

Setophaga ruticilla (L.) Sw. May 3 I noticed a single female; the 5th, a pair; the 8th, three males in different flocks, and the 9th I found them very numerous. After this date and until the 15th, they rather outnumbered the other species, when the number rapidly diminished. I found it breeding here very abundantly, the first egg being taken the 3rd of June.

THE COMMON NAMES OF AMERICAN BIRDS.

BY ERNEST INGERSOLL.

The Thrush family—here regarded in its broadest sense, for the sake of convenience—does not present a wide range of vernacular synonyms except in respect to two or three species, nor are these difficult of explanation.

The word *Thrush* is very old, appearing in substantially the same shape—the *u* sound having superseded an older *y* or *ö*—in the Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon languages. I believe that the origin of the word was a reference to the throat, or in other words to the singing powers of this family, whose voice is probably their most notable trait; and this view is strengthened when it is remembered that the old German word *drozzd* coming from the same root as our English *throat* gives *drossel* in modern German as the word for “throat,” “throttle,” and also for “thrush.” Under *Thrasher* I shall adduce a further argument. From the earliest times, then, the Thrushes have been considered preëminently the song-birds of the world.

Taking up the list in regular order, the first to present itself is *Turdus mustelinus*. Its common names are: *Wood Thrush*, *Wood Robin*, *Swamp Robin*, *Swamp Angel* (Adirondacks), *Bogtrot* (South Carolina), *Alondra del Monte* (Mexico). All of these evidently refer to its habitual forest-resort and its Thrush- or Robin-like (for frequently these words are confused) character. The terms *Song Thrush* and *Grive des Bois Flûte* (Canada) point to the striking music of this bird, the French literally meaning “the flute-voiced Thrush of the woods.” Referring to

the color of the plumage are the book-names *Tawny Thrush* (Pennant, Latham) and *Merle tanné* (D'Orbigny). As for *Grasset* (Texas), I cannot explain it.

For *Turdus fuscescens*, size and color are indicated in *Tawny Thrush*, *Little Thrush* (Latham), and *Merle grivette* (Canada—literally “Little-Thrush-Blackbird”); *Wilson's Thrush* discloses its first adequate biographer; *Veery* (New England) and *Torruck* (Thoreau's Writings) refer to its pleasing note, which they copy.

The first name of *Turdus aliciae*, *Alice's Thrush*, is complimentary to Miss Alice Kennicott; the second, Gray-cheeked, is, of course, a color-mark.

Turdus ustulatus gives us *Oregon Thrush* (locality), *Willow Thrush* (California—habitual haunt), and *Russet-backed Thrush* (color). The variety *swainsoni* is usually called simply *Swainson's Thrush*, but it is also the *Olive-backed*, *Little* or *Brown Thrush*, or *Swamp Robin*.

Skipping the western types, our eastern *Turdus* “*pallasi*” comes next. Nearly all the names of this shy and solitary bird refer to its habit of haunting for the most part the undergrowth of secluded and damp woods. Its small size and distinguishingly reddish tail supply the rest. Following is the list: *Hermit* or *Solitary Thrush*; *Grive* or *Merle solitaire* (Canada); *Ground Swamp Robin* (Maine); *Little Swamp Robin* and *Rufous-tailed Thrush*.

This brings me to *Merula migratoria*, the *Robin*. The word robin is an ancient pet-name for Robert, which is of German descent. That it should have been given to the household favorite of Great Britain is not surprising; in fact some similar personal pet name has been given to that Warbler (*Erythacus rubecula*) all over Europe, and such analogues as “Jenny Wren” and “Jim” (for the Sparrow) are common. The earliest emigrants to America, finding a red-breasted bird inclined to be familiar with them, and eager to be reminded of the home for which they longed regretfully, gladly called it “Robin,” not aware, or regardless, of the fact that the old one was a Warbler and the new friend a Thrush. This fact was speedily recognized, but the old name clung, and hence we hear *Robin Redbreast*, *American Robin*, and *Robin Thrush* as surviving appellations throughout the northern half of the continent. In the Southern

States, however, the bird's resemblance to the *Turdus pilaris* of Europe came strongly to the mind of the early writers. Hence one finds in old books like those of Brickell, Lawson, Catesby and so on, that it is most often spoken of as the *Field-fair*, *Field-fear*, or *Fieldfare*; of these the last is the proper spelling, and means one who travels or *fares* in the fields; the name is yet heard occasionally.

More distinct recognition of the bird as a *Thrush*, together with its two striking characteristics — red breast and migratory conduct — gives us: *Red-breasted Thrush*, *Merle** on *Rouge gorge du Canada*, *Migratory Thrush*, *Merle erratique*, *Robin Thrush*, *Grive de Canada*, *Omsel* (Pennsylvania German — a corruption of *Amsel*, "Thrush").

I have been able to collect many Indian names (untranslated) for this bird, the Ojibway and Navajo words seeming onomatopœic: *Opeéchee* or *Péchee* (Ojibway), *Kailee che* (Navajo — note resemblance to preceding!), *Ispokwah* (Creek), *Fiskoko* (Iroquois), *Chauncobshah* (Assiniboine). The Ojibways had very pretty legends connected with the Robin, making it a bearer of tidings from supernal sources, and so forth.

Nothing more calls for special mention until we come to *Mimus polyglottus*. Like its Latin name in both parts, its English and French appellations chiefly refer to its remarkable powers of mimicry, and date far back, for this was one of the most striking of our birds to the new comers. Thus, in the "Collections of the American Antiquarian Society," IV, 24: "*Artamockes*, a bird that imitateth and useth the sounds and tones of almost all birds in the Countrie." We have *Mimic Thrush*, *Mockbird*, *Mockingbird*, *Moquer* or *La Merle moquer*, and *English Mockingbird* (to distinguish it from the "French" Mockingbirds of the Southern States — chiefly *Harporhynchus rufus*). Its sweetness of voice apart from mimicry, and its habit of singing frequently after sunset or in the moonlight, caused it to be called in the English West Indies, *Nightingale*, and in the other islands *Rosignol*. This last word is only a modification of *Rosignor*, or Lord of the Rose — the Spanish name of the Nightingale; it is probably of Moorish descent, and has been applied to other American birds as well as this. The Mexican (west coast) name —, *Sinsonte*, is also in allusion to the bird's voice.

* *Merle*, "Blackbird," is the French form of the Latin generic word *Merula*.

The spotted plumage is expressed in the German name *Spottvogel* or *Shpotvogel* as it is spelled in Pennsylvania. Indian names at my disposal are two: *Yuswahaya* (Florida Seminoles); and *Tshitshikniin* (Delawares).

Galeoscoptes carolinensis, *Cat-bird*, was a name early and spontaneously decided upon for this Thrush, whose *mewing* note at once suggests it. *Cat Flycatcher* (Pennant), *Merle Catbird*, *Chat* (Canada), *Katsafogel* (Penna. Germ.) and *Zorzal gato* (Cuban), all ring changes upon this point; probably Bartram's name *Chicken-bird* belongs to the same category. Color is designated in *Blackbird* (Bermudas—where also it is properly called *Mockingbird*), and in D'Orbigny's French name *Merle à derriere roux*,—the Red vented Blackbird.

The *Harporhynchus rufus* is a bird of many names suggested by more than one striking point in its character. Its strong color and mimicking voice gives us *Fox-coloured Thrush* (Bartram and others); *Ferruginous Thrush* (Wilson) or *Ferruginous Mockingbird* (Audubon); *Rufous-tailed Thrush*, *Grive rouge* (Canada), *Sandy Mockingbird* (Dist. of Col.), *Brown* or *Red Thrush*, *Red Mavis* (recalling an English songbird), and *Brown Thrasher*.

The last of these (*Thrasher*) is perhaps the most often heard of all its names in the Northern and Middle States. The word is undoubtedly another derivative from the root of *thrush* just as the Swedish *trast* is; or you may say that it came from the root of the verb *to thresh* (in Anglo-Saxon *therscan*), the original meaning of which was to make a rattling noise,—one of the most prominent of the utterances of this garrulous bird.

Its imitative powers have given it several names, such as two or three quoted above; *American Mockingbird* (Wisconsin); *French Mockingbird* (Southern States—distinguishing from *M. polyglottus*); *Carolina Mockingbird*, and so on. In the name *Corn-planter* (New Jersey and Massachusetts) we have a recognition of the time of its appearance in the spring, when the maize-seed is being put into the ground. "While you are planting your seed," says Thoreau, "he cries—'Drop it, drop it—cover it up, cover it up—pull it up, pull it up, pull it up.'"

CINCLUS MEXICANUS. The notable habits and waterside haunts of *Cinclus mexicanus*, together with its affinity to the Thrushes, have given it the name "*Water Ouzel*," for *ouzel* (or

ousel) is an old English word for Thrush, allied to the German *amsel*. Many European names exist, and we have imported one, *Dipper*; this simply means "diver," coming directly from the same root. Its small size and lively manner gives it the names *Water Wren* in Colorado, and (adding its brilliant song) *Water Oriole* on the Northwest Coast. Among the miners of Nevada it figures as *Water Turkey*, a term having as much sense as that of "Winter Geese" given by the Nahant people to the Snow Bunting.

The next names worthy of notice are those of the *Paridæ*. *Tit* originally signified something small; by itself it stood as a name of a small bird. But our word is confounded with the Angle-Saxon *múse*, the name of several sorts of little birds in that language. It has no connection with "mouse," which comes from a different root; therefore its plural should not be titmice, which involves this error, but titmouses. The root of *múse* signifies "to diminish," and hence the latter part of the name, as well as the former, refers to the small size of the birds—about the smallest, indeed, with which northern nations are popularly acquainted. *Tomtit* is an affectionate nickname suggested by alliteration, like Tom Thumb.

The local American names of our Titmouses call for short mention. *Lophophanes bicolor* is the *Tufted* or *Crested Tit* or *Titmouse*, for obvious reasons. Thomas Nuttall designated it *Peto*—I suppose after its note; and Mr. E. A. Small writes me that in Western Maryland it is called *Peter-bird*; also *Storm-bird* and *Spring-bird*, explaining that "its notes are generally heard in damp weather in the spring and late winter." No explanation is required for the word *Chickadee* belonging to several species of *Parus*, for anyone who has ever heard its

"—Saucy note
Out of sound heart and merry throat."

An allied species of the West, *Auriparus flaviceps*, is known as the *Yellow-headed Titmouse* (or in Mexican *Paro amarillo*) and *Verdin*, meaning "greenlet." In Texas its yellow-daubed head has won it the name *Fat-eater*; while the Mexicans there seek to imitate its voice in *Pitachoche*.

This brings me to the *Sittidæ* or *Nuthatches*—birds that "hack" or "cut" nuts, perpetuating an error so far as this family

is concerned.* In *Tomtit* (Ohio Valley) and *Sapsucker* (Maryland) for these birds, other errors are indicated. Buffon's *Torchepot* ("pot-cleaner") perhaps alludes to the smutty black of the face. *Chipinnee* is a good name I have heard in Southern Massachusetts, describing its well-known note very accurately.

Skipping such terms as *Brown Creeper*, *Oven-bird*, and others readily understood, I come to the varied tribe of Wrens, about which in the Old World so much of personal affection and legendary, not to say superstitious, interest gathers. *Wren* derives from an ancient root *wrin*, whence, we are told, came Anglo-Saxon words meaning to neigh (as a horse), squeal (as a pig) or chirp (as a sparrow). But the neighing horse and squealing pig of which these words were always used were uncastrated animals; and the literal meaning of *wrenne* in the Anglo-Saxon was the "little lascivious bird." Few words have suffered or admitted of less change than this during all the centuries of vicissitude through which it has passed. None of the names of our representatives of this family require special notice; it may be mentioned, however, that *Telmatodytes palustris* is *Tomtit* in South Carolina and *Reed Warbler* in Rhode Island.

The Frenchmen in Louisiana in the early days gave to their familiar Wren (probably the *Thryothorus ludovicianus*) the name *Roitelet* or "Little King." This was a direct importation from Europe, and perpetuated a bit of folk-lore, which tells us that the Wren is the superior of the Eagle, and hence King of the birds, but a diminutive King, — hence Kinglet or *Roitelet*. This supremacy was attained by the trial of the birds, in congress assembled, as to which had the greatest powers of flight. The Eagle soaring above all the rest, thought himself *facile princeps*, when an impudent little beggar of a Wren that had slyly perched

* Though it is true enough that it is an "error" so far as the general woodland habits of the *Sittida* in the United States are concerned, yet I know of opposing instances. For example: My neighbor in New Haven this winter has been accustomed to feed a colony of gray squirrels by placing nuts of various sorts on his window-ledge, whither they go after them. The Nuthatches discovered, and two or three came regularly all winter, feeding upon the broken nuts and often flying away with large fragments in their beaks. They would frequently place a nut in a corner of the window-frame, where it would rest firmly, and then hammer at it with their pickax-beaks most sedulously, breaking the shells of the lighter sorts, and crushing the inner septa of the heavy kinds like hickory nuts. They did not seek worms, but fed greedily upon the substance of the nut-kernel.

upon the Eagle's broad back, rose gayly over his head, repeating the maneuver as often as the baffled "King" attempted to get above him. Ever afterward the Eagle was properly respectful in the presence of the mite of a Wren that had outwitted his majesty. Many forms of this myth appear, and sometimes the statements are given as facts. Thus it is hard to tell whether or not DuPratz believes the story he tells in his "History" to account for the Kingship of Le Roitelet in Louisiana. In America we do not regard the Wren with special kindness; but in Great Britain, it is scarcely ever spoken of without some gentle, loving epithet; and the word "poor," "little," "tiny," or "dear" is constantly joined to the prefix Jenny, Kitty, Titty (*cf. antè Tit*), Jintie, or Chitty when naming it.

In *Titlark* (*Anthus ludovicianus*) we again have the prefix "small." *Lark* is a condensation of two ancient words in Anglo Saxon (*læw*, "craft," and *werca*, "a worker") which meant a worker of guile; and the etymologists tell us "the name points to some superstition which regarded the bird as of ill omen." In the Scotch form *Lavrock* or *Laverock* a near resemblance to the old Icelandic *læviriki* (meaning the same as above) is to be seen. As for *Pipit* or *Pipit Lark*, common terms, the word is derived from the same root as the verb *to peep* (like a young bird's cry) and hence a word describing its somewhat feeble chirp. In my long list of local American names for this species occur the following: *Titlark*, *Prairie Titlark*, *Lark*, *Skylark* (Dist. of Col.), *Louisiana Lark* (and many other old book-names); *Brown Lark*, *Red Lark*; *Wagtail*, *American Pipit*, *Alouette Pipé*, etc., etc.

DESCRIPTION OF A HYBRID SPARROW (*ZONOTRICHIA ALBICOLLIS* + *JUNCO HIEMALIS*).

BY CHARLES H. TOWNSEND.

On December 12, 1882, Mr. William L. Baily shot the bird here described near Haverford College, Montgomery County, Pa. Mr. Baily suspected it to be a cross between the White-throated Sparrow (*Z. albicollis*) and the Snowbird (*J. hiema-*