

# THE MIGRANT

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL  
DEVOTED TO TENNESSEE BIRDS

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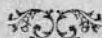
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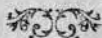
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# THE MIGRANT

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## A WINTER'S DAY

By ALBERT F. GANIER.

Yesterday had cleared with the ground whitening under flurries of snow, a leaden sky and a cutting north wind which gave poor promise of a hike afield on the morrow. Feathered denizens of the woods and fields had retired early and even the little Screech Owl, after foraging a bit, decided that more calories of heat might be retained in his small body if he would return to his hollow tree and forego an attempt to catch a luckless White-throat among the cedars.

But weather is fickle, even in winter, and Sunday dawned under a blue sky. Dazzlingly, the sun arises, from behind the hill and up through the trees as yesterday's snowflakes turn into fields of diamonds. Yesterday, scarcely a living bird could have been seen abroad, but now, what a change! Here, yonder and there, are flitting wings and cheerful voices to greet the warming sun and prospects of breakfast from under the thawing snow. My own breakfast over, I don a snug sweater, an old coat that laughs at briars, a slouch hat, wool sox, knit gloves and heavy high-top shoes which disdain such things as mud, mush and water, and motor my way out to Otter Creek, a favorite hiking ground. The gate is not convenient, but what of a barbed wire fence? It's done in a jiffy. As my feet touch the ground of this wooded pasture a sharp call ahead of me and there arises a flock of five Killdeer. They circle a bit and light again, a little further up the "wet weather brook," by which they have been feeding and "deer" at me as I pass them by. A patch of buck-bushes ahead stirs with feathered movement and as I come closer, one, two, three—eight buffy Field Sparrows arise and make for the next patch of brush. I pass along and presently am greeted with a hoarse "croak," looking near me in the thick crab-apple tree, I perceive that king of summer songsters—a Mockingbird. There is no need for song now, for mating days are far ahead—too far, indeed, to even be about practice, and then an insectivorous bird on a cold winter day must hustle so briskly for food there's little time for song. Those Starlings, too, of late years, have been greedily stripping the berries that formerly kept him fit. I pass on to the creek bank, always a center of avian activity. There goes a bolt of brilliant blue and a rattling call drifts back to tell me a Kingfisher is trying to "stick out" the winter to avoid tiring his short, stubby wings with further flight southward. Straight up the creek he goes, to the next pool, where he will patiently await the chance to drop like a plummet on some luckless little fish. A warbling call overhead arrests my attention and, casting eyes upward, I view four Bluebirds flying about erratically. They decide the thawing pasture soil will afford good feeding, so down they tumble, alighting on dry mullen stalks to make a further survey. Two brilliant males are near me, the azure back of the one and the russet red breast of the other contrast beautifully with the white snow and the emerald cedars beyond. And, happy coincidence, here comes the last of that trinity of winter birds

clad in blue—a Blue Jay—noisily winging his way over to the haystack, where the pigs are crunching a breakfast of corn on the cob. As long as the pigs get their daily ration he will get his as well, and be as happy-go-lucky an evil spirit as in the good old summer time.

My path leads me on up the creek and from the brush at the water's edge there flits ahead a little brown bird which disappears into the tangled roots of an old sycamore. He is too good for me at hide and seek, so I sit quietly, on a stump nearby, as though to say, "I give up." Presently he steps into view to look me over and then I recognize him as that cheerful sprite of the streams, a Song Sparrow. A handsome fellow is he, with neatly spotted breast and small black batwing tie. Others join him and as I pass on there are one or more in sight at every few paces. A dark brown member of the group, with shorter tail, I identify as a Swamp Sparrow. In a willow I perceive a small dusky bird in nervous motion, and as I come closed the steady flicking of its tail reveals the fact that it is a Phoebe. He, too, is a weak-billed insectivorous bird, which partakes but sparingly of wild fruits and berries, so I am forced to conclude that there are more insects abroad in winter than we might realize.

A tenant's cabin lies near my path, and over the rickety fence lean ragweed and sunflowers. There is movement about the sunflower heads and as I focus my binoculars for a better view I find a bevy of Goldfinches in olive garb, hanging head down and forked tail up, drawing forth the little black seed. I move closer and off they go with a "chittering" call and undulating flight. There is a thicket ahead; briars, weeds and buck-bushes red with fruit that look tempting, but which only the White-footed Mice deem a delicacy. A White-throated Sparrow arises and dives again a few paces ahead; in a moment a half dozen of his fellows follow. A larger bird cautiously climbs the far side of a vine-clad stump and announces himself—"joree." Where there's one there's more, and a moment later three other Towhees stealthily slink away and join the White-throats. A flash of red and a Cardinal mounts a brier before he joins two somber females in the canes by the creek. But surely there's a familiar friend missing from this motley throng, so I look about for a Chickadee and presently find him and two of his kind among the withered goldenrods. They were too busy to notice my intrusion for they were digging into the tops of the goldenrod stem galls, knowing that a fat grub lay dormant within. Over a mossy old stone wall I find myself in an open pasture, beyond which lie rough and heavily wooded hillsides. A small flock of Mourning Doves pass overhead, with whistling flight, to join the Jays, where the pigs were fed, and looking on beyond them I perceive a Turkey Vulture, gracefully soaring this way and that, systematically scanning the ground for some hapless creature which may have given up the battle of life. I've been this way before, and know that here a flock of Prairie Horned Larks may usually be found in winter, so I set about to look them up. The grass is closely cropped and I look for a dark grey "patch" upon it. In a few moments I find them—a flock of threescore, busily and silently walking along like a small army of infantry. I approach them cautiously and they allow me to come within fifty feet. Suddenly they arise en masse and after wide, sweeping circles, return and alight in the same spot, to permit my further study. A Red-tailed Hawk lifts himself on buoyant wings above the woodland, so I turn my steps that way, thinking perchance I may find his old nest now, so as to revisit it after the spring remodeling. As I enter the woods, a flock of Cedar Waxwings leave a mass of vines overhead, where they have been breakfasting off fox grapes. They fly compactly and erratically, but wheel and dive into a nearby hackberry tree, where another delicacy awaits them. A whining note a

bit further on arrests my attention, and I perceive a small Woodpecker playing hide and seek with me from behind a crab-apple tree. I stalk him from behind another, however, and soon make out the small topknot and tell-tale white stripe down his side which brand him as a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Approaching nearer, I find that he has ringed the bark with little holes from which he will daily drink the sap as it gathers.

I survey the winter scene about me and am impressed with its beauty. Splendid white oaks show their strong bare limbs as though defiant of the winter cold; broad beeches, with lowering branches and smooth silvered trunks contrast with hickories, tall and shaggy barked. The green foliage of the cross-vine and the reptilian drapes of a huge wild grape lend further variety. Underfoot, spurge and ferns raise their fresh foliage above the carpet of fallen leaves, and the rocky ledge nearby is green with mosses and saxifrage. There's interest at every turn, and I am inclined to feel downright sorry for those friends of mine who hover about their hearthstones and think of winter, out of doors, as but a drear and lifeless thing.

An old rotten log ahead has been riven into splinters and bits of the soft wood lie all about. I listen for a Pileated Woodpecker, for none but he could have done this job. Within these old logs and in rotten stumps he finds large grubs for his winter's fare. I sit upon the log to eat my lunch and presently am aware that a Winter Wren is fidgeting his small, bobtailed self about the further end. Overhead, a coterie of Myrtle Warblers are busily flitting about and feeding on the seed-tipped branches of poison ivy. Further on through the woodland I hear the familiar whistle of the Tufted Titmouse, calling to the mate who is his constant companion the whole year through.

The sky has again become overcast, the brisk wind of yesterday has reappeared, low clouds move by, presaging more snow before nightfall, and a chilly night. The Crows are already winging their way southward, by twos and threes, to their big roost in the cedar glades some fifteen miles away. Grackles, too, are flocking by, from the Harpeth valley corn fields to the Mount Olivet magnolias and pines, and a sprinkling of Starlings and Cowbirds may be seen among them. A flock of Robins move westward with uncertain flight, toward the buckthorn thicket roost in the Charlotte Hills. I wend my way toward the car, a mile away, and keep tab on how other birds are preparing for this winter's night. A Flicker dives into his last year's nest hole in the top of an ancient sycamore, and presently he is joined by another. As I pass through a clump of cedars, I tap on the trunks and there is a stirring of White-throated Sparrows overhead. Along the creek, the Juncos and Song Sparrows are tucking themselves among the roots where the bank overhangs. In a mass of bronze-green honeysuckle, on an old stump, a solitary Mockingbird and several Juncos have ensconced themselves. I tap a fence post in which I perceive a newly-excavated hole, and a Downy Woodpecker pokes his head out before flying to a nearby limb to scold at my intrusion. A belated Cardinal hurries across the path to join his clan in a briar patch.

The dusk has gathered rapidly and now no more birds are abroad. Before entering my car I check over my card list for the day and find I have recorded 34 species. "Not so bad," say I, "but 35 would have been better. Well, there's number 35 now;" a Great Horned Owl begins to call from the woodland, his deep "whoo-whoo" note carries far and I know that many a small wild creature draws further within its shelter as this ominous call of the night goes forth.

Nashville, Tenn., December, 1931.

## THE GREAT HORNED OWL

By GEORGE B. WOODRING.

The Great Horned Owl, with its imposing size, commands attention and respect from even the most casual bird admirer. Being a member of the striking family of Raptores, it forages over valley and woodland in search of its living prey. To some it is often confused with its grey neighbor, the Barred Owl, but the dark brown color and the two tufts of feathers resembling horns will readily identify the subject of this sketch. This great nocturnal bird has been crowded into the heavily-wooded sections, where it spends most of its time.

The nesting of this species is most interesting. It usually selects some large hollow tree, a sycamore preferred, for its home site. However, nests have been found in deserted hawk-nests and along rocky ledges of high cliffs. If unmolested, the same pair will nest in the same vicinity year after year. The eggs are laid about the twenty-fifth of January, often while the snow is on the ground. To counteract the early start that this species gets on the other members of the feathered tribe, it takes about four weeks for the eggs to hatch. Therefore, the weather begins to break and spring is here when the young are approximately a month old. Two large, nearly round, white eggs usually constitute a clutch, but often there is only one—rarely three. Unlike most other birds, the Great Horned Owl uses its nest as a home as well as a brooding chamber in which to raise its young.

This marauder of the night is the largest of the Owls nesting in the United States, being twenty-two inches long, and has a wing spread of about fifty inches. A characteristic of the Owl family is that their flight is noiseless, differing greatly from the flight of the Dove, for instance. In the latter the wind whistles through the even edges of the outer feathers with every beat of the wing. The Great Horned Owl, with its large wind-spread, is able to fly without the slightest exertion; its wing feathers, instead of the clear edge, have a covering of down which allows the wind to pass through without a sound. This sound absorber enables the Owl to move freely when everything is quiet and silently procure its food.

The extent to which this species is harmful is somewhat in question. It seems, however, that its favorite food is rabbit, while young Quail, young Crows and other birds are also among its victims. To help offset this, it catches large numbers of harmful rodents which infest the territory over which the Owl ranges. The food is eaten, fur, feathers, hide, and all; the indigestible portions disgorged in wads known as "pellets."

The Great Horned Owl is noted for the powerful grip of its claws, and with this strength it easily sinks its talons into the vitals of its victims. It is extremely difficult to tame one of this species, for although it may appear meek and quiet in the daytime, at night it becomes a veritable "tiger of the air."

Nashville, Tenn., November, 1931.

The annual Fall Field Day was held on Oct. 18th, at Big Bluff Creek Spring, a mile southwest of Ashland City. Here a large portion of Cheatham County, about 35,000 acres of woodland, has been set aside as a wild life preserve. On arrival, the group dispersed into several parties to list the birds of the vicinity and the day's total was forty-one species. No very unusual birds were found. A hot lunch was ready under the beeches at 1:30, thanks to our efficient lunch committee, and about seventy were served. After lunch, talks were heard from Messrs. Merritt, Mayfield, Ganier, Wilson and Edw. Ray, Secretary of the Kentucky Ornithological Society.

## ATTRACTING BIRDS TO THE HOME

By AMELIA R. LASKEY.

As we like to have many bird neighbors, we have for several years sought to attract them in all seasons to our suburban home. We desired our garden to be a bird-haven, so planned to provide the things that would be inviting to them and would meet the needs of bird life, such as roosting and nesting places, water, food and protection from their chief enemy, the cat. Our aim is to provide natural food by planting, but when it becomes scarce or unavailable on account of the weather, we supply what might be termed artificial food, in numerous places convenient to them. Birds soon respond to the enticements of a friendly garden and shrubby border, rich in wild berries and seeds. They will roost and build nests close to the house if there is dense foliage such as evergreens, honeysuckle and other vines in the plantings. A trellis or arbor covered with our evergreen honeysuckle is an excellent roosting place for Mockers and other winter birds. We have many trees which furnish seeds and fruits relished by the birds. Among them are hackberry, mulberry, hawthorn, mountain ash and cedar. There are many fruitbearing shrubs and vines, both wild and cultivated, which are beautiful in the home planting, including Tartarian honeysuckle, barberry, elderberry, high bush cranberry, untrimmed privet, chokeberry, euonymus (both wahoo and strawberry bush), coral honeysuckle vine and trumpet vine (for the hummingbirds). In inconspicuous places, grow pokeberry and coralberry (the common buckbush). Perhaps the old colored yard man had us in mind when he said: "In the country they digs out buckbushes, but city folks plants 'em and calls 'em scrubbery." A pretty picture is still vivid in my memory—my first sight of a Cardinal. Looking out early one Christmas morning, all outdoors was wearing a mantle of dazzling whiteness and a few feet from the window was a brilliant Cardinal and his mate feeding on the cerise-colored fruit of the buckbush. We also grow some cultivated fruit for the birds—currants, soft cherries and strawberries. Some seed-bearing plants are tucked in odd corners, such as coreopsis and cosmos for the Goldfinches, millet for the Sparrows, and sunflowers, which many birds are fond of eating as the seeds ripen on the stalks.

During the winter and early spring the supply of natural food becomes scarce or is inaccessible on account of snow and ice. Hunger brings our feathered friends to our dwellings for temporary relief at least, therefore we begin in autumn with our artificial feeding program, placing various kinds of food out of doors regularly until Nature again provides bountifully with insects and worms in the springtime. Beef suet becomes a cold weather substitute for insects and several pounds are eaten in a season. We tie it to trees, place it in wire baskets and fill coconut shells with it. It attracts many birds, including all the Woodpeckers, Brown Thrasher, Mockingbird, Wrens, Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse. Broken bread and crumbs, especially cornbread, are well liked. Cracked nuts of all kinds and what remains after shelling nuts are very popular, for the birds pick out the tiniest morsel both in and among the shells. For the Cardinals, especially, we provide sunflower seed, though it is eaten by many others. Cracked grain, millet, and chicken feed mixture are good winter foods. We feed from window shelves and close to the doors, but at first found it best to place the food at some distance from the house near the trees and shrubs frequented by the birds, until they lost their fear. Feeding shelves having a sloping roof to protect food from rain and snow and a rim about the width of a lath to prevent it from being blown away, are the best. There are many types

of feeding devices illustrated and described in Farmers' Bulletin No. 912, obtained by request from the U. S. Department of Agriculture. We use the single and double shelves, hanging them in trees. We also use the weather-vane type on a post which keeps the open side turned away from the wind. Some seed and crumbs are always scattered on the ground under the feeding shelves for Juncos and the various Sparrows, which seldom feed at high elevations, but glean the tiny crumbs dropped as the larger species feed. Food is always on the window ledge shelves, for it is easiest to keep such shelves filled on cold days, and it is a pleasure to have the company of the birds and the opportunity for closer observation as well as entertainment. Very amusing is the Mockingbird, which likes his berries served in the Christmas wreaths of holly and cedar hung outside the windows, where he perched, alternating his feeding with fighting what he evidently took to be a presumptuous rival in the window reflection of himself. It was very interesting to watch the Chickadee as he diligently peeled his sunflower seeds, hiding each alternate seed in crevices of a nearby hackberry tree, and the Tufted Titmouse which closely followed him, apparently intent on a meal minus the labor of preparing it. The Titmouse, too, is very prone to carry away and hide bits of bread and suet, long after he has had his fill. Most pleasing are the cheerful calls of the early morning and the gentle pecks at the window as Cardinal, Towhee, Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and other feathered friends seem to ask for breakfast or help themselves at the cafeteria.

Nashville, Tenn., November, 1931.

## PRAIRIE HORNED LARK IN HOUSTON COUNTY

By G. P. DILLON.

A most unusual nest was found this spring, in the early part of May, in the northeast corner of Houston County, Tennessee, on the farm of J. F. Broadus. Near the center of a large field on the first bench of slightly higher ground, above the Wells Creek bottoms, this nest was found in land that had been prepared for setting tobacco plants. In loose, mellow soil, a small hole had been scratched out, and into this had been placed small straws, all of the same kind and size, and so evenly set in the side of the walls surrounding that it almost had the appearance of basket weave. No blades had been left on these straws, as they had grown, and this added to the appearance of a small basket which had the golden yellow of clean wheat straw.

No mother bird protested my examination of this nest, and the only marker which would help even a bird to find it in the broad expanse of field was an old tobacco stalk which stretched two gaunt, bleached roots over the nest in an effort to shield it. Greatly interested, I drove a stake so that I could again find this nest that was entirely at the mercy of all and still so hidden in the broad stretch of entirely open field as to be safe from enemies.

On my next visit there were four eggs in the nest. These were about the size of English Sparrow eggs and looked like some especially dark eggs that I have taken from nests of these birds. The eggs were white with a tendency toward sea-green, and the dark "speckles" were distributed evenly all over the surface, which fact made them blend with the surrounding soil. Bird eggs, to me, are speckled, splotched, splashed or marked. Speckles are uniform in size and color. Splotches are irregular in size and color, while splashed and marked are self explanatory. These eggs were speckled and their small end was decidedly blunt.

The mother bird did not get excited at my examination of the eggs, but



set off at considerable distance, giving an occasional call, consisting of two musical notes that would be very hard to describe. When the male came, he, too, sat off at a distance and appeared to be the same color and marking as the female. They would not allow one to approach them, but ran or slowly flew away, leading one from the nest.

"What kind are they?" asked my seven-year-old son. "I don't know," was my reply, but they are the size of English Sparrows and they are colored like the little Chipping Sparrow while they are wearing a "bib" that is dark and rounded at both top and bottom. Instead of the red head of the Chipping Sparrow they have an almost black cap that is quarter-moon shaped with the points well up on his head. After some further study and by process of elimination, it was decided that these birds were Prairie Horned Larks.

On our next visit to these birds there were four young with especially conspicuous fuzz on them which, in color, exactly matched the straw in the side of the nest. The seven-year-old boy carefully counted each patch of fuzz that grew on backs, heads and wings, then seriously stated that twelve birds had hatched from four eggs. The following week was our first extremely hot weather and one of the babies died, apparently from overheating. This was left about five feet from the nest, and the following day, on my visit, it was gone. The three remaining birds soon left the nest and I was unable to again find the young or their parents in the field.

Some weeks later, however, I found a similar nest about 200 feet away from the one above described. The young had just hatched and I drove a stake to protect them from the plows that made regular trips through the tobacco rows. Profiting by experience, the last nest was built under the protecting shade of a six-inch Bull-nettle. I was unable to find the parent birds about this nest, and it would seem that they had become accustomed to my presence and trustful of my intentions.

On April 20, Prof. H. C. Major and myself observed one of these Larks at a point 5 or 6 miles northwest of the Houston County site. This bird allowed us to approach to within 10 feet and doubtless had a nest, but being unaware of its early breeding habits, we did not search for it.

Erin, Houston County, Tennessee, August, 1931.

## NESTING OF PRAIRIE HORNED LARK NEAR NASHVILLE

By A. F. GANIER.

Mr. Dillon's notes above, together with nesting data given below, extend the breeding range of the Prairie Horned Lark (*Otocoris alpestris praticola*) to a new southerly latitude. On April 5, 1925, the writer found the first nest of this species known to have occurred in Tennessee. It was located on Paradise Ridge, on the edge of the "Highland Rim," 10 miles northwest of Nashville. The nest contained two young about seven days old, and, calculating backward, incubation on the eggs must have commenced about March 13. The site was again visited on March 24, 1929, when a nest containing four fresh eggs was found about 150 yards from the 1925 nest. On March 16, 1930, H. C. Monk visited the locality and found a nest within a few feet of the 1929 nest. It contained three eggs, incubated apparently about one week. In 1929, 1930 and again in 1931, two pairs of birds were found on each visit, in the immediate vicinity. In 1931 no nest could be located on the occasion of a visit by Messrs. Monk and Crook. Although a close lookout for these birds has been kept by members of the T. O. S., no other breeding pairs have as yet been located within the state. This species occurs here in flocks, as a regular winter resident.

Nashville, Tenn., August, 1931.

## THE ROUND TABLE

A Snake in a Mockingbird Nest.—Some years ago, a Mockingbird built a nest in a rose bush, on the fence, fifty feet from my house, and looking into it one day I saw that three eggs had been laid. The next morning early I heard the distress cries of both birds and saw them flying about the nest, quite close to it, but never alighting even on the rose bush. I went at once to the rescue and parted the branches of the bush so that I could see into the nest. As I did so a small snake raised his head above the nest and shook his tongue at me menacingly. He had coiled within it, so as to completely cover the eggs. I retired quietly and returning with a large pair of scissors, again parted the branches and as the snake stuck his head up I quickly cut it off. I washed the three eggs in the dew-wet grass, wiped them dry and replaced them in the nest. At noon that day I looked again and found that a fourth egg had been laid. All of the eggs hatched, and in due time the young left the nest.—Mrs. Sanford Duncan, Gallatin Road, Nashville.

A Biological Station is to be established at Reelfoot Lake on a ten-acre tract at Walnut Log. A lodge is now on the property and the State has appropriated \$2,500 for further improvements.

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\*Note.—Pages of the June Migrant should be renumbered, from 9 to 16.—Ed.

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