pontederia ) is by far the most beautiful flowering plant along the borders of this river, where almost everywhere it forms a broad border between the belt of lily pads and the meadow grass.]

A Weasel  
crosses the  
river  
at night

The most interesting of the day's experiences remains to be told. I was paddling past the swimming place on my way home, keeping the middle of the river (here about 200 feet wide) where a long, narrow belt of wind-ruffled water was still faintly silvered by the light in the western sky, when a small, long, dusky form shot directly across my bows, then turned short about and started back towards the south shore. I whirled the canoe around and followed but although I exerted myself to the utmost I did not at first seem to gain much on the mysterious little creature which skimmed over, rather than cleft through, the water and at a rate of speed which amazed me. Indeed, I thought at first it must be a crippled Bird or Bat but there was no flapping of wings and very little "wake". The pace told on it at length and just as it had almost gained the shore I got sufficiently near to deal it a hurried blow with the paddle when instantly to my nostrils came the unmistakable foetid odor of a Weasel. It proved to belong to our smaller species, as I made out to my entire satisfaction a moment later when, after recovering partially from my blow, it climbed out on a lily pad and faced me at barely arm's length. I teased it a little to see if it could be made to dive, which it would not do, and then left it to make the best of its way to land, which it accomplished with much noisy plashing before I was out of hearing. Poor thing! I was sorry to have used it so roughly, but there was no other way of finding out what it was.



CONCORD.

Evening Walk to Bow Meadow.

1892  
July 20

I did not go out to-day until after tea, when I started for a walk up the Estabrook Road. [Keeping on past Clark's, I turned into Dutton's Lane and followed it through to Bow Meadow. For the first part of the way -- in the open country -- I heard Robins, Grass Finches, Song Sparrows, Meadow Larks and Quail, but the singing here was much less vigorous and general than it has been heretofore. The swamp beyond Dutton's was without a single songster of any kind and at Bow Meadow I heard only five birds -- a Wood Thrush, Black-throated Green Warbler, Oven-bird(ordinary song), Black-billed Cuckoo and Red-shouldered Hawk.]

Birds singing  
at evening

In Clark's woods, which I did not reach until 7.15, when the light was getting dim under the arches of the grand old trees, [three Wood Thrushes, an Oven-bird, a Blackburnian Warbler, a Grosbeak (in full song), a Tanager, a Black-billed Cuckoo and a Wood Pewee were heard. The Oven-bird gave the flight song. The Blackburnian sang twice -- in the top of a tall white pine. All the others sang vigorously and persistently.]

Dendroica  
blackburniae

Concert by

Wood  
Thrushes

The concert of Wood Thrushes was simply the finest that I ever listened to. There were three of them close about me at one time and they fairly made the woods ring. With this species as with the Hermit there is much individual variation in quality of voice and variety and ease of execution and, as it happened, all three of the birds in Clark's woods

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Concert of  
Wood Thrushes

this evening were particularly good performers while one was preeminently fine. On the other hand, a bird singing in the hemlocks on the opposite (eastern) side of the adjoining swamp had a voice so effectually "veiled" that I was actually unaware of his presence until I came nearly under the tree in which he was sitting. Indeed the odd medley of low, wheezy gasps, catarrhal squeaks and clucks, and thin, feeble whistles, not one note of which was either musical or pleasing, was wholly inaudible at a distance of fifty yards. It was not sotto voce singing. On the contrary, the poor bird was quite evidently exerting himself to the utmost as if striving to outdo his rivals in the woods across the swamp. Was he conscious of the lamentable failure or, like certain human singers equally devoid of musical ability, did he delude himself into the belief that he was really producing melodious sounds? It occurred to me that possibly he might be deaf and like deaf mutes of our own species incapable alike of appreciating or correcting the painful discords of his voice. Certainly the case was one of the most extreme of its kind that has ever come under my notice.

[Clark's woods evidently form about the centre of distribution of a colony of Wood Thrushes larger than I have hitherto found in any part of Middlesex County. I heard in all to-night no less than seven singers and there are to my certain knowledge nearly as many more to the east of the Estabrook Road. Indeed I have little doubt that upwards of

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twenty could be heard in this region in a single evening by a rapid walker who was familiar with the ground.

Estabrook Road at Evening.

After leaving Clark's woods, I struck directly across country to the Estabrook Road in which I took my stand on the crest of a knoll with a maple swamp behind me and a tract of about fifty acres of rough, rocky land cleared two or three years ago and now densely covered with oak and walnut sprouts eight or ten feet in height stretching away towards the sunset.

The air was cool and there was no wind. I could hear Wood Thrushes in every direction and now and then a Tanager or Cat-bird. All three species were singing at 7.45 when the first Whippoorwill began and one of the Wood Thrushes continued just twelve minutes later, closing the concert of day birds at 7.57.]

Wood Thrushes

As I walked slowly homeward after dark, I frequently heard Mice rustling or jumping in the dry leaves and occasionally a fluttering as of a bird's wings in the foliage of the oaks which overarch the road. The latter sound proved to be made by large Moths probably of several species although all that I saw looked nearly alike. One alighted on the under side of a leaf almost within reach of my hand and opened and shut its wings/ <sup>broad</sup> slowly. It, as well as all the others,

Wood sounds at night

Moths

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seemed to be of a light creamy color which appeared at times to have a luminous quality although this was probably an illusion.

Night

sounds

Occasionally a Bat darted past within a few feet or even inches of my head and was almost instantly lost to sight in the gloom. Fireflies in small numbers flashed their tiny lights along the edges of hazel copses or in and out among the foliage of the oaks. The only sounds now were those of the Mice among the leaves, the fine shrill squeaking of Bats, the feeble chirping of summer crickets and now and then the notes of a distant Whippoorwill. Some Green Frogs were tunging in Rhodora Pool but the calling season of the Tree Toads is over. I have not heard one for a week or more.

Tree Toads

Whippoorwills

My experience with the Whippoorwills to-night taught me some new things about them. As I stood on the knoll in the Estabrook Road two came close about me, uttering an emphatic note which, within a distance of 20 or 30 yards, sounded like quqip, and further off was distinctly quip. This was apparently a call note used by both sexes for the birds were almost certainly a pair. They moved their positions frequently as I could tell by their calls, apparently taking short flights from place to place among the sprouts but never once showing themselves against the light in the western sky. The male sang every few minutes, often very near me. As a rule he uttered the quip or quqip from one to

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Whippoor-  
wills

five times in quick succession just before the song began but this was not invariably the case. I heard the well-known clucking call whenever the bird was within 50 or 60 yards. It resembles most closely the cluck of the Chipmunk (

) and to-night at least was not once given until the song was well under way, usually beginning with the 5th utterance of the whippoorwill and invariably coming in exactly at the end of the first syllable, thus: whip(cluck)poorwill, and not, as has been stated by writers, between the calls. It did not seem to interrupt the continuity of the whole utterance (whippoorwill) but rather appeared to be given simultaneously with the close of the first syllable and perhaps the beginning of the second. Indeed it was difficult to believe that the cluck and whippoorwill were both uttered by the same bird, the effect being decidedly that of one bird singing and another near it clucking a sort of accompaniment. There can be no doubt, however, that one individual did produce the two sounds. After the clucking began, it always accompanied each utterance to the end of that period of singing.

It would be difficult to improve on the popular and long-established rendering of the song of the Whippoorwill (Antrostomus vociferus). Whether the sound comes from afar or from within a few rods, the bird says "whippoorwill" with almost perfect distinctness, emphasizing the first and last syllables strongly. The song can be heard nearly, if not quite, a mile away when the air is still and damp as is usually the

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Whippoorwills

case of a summer evening. When there is no moon the bird sings but little if at all after the sunset light has wholly faded in the west. As twilight deepens, the Whippoorwills come out of the woods and sing in orchards and on stone walls near houses. They wander over wide areas in this way.

CONCORD.

Evening Walk to Clark's Woods.

1892  
July 25

Birds not  
affected by  
extreme  
heat

At noon I walked over the farm to note the effect of the extreme heat on the birds. To my surprise, they were apparently not in the least depressed by it. Indeed I heard more singing than for a week past at the corresponding hours. [A Robin, two Chipping Sparrows, a Song Sparrow, a Grass Finch, a Warbling Vireo and a Quail were singing steadily and Yellow Warblers (at least two birds) more freely than for many days, while a Meadow Lark whistled at intervals. Martins and Barn Swallows were flying about rather high up.]

After tea I started for the Estabrook woods. As I walked slowly along past Burrills', through the hollow beyond, and up the slope to Clark's, I heard two Song Sparrows, a Robin, a Grass Finch, a Yellow-winged Sparrow and a Quail -- just six birds in a distance of nearly a mile! Beyond Dutton's the woods along the Estabrook road were absolutely silent save for an occasional chirp or twitter in the dense foliage near at hand and I did not hear another bird sing until I reached Clark's woods, where, on my arrival at 7 .20, two Wood Thrushes were tuning their flutes in low tones and a Wood Pewee was wailing in the hemlocks under which I seated myself. A few minutes later a Black-billed Cuckoo sang several times.

Covert of  
Wood  
Thrushes

I had begun to fear that the Wood Thrushes were going to disappoint me when (at 7.30) the two which, up to this time, had been apparently merely rehearsing , burst

suddenly into full song. In a moment others took up the strain until five were singing at once. My companion, inexperienced in such matters, insisted that there were at least a dozen, a delusion natural enough under the circumstances for these birds, as is their habit at such times, kept flitting restlessly from place to place so that, in the course of a minute or two their notes did actually come from at least a dozen different points. The effect was impressive beyond my powers of description. I have heard nothing to equal it before, even in these woods, for not only were the singers more numerous this evening than on previous occasions, but at the height of their concert they literally had the whole field to themselves, not a single note of any other species of bird being heard for the space of ten minutes or more.

Covert of  
Wood  
Thrushes

[The first Whippoorwill sang at 7.35. I heard it only a few times after this.

Warbler  
migrating

As I was walking home after darkness had fairly set in, a Warbler of some species passed over, lispng. This is the first migrant that I have heard at night with the possible exception of the Grosbeak at North Billerica on the evening of the 23rd.]



CONCORD.  
To Ball's Hill.

*Copied*  
1892  
July 27

Fire at  
Davis's  
Hill

[I spent the entire morning in the house, writing, but] <sup>A</sup> at 2 P. M., hearing that the fire at Davis's Hill had broken out again badly and that the fire department of Concord had been sent, at this "eleventh hour" to suppress it, I took one of my canoes and started down river. On reaching the hill, I found that the fire had, since yesterday, spread over practically the whole unburned portion. The flames had been everywhere smothered by throwing sand over the leaves, and the two men left as watchers had no difficulty in suppressing them when, as happened every little while, they blazed up again but smoke was rising from a hundred different places where the fire was smouldering beneath the surface, eating its way slowly but relentlessly deep into the ground and doubtless undermining and destroying most of the fine old trees for which these woods are, or perhaps I should now say ~~it~~ have been, famous. ~~I~~ I dug down about several of the largest pines and found not only the superficial mat of needles and leafmould but even the sandy loam beneath a glowing mass of fire, while roots as large around as my leg were reduced, outwardly at least, to charcoal. In many places this subterranean fire had excavated pits several feet in diameter and from one to four feet in depth while in others what looked like solid ground was completely undermined for yards, giving way beneath the slightest pressure of the foot. A pail-full of water poured into such a cavity had little

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effect other than making the furnace beneath hiss angrily for a moment and send up a cloud of steam instead of smoke.

There was but one attractive feature connected with this deplorable fire and that was the smoke, which had<sup>a</sup>/rich, resinous, almost fruity aroma more pleasing to the nostrils than the choicest incense. It seemed the epitome of a century's growth, the fragrance of the hundred or more summers that have passed since these giant trees were young, gathered, season after season, from the south wind, from the breath of the white azalea and clethra that grow in the neighboring swamp, from the white water lilies that float on the river, from the myriad wild flowers that deck the adjacent fields and woods and stored carefully away by provident Nature in the deep mat of fallen leaves, to be at length released by the subtle agency of fire and disseminated to the four quarters of the earth. I could smell this smoke distinctly at the Buttricks' after my return in the evening, although the wind was apparently unfavorable to its progress in that direction. It must have been wafted westward by some upper current of air and then have descended again.

[The absence of rain for so many weeks is fast bringing on a severe drought. The smaller trees and shrubs are wilting and the grass turning brown.]

Decline of  
bird singing

The singing season is waning fast, the falling-off being appreciable from day to day and very marked from week to week. Along the river this afternoon I heard only Robins, Song and Swamp Sparrows, Yellow Warblers, one Grass Finch, two Meadow Larks, three Red-wings, two Short-billed Marsh Wrens, and a Phoebe. The last was singing only listlessly and at intervals -- in the trees in front of my cabin. I believe that it is the same bird which I heard there in the early spring and which, failing to secure a mate, finally left me.

The woods behind Ball's Hill are silent to-day save for the songs of a Robin and Pine Warbler.

Robins

I saw Robins in small flocks in my blueberry swamp and among the maples at the foot of Holden's Hill. At the latter place they seemed to be collecting to roost (a little before sunset).

Red-wings'  
roost

As I came up river the air was filled with Red-wings and Barn Swallows flying about in every direction as if assembling from distant points to pass the night. The Red-wings' roost at Beaver Dam Rapid has been broken up by the cutting of the grass.

Young Martins

Numbers of Purple Martins again spent the day in the tall trees near the swimming place. The broods seen there yesterday were united into one flock to-day. I counted ten birds in one tree, all young. The flock took wing and went off to the south-west as I was passing on my way home.

CONCORD.

Morning Walk.

892  
July 28

Young  
Martin  
caught by  
a Hawk

Immediately after breakfast I started for a short walk. [Robins, Red-eyes, Chippies, Yellow Warblers and a Meadow Lark singing rather listlessly.] As I was passing the Burrills' the calls of Martins attracted my attention and, looking to the eastward, I saw a flock of about a dozen of these birds flying in circles at a height of several hundred feet over the vineyard on Mr. Merwyn's farm. They seemed to be excited about something and the cause was soon explained when a small Hawk which looked exactly like a Pigeon Hawk (*Falco columbarius*) suddenly appeared directly among them, coming from I know not where. For a moment or two it sailed about with them as if it meant them no harm but merely wished to join the flock. None of the Martins tried, so far as I could see, to avoid it but all continued their slow, easy, circling flight. Perhaps they were too frightened or bewildered to attempt to escape or more probably the majority were young, unaware of the fearful risk they were running as they brushed past the strange bird in their midst. The latter, secure of his prey, doubtless found a certain savage pleasure in prolonging the moment of his triumph as a Cat plays with her mouse or bird before ending its sufferings. But at length there was

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a sudden dash, the flock were scattered in every direction, and a single Martin closely pursued by the Hawk disappeared behind a cluster of trees. The next instant I heard the screams of the poor victim, at first loud, then fainter, and finally, after a moment of silence, coming again in feeble, despairing tones as the unfortunate creature drew its last breaths in the grasp of the sharp and relentless talons.

As on several former occasions when I have seen a Hawk catch a small bird and have listened to its expiring cries I was moved by deep pity and fierce wrath to an extent surprising on the part of one who, like myself, has killed thousands of birds without suffering more than an occasional slight qualm. But there is something peculiarly moving and piteous in the voice of a bird in the clutches of a Hawk, a quality of mingled pain and apprehension which the grasp of the human hand seldom or never elicits.

[The identity of the Hawk just mentioned puzzles me. The bird was almost certainly a Falco but I have never seen columbarius here at this season while sparverius (Sparrow Hawk) would scarcely attack so large a bird as a Martin. As the chase and capture occurred at a distance of fully six hundred yards and I had no glass with me, I could only judge by form, size and flight.

The Grass Finches have nearly ceased singing but Song Sparrows and Chippies keep on with unabated vigor.]

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CONCORD.

To Ball's Hill.

1892  
August 4

My man George came from Cambridge this morning and we went to Ball's Hill for the day, driving down and back. We spent most of our time clearing out my woodland path, which had become choked in places by this season's growth of shrubs and ferns. I heard almost no birds singing, a Chippy at Benson's and a Short-billed Marsh Wren across the river being actually all that I remember.

Wasp and  
Spider

Nevertheless I had one interesting experience. Early in the afternoon a Wasp about three-quarters of an inch long, slender of build even for its kind, in color grayish-brown with steel blue reflections on the wings, two yellow bands encircling the abdomen and some obscure yellowish about the head, appeared on the outside of the <sup>wire</sup> iron door of my cabin, moving backwards and downward and dragging after it a spider apparently dead but doubtless only numbed by its sting, and fully twice as heavy as itself. On reaching the ground it at once started across my little lawn, still moving backwards, sometimes among the stems of the grasses, often climbing over their tops. Its progress was wonderfully rapid, considering the burden it bore, and every movement was characterized by impatience of the obstacles in its path and a burning desire to get ahead still faster. When within a couple of feet of the lower edge of the grass, it dropped the spider and flew to the sandy space below where it entered a hole scarce larger than a lead pencil. Presently it

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emerged and began digging the hole out larger, using only the forward pair of legs and throwing the sand backwards between its hind legs precisely like a dog digging at a Woodchuck's hole.

Next it returned to the spider, running perfectly straight to the spot through the grass and then resuming the dragging until it had again reached the hole down which it backed, pulling the spider in after it, not without difficulty. Reappearing at the entrance, it came out, looked about for a moment and then began shoveling sand into the hole from a pile which had evidently been made during the process of excavation and throwing it backwards with the fore legs, as just described.

When the hole was filled to within about a quarter of an inch of the surrounding surface, it scattered the remaining sand in every direction until not a trace of the original pile remained. It then returned to the hole and, standing directly over it, began biting <sup>the edges with</sup> ~~with the edges of~~ its jaws and shaking the earth thus loosened down into the hole. After spending a few seconds in this way, it would vibrate its abdomen up and down and sideways with great rapidity and with so much force that the whole body shook violently. At first I thought it was depositing eggs but after watching it for some time I concluded that it used its abdomen as a beetle (does) to tamp the earth firmly in place. It continued this remarkable performance for fully fifteen minutes, the periods of biting and tamping alternating with perfect regularity. When it finally ceased from its



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labors and flew away, the pit was filled perfectly level with the surrounding surface, from which it could be in no way distinguished.

CONCORD.

1892  
August 15

End of the  
singing  
season

Early in the morning I heard Song Sparrows singing vigorously but at wide intervals. After 9 A. M. there was literally no sound from these or other birds during the entire forenoon, nothing in fact save the z-ing monotone of innumerable grasshoppers and the chirping of the crickets. As there was nothing in the weather conditions to account for this universal silence, it is evident that yesterday was literally the end of the singing season of the birds about our house, for this is the first morning when the Warbling Vireo and the Chipping and Song Sparrows have not sung at short intervals during the greater part of the forenoon.

Woodland  
birds cease  
singing  
first, those  
of gardens  
and orchards  
next, those  
of river  
meadows  
and thickets  
last

Judging by the experience of this season, I conclude that the midsummer silence falls first on the woodlands and thicket-bordered fields and lanes, next on the gardens and orchards, and last on the river meadows where the Short-billed Marsh Wrens at least may be counted on to sing for a week or more longer. Perhaps the Goldfinch should be similarly credited to the fields and orchards but he is not common here and curiously enough the few individuals that I have seen of late have not sung at all.

The Quail has been wholly silent for a week or more past. I am surprised at this, for I had an impression that his "bob-white" was usually heard through this entire month.

Quail

CONCORD.

1892  
August 21

[To Bow Meadow at 10 A. M. via Derby's and Dutton's lanes, returning down the Estabrook Road about noon.

The only birds heard singing were a Song Sparrow, a Red-eye, a Black and White Creeper, a Wood Pewee, and a Quail. The first was near the house; the second and third were in Derby's woods and both sang nearly as steadily and well as in June. The Pewee also gave the expressive spring song, not the listless pee-e which I hear most of the time now.

Birds appear to (be) very scarce/<sup>even</sup>for this, the season of greatest quiet and retirement. Besides the species just named I saw or heard: Field Sparrows (2), Towhees(3), Robins(8), Cedar Birds (2), Thrasher(1), Crows(several), Jays(2), Swifts(5, or 6, flying very high), Red-tailed Hawk(1), Phoebe(1), Bluebirds(2), Kingbirds(2), Downy Woodpecker(1), Golden-winged Warbler(1), Chickadees(6), Least Flycatcher(1), Yellow-bellied Flycatcher(1) and Black-throated Green Warbler(2). In all, 22 species.

Mixed flock

The five species last named, with a Robin, a Creeper and a Wood Pewee were all together in mixed pines and oaks near Clark's big woods. After the manner of all such gatherings of small birds, they were moving rather steadily and rapidly from tree to tree, so that I had to walk at a fair pace to keep up with them. The Mniotilta occasionally gave the midsummer song and one of the Black-throated Greens warbled frequently in low tones a strain which had little of the peculiar quality of the spring song which was indeed]

Golden-wing

Warbler

scarce recognizable. I think the singer was a young bird. The Golden-wing was a male with full black throat and apparently fully perfected autumnal plumage. He uttered a low rasping chirp not unlike that of an Indigo Bird and seemed to avoid the pines, working chiefly at the extremity of oak branches where he hung back downward like a Chickadee. I saw him find and eat several good-sized hairless Caterpillars, one of which he extracted from a rolled-up leaf wrapped about with Caterpillar silk.

Red-tailed

Hawk

The Red-tailed Hawk was flying over the swamp east of Clark's woods, uttering a gasping or choking scream prolonged and husky as if the bird's throat were dry (crée-ě-ě-ě-ě-ě-ě). This is one of the most characteristic cries of this species.

Gray

Squirrel

In Dutton's corn a large Gray Squirrel, tinged strongly over the entire upper parts with rusty fulvous clung head downwards against the stump of our oak for a minute watching me, and then, taking to the wall, ran along its top very swiftly until he reached the woods.]

Bow Meadow

Bow Meadow. I spent an hour or more sitting on a ledge covered with rock ferns looking out over this pretty little opening. Its appearance is singularly wild and northern, reminding me at all seasons of some of the bays in Maine or New Brunswick although there is nothing really

northern in its flora. The resemblance is probably due to the abundance of <sup>(Leather leaf)</sup> Cassandra, now dull and rusty in tint, and to the stunted, gnarled character of the scattered birches and pitch pines which, doubtless, get more water than is good for them, although the place is seldom flooded. There are a few clusters of vivid green high blueberry bushes, sprinkled about, and in places cotton grass rearing its white, flower-like heads which seem(ed) to attract the yellow butterflies. The entire opening is encircled by a belt of young but tall and vigorous white pines, gray birches, maples, chestnuts, oaks and hickories with an undergrowth of high blueberries <sup>(White alder)</sup> and Clethra, the latter covered with creamy-white blossoms which loaded the air with their strong fragrance resembling that of tube roses.

Quail

As I sat looking out through the foliage, I heard Crows cawing and a Quail whistling "bob-white" at short, regular intervals in the distance towards the west. Near at hand a Jay chucked, a Towhee called, a Cedar Bird lisped. Overhead high against the sulphury white clouds a few Swifts circled, twittering. Once I heard the pink of a Bobolink, passing southward. The dry, stammering autumn call of Pickering's Hylas came at frequent intervals from the surrounding woods (I heard this autumn call yesterday for the first time this month) and the frying notes of the Cicada were almost incessant, one beginning almost immediately after another had ceased. The grasshoppers and crickets

Pickering  
Hylas

8/21/92  
4

in the meadow supplied a steady volume of mingled low z-ing and chirping which formed as even an undertone or background for the other sounds and which reminded me of the sizzling of damp wood burning. Once a Tree Toad chirruped in low, doubtful tones. Dragon-flies were flitting from stem to stem of the Cassandra bushes. The breeze rustled the oak leaves overhead. These were all the sights and sounds that I noted here.

[Many of the leaves of the gray birches, especially on the lower branches, are turning yellow and some have even ripened and fallen.

Late in the afternoon I went up the Assabet/<sup>by boat</sup>with C., rowing to a little above "Birds Nest Island" and taking our tea in the boat as we floated slowly back with the stream.

Birds appeared to be very scarce -- a Water Thrush, a Wood Pewee, a Black-billed Cuckoo, several Robins, a Wilson's Thrush, a Cat-bird and three Night Hawks besides a Crow or two being all that I saw or heard. There was literally no singing at sunset save that once a Black-billed Cuckoo uttered the series of notes (cuc-cuc-cuc-cuc-, coo, coo, coo) which seems to serve it in lieu of a song and which I have not heard before for more than two weeks. The Wilson's Thrush was calling (pheu) merely. The Robins, six or eight in number, came apparently from a distance and singly and pitched into the birch swamp exactly at the point where there was a well-defined but small roost in 1886-87. There can be no doubt that those which came this evening passed the night in these

Black-bill  
Cuckoo

A curiously  
small

Robin roost

8/21/92  
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trees for I stayed near them until it was nearly dark and heard them flutter and settle themselves on their perches. Surely this is the smallest Robin roost on record! There were no Grackles with them as was the case in 1886-1887, and I am beginning to wonder what has become of the Concord Grackles for not one have I seen this month! Can they have left the township altogether?

Night  
Hawks

The Night Hawks were apparently migrating in company for when they first appeared all three were high in air, and heading south, but one turned back and lingered over the river for many minutes, descending lower and lower until it was below the level of the tree-tops and beating up and down the stream.]

CONCORD.

1892  
August 22

[At 7.30 A. M. I found a rather large and interesting mixed flock of birds in the elms in front of our house. They stayed in these trees over an hour and with the aid of my glasses I identified them all positively and made out the following list: Black and White Warbler (Mniotilta varia), 4, (one adult male in autumn dress); Parula Warbler (Compothlypsis americana), 2, (moulting about the head and fore neck); Nashville Warbler (Helminthophila ruficapilla), 1, (apparently adult male in full autumn plumage); Chestnut-sided Warbler (Dendroica pensylvanica), 2, (in perfect autumn plumage with olive-green upper and white under parts, the yellow wing bands and whitish rings about the eye very conspicuous); Warbling Vireo (Vireo gilvus), 4, (three young with very yellow sides, the fourth bird an old male not through the moult but warbling every now and then in low tones); White-breasted Nuthatch (Sitta carolinensis), (female very ragged and pin-feathery); Baltimore Oriole (Icterus baltimore), (adult male and female, both in nearly or quite perfect fall plumage); Wood Pewee (Contopus virens), 1, (silent and apparently young); English Sparrow (Passer domesticus), 5 or 6; Chipping Sparrow (Spizella socialis), 4; in all ten species and about twenty-six individuals. The four species first named were probably migrants which came from the north last night and joined the others, all of which



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have been in the habit of resorting to these trees daily for the past week or more.

Orioles  
resume  
singing

The male Oriole sang several times in loud, ringing tones. This is the first time that I have heard the full song for several weeks, although a bird (evidently adult) in the birch swamp on the Assabet last evening gave most of it sotto voce. This autumn (or rather late summer) song of the Baltimore is more prolonged and richer than the ordinary spring fluting and its effect is heightened by the general silence at this season. It begins with the normal flute-like song, is continued by a succession of rich notes and ends, usually, in a low chatter.]

Sharp-shin  
Hawk  
catches a  
Robin

*copied*

At 3 P. M. I started for Ball's Hill with C. We had just reached the foot of the slope between the Buttrick's house and the river when there was a sudden shrill outcry of bird voices in the big willow by my boat-house and the next instant a Robin appeared, closely pursued by a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The Robin, a young bird still in the speckled plumage but with fully developed wings and tail, flew very slowly and when within ten or twelve feet of us (for the chase led directly towards us) its wings seemed to fail it altogether and it fluttered feebly down to the ground, uttering a shrill, squeaking cry and evidently fairly overcome with terror. The Hawk, a large female and also a young bird as I could see quite plainly, sailed on set wings with tail wide spread and although it did not seem to move

at all swiftly it made at least two feet to the Robin's one and was within a yard of its victim when the latter sought the earth. Undeterred by my shouts or by the canoe cushion which I flung at it, it pounced on its prey without a moment's hesitation. I could not see exactly what ensued for both birds were hidden somewhat by the grass, but there was the usual agonized screaming on the part of the poor victim and when I reached the spot the Hawk rose literally at my feet with the Robin clutched firmly in both feet and started off, flapping heavily. He went only a few rods before coming to the ground again, once more among thick grass. I followed and flushed him directly underfoot a second time but he left the Robin behind. On picking it up, I found a few feathers gone from the rump and a little blood flowing from the base of the neck next the breast. The wound seemed trifling but the bird died in my hand within the space of a few minutes, although it seemed little hurt at first and pecked my hand bravely. The Hawk flew straight away across the river and out of sight over Ripley's Hill.

[During the row to Ball's Hill I saw a Kingfisher-- the first for some time -- a Black-billed Cuckoo, and thirty or forty Red-wings, the last feeding on wild rice on the island just below the tent. No birds were singing anywhere, either along the river or in my woods. I saw a Carolina Dove crossing Benson's field late in the afternoon.

Bobolinks  
assembling  
to roost

Just before sunset Bobolinks were coming into the Great Meadows in very large numbers. I counted fifty individuals in one flock and then did not get all. There were many smaller flocks and the pink, pink was a constant sound for fifteen minutes or more. It is evident that Bobolinks seek their roosts much earlier than do most birds. The flight had practically ceased this evening before the sun disappeared.

Swallows

There were a few Swallows (all apparently Barn Swallows) flying over the meadows at sunset and as we were on

Night Hawks

our way up river in the twilight I saw three Night Hawks (or possibly the same bird three different times) skimming close over the surface of the water.]

CONCORD.

1892  
August 24

[Driving with C. -- 9 to 11 A. M.-- about the village and through the Virginia Road. Saw few birds except Song Sparrows and heard nothing sing. The rum cherries are ripening fast and Cedar Birds and Robins are already eating them. Near our large tree I saw two Flickers; they, also, are very fond of these cherries.]

Mink swims  
the river

To Ball's Hill alone at 3 P. M., paddling most of the way. Near the foot of Beaver Dam Rapid a large Mink crossed the river 100 yards or more in advance of me. I recognized him at once by the large, bushy tail held well out of (the) water and perfectly motionless. *See*

A Musk-rat will occasionally carry his tail in much the same way but he is sure to move it every second or so and usually waves or vibrates it incessantly. Another point of difference was the greater space between the head and tail (the back was entirely submerged) of the Mink. At a distance the tail looked like the head of a second and larger animal following the first closely. This Mink swam much more slowly than the one I saw in the Damsdale pool last May and no faster than a Musk-rat. He went ashore very noiselessly, entering a bed of pickerel weed without making any plashing or agitating the stems of the plants as a Musk-rat would have done. I did not try to overtake him but on the contrary stopped paddling as soon as I first sighted him and watched him through my glasses. He did not appear to notice me at all.

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[To Ball's Hill with C. at 2.30 P. M. Did not hear a single bird singing, either along the river or in my woods which we traversed from end to end. Saw a Water Thrush ( ) under the maples at Dakin's Bend, and a Carolina Dove flying over Ball's Hill. A large flock/<sup>of</sup>(about 40) Bobolinks came in our Great Meadows at sunset. Many Warblers migrating after dark.]