

SOME ORNITHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES  
IN EUROPE

By MARGARET MORSE NICE

THE occasion of our family's journey to Europe in 1932 was the International Physiological Congress, which met at Rome the last of August; moreover, we wished to give our daughters a comprehensive trip from the sight-seeing and educational point of view; hence birds were not by any means the first consideration. Any one hoping to do much with birds should go over earlier in the season than we did—we landed June 25th—and not spend much time in cities. I was handicapped at first by having no book but one for English birds<sup>1</sup> and that of uneven value; in some cases the pictures were good, in others misleading, besides which several species occurring in France were not mentioned at all. In Paris and Berlin I had the assistance of ornithologists, but the rest of the time I puzzled out the birds as best I could by myself, greatly helped later by an excellent set of German books.<sup>2</sup>

One delightful feature of Europe is the close association of many of the birds with human dwellings and cathedrals; there are Swifts (*Apus apus*), Swallows (*Hirundo rustica rustica*), Martins (*Delichon urbica urbica*), and Jackdaws (*Colæus monedula spermologus*), not to mention the ever-present House Sparrows (*Passer d. domesticus*) and common Pigeons. The Swifts are larger than ours, and their note is entirely different, a kind of sucked-in whistle, *ssee, ssee*, heard especially in the evenings when small companies dash madly hither and yon above the roofs. The Swallow, nearly related to our Barn Swallow, and the Martin were found everywhere. The latter built retort-shaped nests under the eaves of houses and were still nesting under the archways September 13th in Kings' College at Cambridge. Jackdaws frequent the towers of almost all the old churches and are most amusing with their screams, chuckles, and queer shouts.

July 1st, spent in the country in Brittany near St. Malo, was richly rewarding. Yellowhammers (*Emberiza citrinella*) sang by the roadside, while Magpies (*Pica pica*) were common in the fields and a gorgeous great Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

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<sup>1</sup>Sanders, E. A Bird Book for the Pocket. Oxford Univ. Press. 1927. 245 pp.

<sup>2</sup>Fehring, O. Vögel Mitteleuropas. 3 vols. Heidelberg. Winters. 1931.

sat on the trunk of an apple tree. In the hedges we met White-throats (*Sylvia communis*), whose jumbled refrains reminded me of our own Bell's Vireo (*Vireo belli belli*). In the woods we heard our first Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), whose song quite intrigued us at the first hearing, but before long began to be extremely monotonous. Here we met whole processions of Tits; Marsh Tits (*Parus palustris*),<sup>1</sup> very much like our Chickadee (*Penthestes atricapillus*); the engaging Crested Tits; (*Parus cristatus*), the gay little Blue Tit (*Parus cæruleus*), and the charming little Long-tailed Tit (*Ægithalos caudatus*). Later we often met the Great Titmouse (*Parus major*). There are far more kinds of Titmice in Europe than in America. In the fields the Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) were singing a prolonged, rapid, jumbled ecstatic song. I can see how Europeans could become much attached to it, but to me, after Shelley's poem, it was a sore disappointment. It was too late to hear the Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhyncha*) at its best; I described its song in my note-book as "bubbling, warbling, joyous."

In Paris the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle is planned according to artistic principles, the room of European birds being arranged with all the large birds at the bottom and small ones near the ceiling, where it is impossible for the laity to see them, the entrance to the gallery being reserved "seulement pour les professeurs." There seems to be little popular interest in birds in France; although I asked at countless stores for bird books, I could discover nothing in the way of a pocket guide, the only books offered me being M. Delamain's charming volumes of essays "Pourquoi les Oiseaux Chantent" (crowned by the French Academy) and "Les Nuits et les Jours des Oiseaux." The author is doing fine educational work with his series "Livres de Nature," which are mostly translations of American, English, and German books.

One Sunday, Dr. Hans Scharnke (a pupil of Dr. Stresemann), who is doing research in L'Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, conducted us on a trip to St. Germain-en-Laye. After all my lone efforts to learn the birds, it was both revealing and satisfying to have an ornithologist to tell us the author of every song, to corroborate or correct my own identifications, and to name each new bird. Dr. Scharnke showed us our first Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) much like *Passer domesticus* except

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<sup>1</sup>The generic names in general use in Europe sometimes differ from those adopted by the A. O. U. for the same genera, so that a difference in generic names between allied species in the United States and abroad does not necessarily imply an actual generic distribution.  
—EDITORS.

for its brown head, and explained about the two Redstarts, the Common (*Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus*) and the Black (*P. ochruros gibraltariensis*) only the first of which had been in my book. We heard the delightful song of the Redbreast (*Erithacus rubecula*), and the beautiful refrain of the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*). The fat Wren (*Troglodytes t. troglodytes*) has a long and pretty song. But the chief singer was the Chaffinch (*Fringilla caelebs*); we found this handsome bird everywhere throughout our trip, as friendly as could be in parks, and on the mountain-sides in the Tyrol.

On July 18th, leaving my family to take the Rhine trip and explore southwestern Germany, I started for Berlin, spending a night at Cologne. In the Zoo there they have a most ingenious scheme of Habitat Groups of Living Birds, native except in a few cages of Birds of the High Alps, etc. There were Birds of the Woods, of the Fields, of the Garden, of the Edge of the Woods, of the Swamps, of Coniferous Forests, etc., each cage with appropriate environment and colored pictures of each bird with German and scientific name and a brief statement as to range. These exhibits were very helpful to me and must be of high educational value to other visitors.

In Berlin I met a most kind and cordial welcome from the ornithologists, and all of Dr. Stresemann's wonderful array of books and journals was placed freely at my disposal. Dr. Ernst Mayr of the American Museum of Natural History, to whom I am largely indebted for my introduction to European ornithology and ornithologists, took me to visit Herr Gottfried Schiermann, who has done notable life-history studies on the birds near Berlin.

One of Dr. Stresemann's students, Georg Steinbacher, son of the ornithologist Friedrich Steinbacher, took me on two trips. The most interesting birds in all Germany live within a short distance of the third largest city in the world, but it was too late in the season to see most of them. Berlin owns immense stretches of woodland, all planted forests, each portion having trees of one age, the chief tree being the Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), very beautiful with its reddish bark and irregular branching. On July 21st we went to Friedrichshagen, where ten pairs of Swallows were nesting in the railway station; in the woods I saw for the first time the attractive little Red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), and Herr Steinbacher frightened a Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) from a Black Woodpecker's (*Dryocopus martius*) hole, later hearing the cry of this splendid bird in the distance. Woodpeckers are much less

common in the parts of Europe I visited than in our country—an observation that has been made by other Americans. The most thrilling sight was that of a pair of Hobbies (*Falco sub-buteo*), handsomely marked little falcons and among the fastest-known flying birds; to the accompaniment of much screaming the female met her mate and snatched from his claws the prey he carried.

Four days later we went to Finkenkrug, a half-hour's ride on electric railroad, where we found ourselves again in extensive woods, but this time there were deciduous trees and undergrowth and ripe red raspberries besides the pines. Here I saw my first Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*), Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), and others. After sunset a number of the small roe deer appeared and gave their curious loud barking cries. But the great excitement of the day, and, indeed, of the whole European trip, was the sight of five Great Bustards (*Otis tarda tarda*). The immense birds, with their long white necks and brown speckled backs, walked slowly over the mown meadow, dwarfing a Common Buzzard (*Buteo b. buteo*) that perched near. As we approached, they flew, giving a most striking display of the white in their brown wings.

Raptors are astonishingly common, according to our ideas, in the vicinity of Berlin, and there are even a few pairs of the Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and the Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*). Herr Schiermann found in a tract of deep woods of about nine square miles the nests of eight pairs of owls, twenty-four nests of hawks of six species, ten pairs of Storks of two species, and five pairs of Cranes—a total of forty-seven pairs of large birds of ten species. All birds of prey are strictly protected except the Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and the Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*).

Dr. Oskar Heinroth showed me the Berlin Zoo one morning and the Aquarium another. It was a great disappointment to me that Frau Heinroth was in Rumania and also that this season for the first time in thirty years no young birds were being raised. For the Heinroths have done the most extraordinarily interesting and important researches, having brought up from the egg or early babyhood hundreds of different species, making careful studies on the growth, development, and psychology of the young birds. Everywhere in European ornithological literature one finds the Heinroths quoted as the authorities on life-history questions. It was a shock, to learn after my return home that Magdalena Heinroth had died in

August—an irreparable loss to her friends and to ornithology.

Among the most interesting features of the Zoo to me were the Monk Paroquets (*Myiopsitta monachus*), natives of Brazil, which live in perfect freedom outdoors the year round, nesting in an enormous colony nest and flying hither and yon shrilly screaming. In one of the bird-houses there is a large cage filled with gaily colored Weaver-birds of different kinds; it is a fascinating sight to see the males building elaborate woven nests.

Even more interesting to me than the Zoo was the Aquarium, of which Dr. Heinroth is Director. Without exception this is the most remarkable collection of living creatures I have ever seen. The first floor is equally divided between marine and freshwater creatures, while upstairs are terraria for reptiles, amphibia, and even spiders and insects. The beauty of some, the strangeness of others, and the extraordinary interest of practically every exhibit made the Aquarium a fascination. Everything is most clearly labelled with pictures, German and scientific names, ranges, and often a brief statement as to habits. Here, as in the Zoo, there are beautiful postcards, as well as small illustrated guides, sold for a few cents to adults and given free to children.

In the Zoologisches Museum three floors are devoted to study collections and only the ground floor to exhibitions. Yet the matter of educating the public is given careful attention. For instance, the museum is open one evening a week for the benefit of working people.

One's first impression of the cases is the absence of crowding. The native birds were arranged in a very instructive way: specimens of male and female and a nest, with labels telling the status of the bird as resident or otherwise, migration dates with transients and summer residents, and nesting dates with the breeders. In other cases were eggs of all the species.

The large room devoted to Biology particularly interested me. Here were illustrated with examples chosen throughout the animal kingdom—Protective Devices, Reproduction, Social Instincts, Effects of Environment, Food, etc., etc., each subject worked out in striking and remarkable detail. All in all, it was a fascinating place that would well repay many days of study.

The French arrange their specimens to form a beautiful picture; we make a show that arrests the attention and, we hope, will inform the spectator; but the Germans deliberately plan to teach and use every pedagogical means to make the

visitor think, to set the animal before him as a problem. In their zoölogical gardens that I visited, the Aquarium, and the Zoologisches Museum, everywhere are evident their abhorrence of superficiality, their determination to get down to reality, their passion for truth.

During our three days in Switzerland the most interesting birds seen were on the Zurichsee and Vierwaldstättersee and on Pilatus. On the lakes were many Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*), at this season minus any black; a few Coots (*Fulica atra atra*), and quite a number of Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*). Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*)—much like our Sparrow Hawk—and Buzzards were noted from the train, and a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) was seen near Luzern.

On August 7th we took the funicular to Pilatus-Kulm near Luzern—an hour's ride from a level of twelve hundred to nearly seven thousand feet, through the beech woods, through the spruces, and finally above tree-line. Here we were delighted to find a large number of the Alpine Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) sailing and diving and circling as gracefully as gulls following a ship. With their strange screams, which suited the wildness of the crags, and the marvel of their flight, they gave the finishing touch to the wonderful scene. They are very tame, coming within a few feet of people in hopes of crumbs, their red feet and legs and yellow bills contrasting strongly with their glossy black plumage.

The other birds on the mountain-top were a Black Redstart, a pair of Ravens (*Corvus corax*), and a pair of Snow Finches (*Montifringilla nivalis*) that were feeding their noisy young in a crevice in the rocks.

The following day we visited Herr and Frau Josef Bussmann to see the terragraph and to talk birds. Besides his researches with this instrument,<sup>3</sup> Herr Bussmann has done a great deal for bird-protection, and is a zealous bird-bander, last year ringing twelve hundred birds, among them large numbers of nestling Black-headed Gulls and migrating Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) that are caught with nets as they roost in the reeds.

Swiss Banders have seven sizes of rings from "Kleinvögel" to Eagles, but they do not have as many sizes for the smaller species as we do—only one ring for birds smaller than a Starling. On the cards announcing recoveries, the "Vogelwarte" at Sempach gives the direction and distance of the

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<sup>3</sup>See Bird-Banding. 1933. vol. 4, pp. 33-40.

locality where the bird was found from the place of banding.

Of the birds of prey in Switzerland only the Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*), Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco p. peregrinus*) can be killed. Formerly bounties were paid for these three species, but this scheme was abandoned, since, as elsewhere, they discovered that useful species were being killed and paid for.

In Italy we had the pleasure of meeting a new subspecies of House Sparrow with a brown head and a slightly different *yap* from that with which we are so familiar. Italian House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus italiae*) are not as common in the cities as *Passer domesticus domesticus* farther north, nor so tame.

Characteristically enough the first bird book offered me was on the native birds suitable for captivity (and even Titmice are included); it is, nevertheless, a charming book in its wealth of quoted poems treating of many of the species, mostly in Italian, but a few in Latin and French.<sup>4</sup> It gives the good news that blinding of birds is no longer permitted, nor the taking of nestlings to rear for cage-birds. Later I found a pretty good handbook<sup>5</sup> with colored illustrations for \$1.50. The far-famed Naples Aquarium was a disappointment after that of Berlin; they have only sea forms from the Bay of Naples. There is not a single label in the whole establishment; any one who wishes to be intelligent about the exhibits must buy a guide (published in various languages) for 50 cents.

In the Colosseum at Rome there lived Jackdaws, a little Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) and a most interesting bird, the *Passera Solitaria*, or Blue Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*). These birds frequent mountain cliffs, church towers, and ruins, and it is a strange and lovely thing to hear the sweet, rippling melody from an unseen singer in some cranny of an ancient Roman monument.

Ornithologically, my most interesting experience in Italy was a visit to Prince Chigi at Castel Fusano, Ostia. Between his quail-banding station on the seashore and Castel Fusano there stretches a beautiful wood of live oaks, maritime pines, and a great deal of underbrush. The bird life is very rich here under strict protection, and a large number of Raptores nest, among them the Black Kite, Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrow Hawk, and the rare Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*). It was an in-

<sup>4</sup>Aschenbrenner, A. H. *Il Canarino*; Ghidini, L. *I Migliori Uccelli Canori Indigeni*. 1932. Milano. Hoepli. 385 pp.

<sup>5</sup>Craveri, M. *Atlante Ornitologico; Uccelli Italiani*. Milano. Treves. 1927.

spiring sight to me to see two Harrier Eagles, or *Biancone* (*Circaëtus gallicus*), and the marvellously graceful great Kite (*Milvus milvus*), the *Nibbeo Reale*. So fascinated did I become with the Italian methods of capturing birds by *whistling* in the *boschetto* and with the trammel nets on the sand-dunes that I asked Prince Chigi whether he would not write an article for American banders on his methods, and his response to my request may be read in the April number of *Bird-Banding* vol. 4, pp. 59-67, 1933.

We often think that because our birds for the most part are different species from those of the rest of the world, we need to be informed only on what is being done in this country, but this is entirely wrong. Life-history problems are the same everywhere, and very important work is being done in this field across the ocean. Every serious student in America should acquaint himself with what is being done in Europe, especially in Great Britain and Germany.

As to the former, it is merely a matter of buying the most significant books and of subscribing to *British Birds*, an interesting monthly magazine dealing almost entirely with life-history papers. If individuals cannot afford this, perhaps they could persuade libraries to get the books and magazines; certainly college and university libraries should be thus provided.

As to German journals, the *Journal für Ornithologie* is the oldest and thought by many to be the best ornithological journal in existence: it publishes a great many life-history articles in detail and with superb photographs. *Vogelzug* is devoted to questions of migration and bird-banding; *Beiträge zur Fortpflanzungsbiologie der Vögel* specializes in nesting studies, while *Ornithologische Monatsberichte* has short articles, some systematic, others biological, and remarkably fine reviews both prompt and discriminating, and also worldwide in scope, articles and books in all languages being reviewed.

The difficulty here is that many Americans do not read German. But scientific German is not very difficult, if one is determined to master it. All my reading knowledge of German I acquired by myself.

I earnestly hope that coöperation between American and European ornithologists will be strengthened by the reading of each other's journals, by exchange of reprints, and by visits—all of which will surely be of mutual benefit.

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