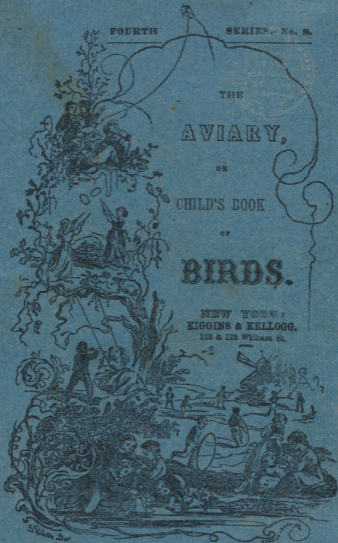


FOURTH

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THE
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OR
CHILD'S BOOK
OF
BIRDS.

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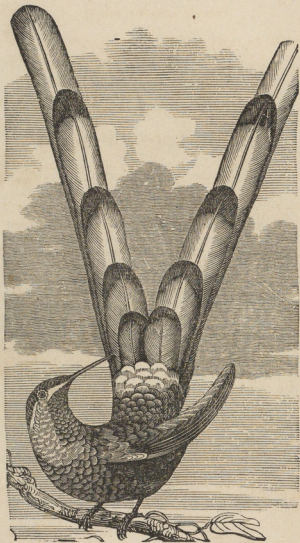


Humming-Birds.

THE
CHILD'S BOOK OF BIRDS.

HUMMING-BIRDS.

HUMMING-BIRDS are the smallest of the feathered tribe, some being not much more than half an inch in length; they are the most beautiful in the texture and colors of their plumage; for no matter nor other substance can come up to the richness of their tints, or the glowing brilliancy of their metallic reflections. They are the most active of all known birds, exceeding in this respect even the swifts, they are still more powerfully winged, in proportion to their size, than these are; and there are no birds which have the breast and the bones which give firmness to the shoulder more finely developed. In fact, the whole of their energy is concentrated upon this part of their organization, and their different styles of flight are all equally vigorous. Suspended in the air, and hovering over a flower, their wings move with so much rapidity that they are not seen except as gleams of light of different colors, but all radiant, as the beams of the sun take them at those angles at which they give out their different lustres; and



while the rapid motion of the wings thus renders them invisible, except as gleams of light playing around the little body of the bird, they make a sound similar to that of the humming produced by the wings of bees and other insects; and it is on account of this, that they get their English name of humming-birds.

The texture of their plumage is indeed as worthy of attention as the tints of color, and the brilliant metallic reflections; for though they are very little birds in all the species, and not larger than humble-bees in the most minute one, their plumage is exceedingly compact, and probably forms a better defence against alternations of heat and cold, and of drought and moisture, than that of any other birds whatever. The individual feathers are beautifully formed; and more compactly laid than those of any others, if we except the under parts especially, of those birds which are almost constantly in the water without ever getting wet.

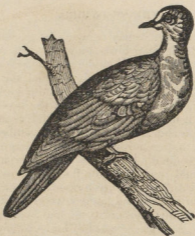
One of the most curious of the humming-birds, is the one seen on the opposite page. It is called the bartailed humming-bird. It is a most singular species, and considerably larger than many of the others. The tail is the most singular part of this bird. It consists of two parts, standing out at an angle to each other like the letter V. Altogether, it is one of the most singular appendages to be met with in the whole feathered creation; and though we are not very well informed with regard to the manners of many of the family, the strong fortification of coverts which this tail possesses would lead us to conclude that it is capable of some corresponding action which is essential to the welfare of the bird



Snowbirds.

THE SNOWBIRD.

WHEN winter comes arrayed in garments of snow, the little snowbirds may be seen, waving their wings against the sunlight, and looking like stars of silver. The scientific name of the bird is snowbunting. It generally inhabits the higher regions of the arctic circles, but as the severe cold comes on, it migrates over the United States, and also Europe and Asia. Early in December, they descend into the northern states, in large flocks, either immediately before, or soon after a fall of snow. Amid the snowdrifts, flocks of these "bad-weather birds," as they are termed by the Swedes, flit about in restless and hungry troops, resting for a moment in the fences or trees, and then again on the wing. At times, pressed by hunger, they alight near the door of the farmhouse, or approach the barn, and in very severe weather, will even venture into the outhouses in search of seeds or crumbs: but when the weather becomes milder, they are much more shy. They seem to be aware also of the advantages to be derived by them from larger birds scratching the earth, and in some degree keep company with partridges, wild-turkeys, and even squirrels, in order to pick up the food rejected by these animals as beneath their notice. The snowbird is a true hopping-bird, and makes its little leaps without the least appearance of moving either feet or legs; in which circumstances it resembles the sparrow. Another of its habits is, that it resorts at night during severe cold weather, to stacks of corn and hay, in which they form a hole, and remain snug in it, during the continuance of such weather.



THE CARRIER PIGEON.

This beautiful bird is very swift on the wing, and will pass over a great distance of country in a short time. From very remote ages, they have been employed to convey intelligence on particular occasions. They have till recently been so used, but messages are now sent by telegraph with a speed which far outstrips their flight. But they are still employed in some parts of Europe. The pigeons to be used for such a purpose, are taken from the place, to which the intelligence is intended to be sent, and the letter, of as little weight as possible, is fastened to the wings in such a way as not to impede their use; and then they are let loose, when they return directly and quickly to their home, by an unaccountable instinct.



THE SACRED IBIS.

THIS bird has been very celebrated from comparatively remote antiquity, for its real or supposed services to the ancient Egyptians, in destroying offensive and poisonous reptiles, and generally for scavengers' work done about the temples and houses. For these reasons it was admitted into the temples themselves among the numerous other animal-gods of the Egyptians; and mummies of it were preserved with the same assiduous labor of embalming as those of men and monkeys. It is a bird of the size of a common fowl, with the plumage entirely white, except the quills, the points of which are black; and the tail, the bill, and the feet, are also black, and so is the naked skin on the head and neck.



THE WILD-TURKEY.

THIS bird, on account of its great size and beauty, its value as a rich and delicate article of food, and the circumstance of its being the origin of the domestic race, which is now dispersed over America and Europe, is one of the most interesting to be found in the United States.

The wild-turkeys do not confine themselves to any particular food. They eat maize, all sorts of berries, fruits, grass, and beetles; and even tad poles, young frogs, and lizards, are occasionally found in their crops. Where the pecan-nut is plentiful, they prefer it to any other kind of nutriment; but their more general predilection is in favor of the acorn, on which they rapidly fatten. When a profuse crop of acorns is produced in a section of the country which they inhabit, great numbers of turkeys are enticed from their ordinary haunts in the surrounding districts. About the beginning of October, while the mast still remains on the trees, they assemble in flocks, and direct their course to the rich bottom-lands; and so constant is their appearance, that the season of this irruption is known to the Indians by the name of the turkey-month. At this time the males, which are usually termed gobblers, associate in parties numbering from ten to a hundred; the females move about singly with their young, or, with other females, form troops of seventy or eighty. Many wonderful stories have been told of the immense size which this bird attains; and turkeys of sixty pounds and upward in weight are spoken of as not uncommon. When fully grown, the wild-turkey measures nearly four feet in length.



THE SCARLET TANAGER.

THIS is a bird of the wild-wood rather than of cultivated places; and among all the birds that inhabit our woods, there is none that strikes the eye of a stranger, or even of a native, with so much brilliancy as this. Seen among the green leaves, with the light falling strongly on his plumage, he really appears beautiful. If he has little melody in his notes, he has nothing in them to disgust. His manners are modest, easy, and inoffensive. He commits no depredations on the property of the husbandman, but rather benefits him, by the daily destruction in spring of many noxious insects; and, when winter approaches, he is no plundering dependant, but seeks, in a distant country, for that sustenance which the severity of the season denies to his industry in this. He is a striking ornament to our rural scenery, and none of the meanest of our rural songsters.



THE REED-BIRD.

This truly beautiful bird is an inhabitant of large reedy tracts in various situations in Europe and Asia. It is a small species, but from the great length and thickness of its plumage, and the length of its tail and legs, it appears when alive almost as large as a robin. Nothing can exceed the beauty of the eye; the bright orange of the iris, surrounded by the deep glossy black of the mustaches and streak above, is more brilliant from the contrast, forming altogether a masterpiece of beauty.



THE EAGLE.

As the lion among four-footed beasts, so, among the feathered creation, the eagle, the adopted emblem of our country, with its bold glance, proud air, elevated flight, and strength of limb, combines so many of the qualities which are commonly esteemed noble. has been styled the KING OF BIRDS. The eagle is extensively diffused over the world, being found in the mountainous regions of Europe, in parts of Asia and Africa, and in this country.

In a clear sky the eagle soars to a great height, sometimes so high as not to be discernible by the human eye. And such is the acuteness of its own sight, that, when thus too high in the air to be visible to man, it can mark out a hare or even a smaller animal that may be upon the ground, and dart down upon it with an unerring aim. His immense muscular power enables him to contend with the most violent winds. Eagles are tamed with great difficulty. The Tartars, however, take them when young, and not only tame them, but train them to assist in the chase of hares, foxes, antelopes, and even wolves.

A view of an eagle's nest is given on the opposite page. The mother-eagle is kind to her young; but though attentive to them while helpless in the nest, she does not encourage them in indolence when they are able to provide for themselves. She rouses them early to exertion, and to the exercise of their energies; she watches and directs, with interest and care, their first efforts to fly, and when finally assured that their powers are sufficiently matured, obliges them to leave the parent-nest and provide for themselves in future.



THE BLUE-JAY.

This elegant bird is peculiar in North America, and stays with us all winter. He is distinguished among the bird family as a sort of beau, dressed in a dandy suit, and very vain and loquacious withal. He makes as many ridiculous grimaces, and cuts as queer antics, and gives himself as many airs, as his namesake without feathers. He is a great mimic, and in the domestic state can be taught to articulate words, and imitate the noise of a saw and other sounds. The blue-jay seems to take great delight in imitating the sparrow-hawk. This he does so perfectly as to deceive the most practised ears. The jay is an enemy of the owl.



THE HOOPOE.

THE hoopoe is an inhabitant of the banks of rivers, chiefly of those rivers which are alternately flooded and low, from the alternation of rain and drought. There they feed upon beetles, and other ground insects, and on the spawn of fishes and reptiles. The number of insects which they capture is very great; so that they render no unimportant services to those countries which they frequent, from their activity; they are necessarily voracious feeders, and their nests are somewhat rank with the remains of their abundant food.



THE FISH-HAWK, OR OSPREY.

THIS is a migratory bird, and on its first appearance in spring, is welcomed by the fishermen as the happy signal of the approach of the fishing season. Such is the respect paid the fish-hawk, that a person who should attempt to shoot one of them, would stand a fair chance of being insulted. This prepossession in favor of the fish-hawk is honorable to the feelings. Farmers associate with its first appearance, ideas of plenty, and all the gayety of business; they see it active and industrious like themselves; inoffensive to the productions of their farms; building with confidence, and without the least disposition to concealment, in the middle of their fields, and along their fences; and returning, year after year, to its former abode.



THE SPARROW-HAWK.

THIS is a bird that preys upon smaller birds. The blue-jays have a particular antipathy to this bird, and frequently insult it by following and imitating its notes so exactly, as to deceive even those well acquainted with both. In return for all this abuse, the hawk contents himself with now and then feasting on the plumpest of his persecutors, who are, therefore, in perpetual dread of him; and yet, through some strange infatuation, or from fear that, if they lose sight of him, he may attack them, the sparrow-hawk no sooner appears than the alarm is given, and the whole force of jays follow him.

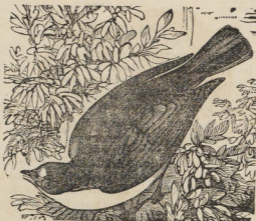


The Common Crane.

THE CRANE.

THE common crane is about the size of a turkey in body, and weighs about ten pounds, but from the great length of its legs, it is nearly five feet in height. Cranes range seasonally from the north of Europe to the south of Asia, and the north of Africa. On these excursions they fly high in the air, though they experience some difficulty in getting on the wing from the ground. Before taking their spring they run some paces, raise themselves a little at first, and then unfold a powerful and rapid wing. In getting on the wing, the apparent difficulty which they experience does not arise from want of space in which to move their wings, for their legs are sufficiently long for allowing these to act with perfect freedom, even when the feet are firmly on the ground. They appear to run forward, for the purpose of getting an impetus of the whole body; and when that is acquired, they jerk themselves into the air by the elasticity of the legs, and move off in very good style, and they are capable of passing over many miles without alighting. When they assemble on the ground for the purpose of repose, which after a long flight they take with the head under the wing, they have sentinels appointed to give the alarm in case of danger. Those sentinels stand on the one leg, as is also the habit of the stork.

In ancient times the flesh of the crane was a luxury, and it is also recorded among the dishes served up in old times in England. In the old birds it is black and tough, but said to be at least tolerable in the young ones



THE FLY-CATCHER.

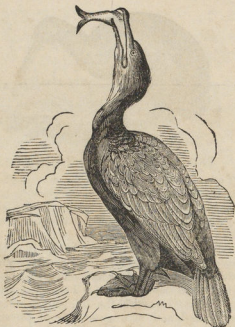
THE fly-catcher is about six inches in length, and of a dark color. In search of food he takes his stand at some favored spot, and thence watches his prey. His eye, moving restlessly around him, traces the flight of an insect for a moment or two, then that of a second, and even a third, until he perceives one to his liking; when, with a shrill scream, he pursues it, seizes it, and returns to the same spot again to look for more.

The services of these little birds would be found valuable in some parts of South America, and in the West Indies, in destroying the vast quantities of gnats and other insects which abound in those countries, where, it is humorously said, the usual morning salutation is not, as with us, "How do you do?" but "How were you off for musquitoes last night?"



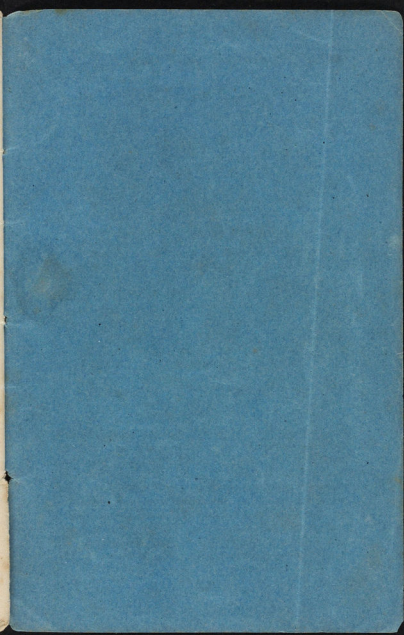
THE APTERYX, OR WINGLESS BIRD.

THE above cut represents a very curious bird, the apteryx or wingless bird of New Zealand. A most extraordinary species, genus, family, and (one might almost say) order of the winged creation, of which the characters, so far as they are known, clearly enough demonstrate that it is a bird, but they as clearly demonstrate that it does not come within any of the orders into which other birds are arranged in the systems. All that is known of it is a single skin, with the bill and feet attached, un mutilated, and in a good state of preservation. This skin was brought from New Zealand in 1812, by Captain Barclay of the ship Providence, from whom it passed into the hands of the late Dr. Shaw. The length of the bird is about two feet, and it is about eighteen inches in circumference at the largest part. The feathers on the top of the head and forehead are short, but they increase in length as they proceed downward over the body. No other specimen of this singular bird has ever been seen, and it might reasonably be expected, so defenceless a being must soon fall, even to extermination, when assailed by powerful enemies.



THE CORMORANT.

CORMORANTS are sometimes called sea-ravens, or sea-crows, and they have nearly the same voracity as the land-ravens, though their prey and manner of catching it both are very different. Cormorants generally fish near the shores, and are more frequently on the wing over the water than at rest upon the rocks. They catch their prey, (which is chiefly fish) by the middle; but to swallow it, they fling it in the air, and seize it dexterously by the head as it falls.



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