



OLD COLONY
NATURALIST

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Old Colony Naturalist

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THE SINGERS.

S. F. G.

Listen now! they are coming home,
 Sweet singers of the sun,
 Singing as they come,
 All Nature springs to greet them.

When the first springtide cleared the snow,
 Sweet singers of long ago
 Came to cheer that little band,
 Who had wandered so far from their native land.

The thatched roofs on the sunny hill
 Sheltered many sad hearts still,
 But they swung the shutters to the balmy air,
 And were glad to be in a land so fair.

Listen now! they are coming home,
 Sweet singers of the sun,
 Singing as they come,
 All that is noble greets them.

THE RECORD OF A NEST HUNT.

One beautiful July morning last summer the writer and a friend, who is an enthusiastic and successful bird student, started out to find whatever they might of interest. From a passing acquaintance with the place, a deserted orchard, a short distance from Warren avenue through the fields had seemed to both of us a promising locality for closer observation.

Upon our arrival the robins were quite as noisy and unpleasant about our friendly call as usual, doing their best to frighten every other bird in the community, but perhaps they may have had some bitter experiences at the hands of unenlightened individuals of our species, and are justified in their attitude. If they only would take the trouble to discriminate a little it would be a double blessing, for it would save their nerves and ours.

A conspicuous and deeply cupped nest immediately invited attention on entering the orchard. Located on a horizontal limb some twelve feet from the ground it might have been

a robin's nest of which there were many in various stages of dilapidation, but this structure contained no mud, being made up externally of small twigs, dry grass and more or less twine, while the lining was composed of matted fibre and cotton. The nest was occupied, containing two young king birds about one-third grown and very hungry. During the investigation the parent birds flew about uttering shrill cries of alarm, and threatening momentarily to attack the intruder.

On a tree near by the English sparrows had filled a cavity with a nondescript mass of building material, making a very untidy and evil smelling nest, but the next bird home was in marked contrast to this one, for it proved to be the neat little cup of the chipping sparrow, made of closely woven rootlets and grasses and lined as they invariably are, no matter how far from any known source of supply, with horse hair. This nest was empty having served its purpose but was still trim and compact.

Slipping silently through the foliage more like a spirit than a bird, a beautiful black billed

cuckoo passed so near that it was easy to see his red eyelids, black upper mandibles and the small, inconspicuous, white spots on the tail, characteristics which distinguish the species from the yellow billed cuckoo.

A small nest ten feet from the ground in a locust sapling seemed rather inaccessible, but strength and agility won, revealing the domestic secrets of the least fly catcher or Chebec, namely three young birds and a skeleton in the family closet in the shape of an added egg. The nest was composed of strips of grape vine bark, plant fibre and newspaper, and lined with feathers, fine grass and rootlets.

If this nest had been hard to get at the next one was almost an impossibility even if seen, for the discovery alone seemed miraculous. Twenty-five or thirty feet from the ground on the dead limb of an apple tree, it was so ingeniously covered with lichens that it might easily have been mistaken for a part of the branch. The climb this time was perilous both for the climber and the charming little nest. During the ascent the anxious owner perched in a treetop some distance away whistled her

plaintive protest, for there proved to be an interesting family of three downy little pewees about three quarters grown.

Soon after this we found an explanation of the Cuckoo's presence in the shape of a carelessly constructed nest of leaves, weed-tops and pine needles containing a piece of pale green egg shell.

The numerous decayed knot holes in the apple trees suggested blue birds, and at length an inquiring hand thrust into one of them discovered the characteristic lining of grasses, but no eggs.

Having exhausted the supply of nests and what with the heat and violent exercise being nearly exhausted ourselves, we left the orchard well satisfied with what we had seen, and the birds none the worse off for our visit in spite of the damaging remarks of the robins who redoubled their outcry as we departed making us out no better than the owls, snakes and hawks.

One more nest by the roadside remained to be inspected.

It had aroused suspicion when seen from the

electric cars in passing, because the female scarlet tanager seemed to be constantly in the vicinity and examination proved the suspicion well founded, though the nest had since been abandoned, containing only one broken egg of a bluish green color with lilac and brown spots and blotches. The nest was about six inches in diameter composed of closely woven roots and twigs and lined with rootlets.

J. H. S.

SOME WILD FLOWERS OF KINGSTON.

(FOR THE NATURALIST.)

Bordered by the sea, and containing the river, numerous ponds, springs, brooks, hills, meadows, swamps, marshes, Kingston has a varied flora. Of the flowers blooming, early and late on the marshes, the best known are marsh marigold, beach plum, gerardia, rosemary, three species of Lathyrus or beach pea, (near Elder Cushman's spring), seaside buttercup, vigorous goldenrod and deep red samphire.

Carnivorous plants include two species of catchflies (*silene*), the well known pitcher plant, *droseras* (three inches high with sticky leaves), two dogbanes and *peltandra virginica*, (an arum with a long spadix, as in the Egyptian "calla lily" covered with insects.) Other arums are sweet flag, swamp calla and Jack-in-the-Pulpit.

Chimaphila umbellata flourishes in the woods, abundantly, but the spotted wintergreen is scarce, in an area hardly larger than a sea gull's wing. The painted trillium, just over the line in Plympton, is far more rare than the nodding trillium of Kingston, or of *Clintonia* with its light green boreal hue growing near it.

The charms of Indian Pond neighborhood are swamp saxifrage, lupine, rare wild teasel of the roadside, golden saxifrage, and *senecio*, or golden ragwort.

The queen of all the asters is the New England, at Seaside.

Diplopappus of August, marshals the great army of asters which follow.

Blooming in the waters of Stony Brook, in

September, is bur marigold, (*bidens chrysanthemoides*). Other species of *bidens*, (beggar-ticks, every seed of which has two sharp teeth), cling to your clothing, in the autumnal season, with the same persistency as cling to the Spaniards in the olden days, the Gueux or "Beggars of the Sea."

Menyanthes fills the inaccessible swamps of Blackwater, whence the turtle crawls to lay her eggs in the sand to be hatched by the solar heat. I once saw in this locality a great nest full of them—and where the lonely bittern, breasting the atmosphere in the stillness of night utters his familiar "Quock." In September if you should chance upon the brooks and meads of Blackwater, be sure to notice, (because the flower appears to be rare in the neighborhood of Boston, though abundant in Kingston,) the four leaf polygala, even more of a dwarf than all the other polygalas.

Kingston possesses a plentiousness of small esculent wild fruits; cranberries, barberries, gooseberries, strawberries, checkerberries, bunchberries, dangleberries, high and low blackberries, huckleberries, and blueberries;

bearberries, (*arctostaphylos*) are plentiful, there being no longer any bears upon the hills to feed upon such berries.

There is a sufficiency of well established home bodies, such as daisies, sedums, white, red and yellow clovers, old fashioned yellow celandine, chicory, brunella (blooming for a large half year,) and quiet little bluets under the swamp azalea, near a wide spreading savin or solitary hawthorn. In the big cow-pasture just back of the farm house, around the front door step of which, with less cultivation than formerly, "Sweet William" and "Bouncing Bet" are seen to linger.

Kingston has black snake-root, yellow adder's-tongue, white throated snake-head (*chelone*,) frog's-bit on the surface of the small ponds in July, "pussy-willows," cat-tails (large and small,) mouse-ear, monkey-flower, cow-wheat and deer-grass.

Scripture and the church lend their aid in Benjamin or spice-bush of early spring, (false) mitrewort, blazing-star, monkshood, Adam's needle, with Jacob's-ladder in the garden, and the star of Bethlehem (astray).

In ancient classic mythology, you see Iris, Achilles in one of his old disguises with a maiden's name, (*Achillea*).

Cassandra or *Andromeda* standing in her snow white April bloom over the river borders, *Nyssa*, *Castileia*, *Arethusa*, *Ambrosia* the drink of the gods, (though in Kingston it is worm-wood, and Roman at that). *Venus'* looking-glass, and my fair lady's-slippers. Oft have the poets sung the praises of other classics of Kingston; *rhodora*, mountain laurel, forget-me-not, (the brooks exhibit a diminutive variety,) trailing *arbutus*, and stately *sabbatia*. In your birch bark canoe over the three famous English miles of 1620, on the bosom of old father Jones, you will see and appreciate, as you rest complacently, many another flower not herein described—classic flowers on land—classic in American history.

"I joy, dear mother, when I view
Thy perfect lineaments and true,
So sweet and bright.
Beauty in thee takes up her place
And dates her letters from thy face
When she doth write."

C. E. RIDLER.

EDITORIAL.

The marshes between Kingston and Island Creek, or more specifically speaking, the marshes a little southwesterly from the "Loring Place," make an excellent field for birds, especially the meadow-larks.

On March 22nd we visited this place and found the birds there. From the way they greeted us, we think they were *all* there. Our note-book says that we saw at least one hundred red-winged back-birds, sixteen meadow-larks, three song sparrows, three crows and a flock of small birds which we did not identify. Every individual bird seemed to be singing as we reached the marsh—a veritable bird medley. A bird symphony would express it better, so well balanced were all the parts and so well trained all the performers; the almost incessant, but by no means unmusical, cackling of the blackbirds, with a timely "O-ka-lee" occasionally thrown in by way of variation, and the clear, flute-like notes of the larks, formed an accompaniment that could not be excelled by human performers, while the solo parts were

supplied by the three song sparrows who had perched so near us that every note of their sweet sopranos was distinctly heard above the chorus. The blue-birds were there, too, but our untrained ears did not catch their notes, although we saw the birds as we left the field. Over the whole assembly circled the crows, who in a stately manner acted as musical directors, perhaps, and whose inspiring "caws" seem to animate and encourage the whole chorus. We like to think of this as being the birds opening chorus in their grand symphony, "Welcome to Spring."

The wood-thrush and partridge have been called the fife and drum of Nature. The Drum Rehearsals are taking place now. It is difficult to obtain even standing room at these, but we hope one of our members may be given a bird's-eye-view and then tell the "Naturalist" about it.

It has been suggested, by one of our public spirited citizens, that the trees in Morton Park be named, in a similar manner as those named

at the Arnold Arboretum, Forest Hills, by attaching to a tree a piece of tin or other metal, on which is printed the English and Latin name of the species; the label being of sufficient size to enable one to read the inscription at some distance.

If only the largest and finest of the trees bordering on the thoroughfares were named in this way, it would undoubtedly add much to the enjoyment of a walk or ride through the park, and would be beneficial to our botanical students. This suggestion has our hearty endorsement.

Mr. F. LeRoy Sargent, formerly an instructor in botany at Harvard and at the University of Wisconsin, writes the following, which is taken from the *N. Y. Commercial Advertiser*. "What makes the rose of England, the thistle of Scotland, the mayflower of Nova Scotia, and the chrysanthemum of Japan so appropriate as emblems of those countries? It is because each is a native of the country it represents, but it is the wild rose and the wild chrysanthemum that are emblazoned on the

coat of arms. The columbine, the average American would recognize at once as a favorite flower of his childhood, no matter what part of the States he came from. Its very name, from Columbia, a dove, suggests a mission of peace among the nations. To botanists it is known as aquila, an eagle, because of the resemblance which its blossoms bear to talons of an eagle. The columbine for purposes of design is most suggestive. You look down on it and you see a five-rayed star like those on our flag and the blossoms are found red, white and blue. As Englishmen cherish the historical symbolism of their emblem in the wars of the roses; as Scotchmen prize the well armed thistle which they say betrayed to their ancestors invading armies who stepped on it incautiously; as Nova Scotia rejoices in its flower, which blooms amid snows, and as the Japanese revere the golden symbol of the rising sun, so would the columbine recall our origin, our name, our history, our character." The NATURALIST would like to hear from its readers in regard to the National flower. What is your choice, and why?

SUPPOSE THE FISH DON'T BITE AT FUST.

(SELECTED.)

Suppose the fish don't bite at fust,
 What be yew goin' tur dew?
 Chuck down yewr pole, throw out yewr bait,
 An' say yewr fishin's threw?
 Uv course yew hain't; yew're goin' tur fish,
 An fish an' fish an' wait
 Until yew've ketched yewr basket full,
 An' used up all yewr bait.

Suppose success don't come at fust,
 What be yew goin' tur dew?
 Throw up the sponge an' kick yerself,
 Au' go tur feelin' blew?
 Uv course yew hain't; yewr'e goin' tew fish
 An' bait an' bait again;
 Bimeby success will bite yewr hook,
 An' you will pull him in.

NOTES AND QUERIES.

How many varieties of clover are found in Plymouth, and which leaves out in March, growing quite flat on the ground?

(A reader.)

Rabbit's-foot, red, white and hop-clover are found, also the black medick. The latter was probably what you saw, and is easily identi-

fied by its small leaves and the manner of growing. Bush clovers of several species are found here.

Which is the largest Woodpecker, and what is its size? (W.)

The Flicker is the largest we have in Plymouth. This bird is a little larger than the Robin.

Is there a bird called the "Yarup"?

(Inquirer.)

This is a name sometimes given to the Flicker or Pigeon Woodpecker as it is commonly called. Probably the note of the bird suggests to some the name "Yarup."

In astronomy what is meant by double stars? Also what is meant by stars of the same magnitude? Does it refer to the brightness, size or distance? (C. L. B.)

Double Stars. Many stars which to the unassisted eye look simply as one are separated by the telescope into more than one. According to the number these are called double, triple, quadruple, or multiple stars. When the components

of a pair appear to be associated together in space it is catalogued as a double star. When they have no actual relation to each other but simply happen to be nearly in the line of sight from the earth they are called "optical doubles."

Magnitude. Hipparchus and Ptolemy divided the stars into six magnitudes according to their brightness, sixth magnitude stars being barely perceptible to the ordinary eye, while the first class comprises about 20 of the brightest. Sir John Herschel found that a standard first magnitude star like Aldebaran (*Alpha Taura*) was about 100 times as bright as a sixth magnitude star. The Pole star is very nearly of the standard second magnitude.

G. F. KENNEY.

THE JAY'S WEDDING CEREMONY.

(FOR THE NATURALIST.)

I heard, one morning, when everything was covered with big fluffs of snow, and the sun was shining, a chirping just like the "baby talk" the birds make when they are feeding

their young. I went to the window to see who it was. In the pear tree in front of our bay window is a last year's robin's nest. There were four jays in the tree, and one of them had a large piece of white bread, in his beak, and was apparently addressing his mate, for she sidled up to him, and seemed interested. He flew to the nest, arranged the bread in it to his satisfaction, and talked with her a little; she cocked her head at the bread, and then took it out, and began to peck at it. At that the other two jays flew to a branch near, and sat quietly side by side looking on. The lover perched on a branch at a distance, and waited; after a few crumbs, she broke off about half the bread, and leaving the rest in a crotch of her branch, flew over to him and presented it to him, coming back to her own piece, and finishing it. Receiving his piece of bread, he flew across the garden, perched for a moment, and then, without tasting it, flew back and presented it to his lady. She accepted it gracefully, devoured it, and then with his pretty bell note, the two flew off together. The "witnesses" who had hardly moved a feather

during the ceremony followed. It was very
pretty to look at. S. E. C.

THE WOOD-MOUSE.

(Selected)

Do you know the little wood-mouse,
That pretty little thing
That sits among the forest leaves,
Or by the forest spring?
Its fur is red like the chestnut
And it is small and slim,
It leads a life most innocent,
Within the forest dim.

It makes a bed of the soft, dry moss,
In a hole that is deep and strong,
And there it sleeps secure and warm
The dreary winter long;
And, though it keeps no calen dar
It knows when flowers are springing,
And it waketh to the summer life
When nightingales are singing.

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