

## THE THRUSHES.

*From 1889 Reports by Members of the Wilson Ornithological Chapter.*

REPORT OF CHARLES D. OLDRIGHT, AUSTIN, TEXAS.

Species found in this county (Travis).

Wood Thrush (*T. mustelinus*), Winter visitant—common.

American Robin (*M. migratoria*), Winter visitant—abundant.

Catbird (*G. carolinensis*), Transient visitant—tolerably common.

Mockingbird (*M. polyglottus*), Resident—abundant.

Brown Thrasher (*H. rufus*), Winter resident—rather common.

Habitat: The Wood Thrush is found, during its stay with us, in thick woods, usually in the bottom lands, near rivulets and creeks.

The Robins congregate in flocks (sometimes very large) and stay in the large hackberry trees (feeding on the berries) and other trees in the bottom lands, also in the cedar brakes, and during rainy weather they are restless, flying from one tree to another.

Catbirds are found in thick woods and dense thickets; are probably common, but not frequently noticed owing to their retiring habits.

The Mockingbird frequents rather open places—borders of woods, clearings and roads, also found on prairies in the few trees scattered over them in clumps, or if covered with mesquite trees (which never form thickets) the "Mocker" will nest in them. This bird is always found around a farm-house, nesting in the orchard if there is a place, if not then in some tree close at hand. In the winter most of them retire to the tall timbers and thickets.

Brown Thrasher. This bird is to be found in woods and thickets where there is a dense growth of underwood, in which it dwells, remaining mostly on the ground.

Nesting: The only species of this family that nidificates with us is the Mockingbird. It commences laying about April 1 (nest containing nearly fledged young found April 30) and continues

until the middle of July. Two nests found July 12, 1889, one of which contained one egg, the other three, with bird sitting. Nests are constructed of twigs, the species of plant varying according to location, *e. g.* nests in the mesquite region are composed of the thorny twigs of that tree. They often contain weed-stems and a plant known here as "Indian tobacco." Inside, the nests are usually lined with roots of grass or other small rootlets, while sometimes extraneous substances enter into its composition as string, wood, paper, rags, etc. Nests are placed in any tree that is convenient, often in honey-suckle or other climbing vines, or in the corner of a "Virginia" rail fence. The height varies from one to forty feet from the ground—in woods usually from six to fifteen feet. Nest is always solidly placed in a fork or resting on a large limb.

In 1889 first set *taken* (not first set found, for I left some before this) was on April 26, incubation commenced; nest in elm tree, seven feet up. The set contained four eggs of Mockingbird on April 24th and on the 26th contained three eggs of "Mocker" and one of Dwarf Cowbird; bird seen. Next set taken May 5, four eggs; incubation, large embryos. Nest placed in a cedar tree, two feet six inches from the ground. May 19, five fresh eggs; nest in a mesquite tree, fifteen feet from ground. May 20, four eggs, small embryos. Nest fifteen feet up in a post-oak. Another nest ten feet from ground in a live oak contained five eggs; incubation commenced.

June 2d. Four fresh eggs; nest in an elm bush, 2 feet up. No birds seen. Description: No. 1, pale, dull green, with large confluent ring of reddish brown; spots around larger end and some distributed all over the egg; size .90x.69. No 2, same ground color, almost obscured by spots and blotches of pale brown. Blotches of darker reddish-brown form a broken ring around crown; .87x.70. No. 3, scarcely distinguishable from No. 1; .88x.70. No. 4, markings same as Nos. 1 and 3, but more evenly distributed; .87x.70. This is a rather peculiar set, so not typical. They are all smaller and more globular than usual.

Another set collected May 29, 1889 by G. M. near Austin, represents another phase; five eggs, incubation advanced, nest "as usual." No. 1, pale blue, spotted all over but most thickly at the large end with distinct spots of chestnut and obscure purple;

1.05x.71. No. 2. Same ground, blotched with chestnut and obscure purplish. Blotches about .15x.15, mostly on crown; 1.03x.72. No. 3. In this egg the lilac predominates. Large spots of it and brown mostly on crown, 1.00x.70. No. 4 Spotted and blotched with purplish and brown; incomplete ring; 1.06x.71. No. 5. Spotted and blotched all over with purplish and chestnut; 1.00x.72. Ground color in all the eggs is the same—pale blue. They are pretty eggs but not typical.

What I consider a typical set may be described as follows: five eggs collected by G. M.; incubation "advanced." Nest of sticks, Indian tobacco, etc., lined with rootlets and hair. No. 1, bluish-green, with small spots of reddish and lilac distributed uniformly over the surface. A few larger spots form a ring around crown; 1.06x.71. No. 2, bluish-green, with large confused spots of reddish and obscure lilac distributed uniformly; 1.01x.70. No. 3, same coloration as No. 1; .99x.71. No. 4, spotted less thickly and with more purplish than No. 3; .99x.71. No. 5, bluish-green, with large and small spots of reddish and lilac, mostly on large half of egg, 1.01x.71. Average size of ten eggs, 1.02x.71.

Mockingbirds' eggs are very variable, being found any color from gray with a solid ring of red, to bright blue with bold spots of dark brown and chestnut, or an almost uniform brownish, or only freckled with reddish, but it is only in a large series that such varieties are found. I know of one so-called "runt" Mockingbird's egg which is just the size and color of a Field Sparrow's egg. I do not think that the eggs differ in size or color according to lateness of season, but I *do* believe that the second brood, in June, consists of four, while five are frequently found earlier in the season. The number of eggs is usually four or five. I have never taken a larger set than the latter number, but sets of six are sometimes found. I have found a few sets of three, but I suspect that one or more eggs had been removed.

Dwarf Cowbirds' eggs (*Molothrus ater obscurus*) are but seldom found in the "Mocker's" nest, but this year several were found. They were also found in other unusual places, nests of Cardinal Tanager, etc.

The natural enemies of the five species are the usual enemies of birds viz. the larger *Falconidæ*, small carnivorous mammals, and many species of snakes. No special enemies observed.

Mockingbirds are brave in attacking cats that attempt to approach their nests. They will often astonish a dog by unexpectedly alighting on his back and administering a sharp peck.

Flight: With exception of the Robin the birds comprised in this group are not addicted to continued flight; they fly easily, in a straight line, and move the wings moderately rapid. As far as I have observed, they hop when on the ground.

Song: Of the thrushes found here only the Mockingbird sings while with us, but all the others sing during the summer when in the north. The "Mocker" sings mostly during the spring—seldom at other times. He sings all day and sometimes all night (I have heard him at midnight and at 3 o'clock a. m.) The Mockingbird imitates very many sounds that it hears and also has many original notes; its song consists of a blending of these songs of other birds with its own notes.

If a Mockingbird is kept near any song bird for some time it will imitate it. Mocking birds seldom imitate the notes of the Woodpeckers, but a man in Austin kept a number of young birds near a Woodpecker's nest and as soon as they began to sing they commenced calling like the Woodpeckers. Favorites with the Mockingbird, are the Blue Jay (himself a mimic) the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Tufted Tit. He will imitate the cries of a young chicken or other like sounds. I have never heard him mimic a cat or dog, but no doubt he can do it. Only the male birds sing—in cages the females do not sing, and I suppose that they do not sing outside. The notes of the Mockingbird are to be distinguished from the notes of the other birds he mimics, not by the sound, for they are exact reproductions, but by the fact that he utters them but two or three times before discarding them for others. One of its favorite notes is the cry of the young birds for food. It is a shrill "ee-ee-ee," and one often hears and old "gray-head" stop in the middle of his melody to squall like a hungry youngster.

Food: Wood Thrush, mixed diet, insects and seeds.

American Robin, almost wholly grainivorous; feeds on cedar, china and hack-berries and winter grapes.

Mocking-bird, feeds mostly on berries—poke, china and hack-berries, mulberries and grapes. They eat some fruit, taking a bite from a peach or plum, but they do little damage. A few insects are also eaten.

Brown Thrasher, seeds, small snail shells are often found in its "crop"; no insects have been found by me.

## REPORT OF LYND S JONES, GRINNELL, IOWA.

*Merula migratoria*, Robin Red-breast.

Feb. 27, first one; next, Mar. 11, several; common, Mar. 12. Found everywhere during migrations, anywhere except in marshes while breeding. Nests are as often found under bridges as in trees in proportion to the number of bridges. The choice of location, if there is any choice, is in the crotch of a shade tree in town, preferably above the walk. This applies also to well-travelled wagon roads in the country.

The nest is almost universally composed of grass and straw externally, well bound together by a thick coat of mud, which in turn is overlaid, or inlaid with rootlets; the mud shows through the rootlets internally but is hidden by the grass and straw externally. Nests are always saddled on to branches of trees or into their crotches, but built flatly on timbers of bridges or buildings unless so small that the nest can be saddled on. The round poles in the roofs of old straw-covered sheds are a good example of the last.

The nest is never on the ground but may be within a few feet of it or 60 feet up. 20 feet is the preference in trees; 6 to 10 in buildings. It may be a few feet above running water, or a mile from any stream. Three eggs is the normal set here. The different sets vary but little in coloration. The extremes are pale blue and torquois blue. First nest, April 1; last, June 15; height of season, May 10.

Crows, jays and chipmunks disturb their nest, as well as wood mice.

*Hylocichla mustelina*, Wood Thrush; "Veery."

First, May 5, ten; next, May 6; common May 9. Found everywhere during migrations. Its favorite resort is the deep woods, usually in close proximity to water. The deep shade of city shade trees is also a resort.

The nest is always in a tree or bush; if a tree, it is saddled on to a branch either at its junction with the tree or far out on the branch; if in a bush, it is saddled into a thick bunch of brush. Nests vary in height from 4 to 10 feet; rarely the latter distance, commonly 5 or 6 feet. Oak trees are the preference.

Nests vary but little in composition. An external covering of grass, with some white or very light colored material, unlike the Robin in this respect, which seldom or never uses so light material in the construction of its nest; and fine rootlets for the lining. Between the lining and outside is a strong, firm layer of rotten wood, never mud. In one or two nests I have found old horse droppings.

Four eggs is the usual set here, never more, often less. Eggs are smaller than the Robin's and darker—nile blue. I see no variation in color. First nest, May 20; last, June 27; height of season, June 5.

The chipmunk is decidedly the worst enemy in breeding season; Jays and Crows disturb it.

*Turdus fuscescens*, Wilson's Thrush.

First, May 9, 40; next, May 10; common May 9; bulk departed May 18; last seen May 30. Seldom seen outside of the woods, except among the trees in town. Keeps mostly to the up-woodlands, not usually very near water. The bird is retiring in its habits and avoids man.

*Turdus aonalaschke palasii*, Hermit Thrush.

First, April 13, 1; next, May 2; was not common; bulk arrived May 5; bulk departed May 9; last seen May 10. Very retiring; keeps well to the deep woods, where it may be found high up among the trees. I have found it most common in the vicinity of water. It was a common migrant in 1887.

*Turdus ustulatus swainsonii*, Olive-backed Thrush.

First, May 9, 50; next, May 10; common May 9; bulk departed May 24; last seen June 2. Their range is much the same as the Robin's, except that they are not found away from timber or brush of some sort. Olive-back swarms in the woods, both in the country and in town. He is seen everywhere while here— one place is no more favored than another by him.

*Galeoscoptes carolinensis*, Catbird.

First, May 5, 4; next, May 6; common May 6.

This is a wood-bird strictly. Few are seen in town, and none in fields away from woods.

The nest is almost always placed in a thorn bush or hawthorn tree, rarely in a thicket of hazel. It is built into the brush that surrounds it, the sticks that compose its exterior blending into

this brush. Internally it is made up of grass, leaves, fibrous bark and sometimes a few horse-hairs. The grass usually if not always sticks through the outer covering—a feature, together with the external covering of sticks, that will always determine the species to which it belongs. Nests are rarely above 10 feet up, commonly 5, not seldom 3. 4 and 5 eggs in the set, never 6, *rarely* 3. The color is much darker than Robin's or Wood Thrush's eggs. The darkest is beryl green, the lightest torquois blue, with a strong wash of beryl green. Eggs vary from rounded ovate to elongate ovate in form.

First nest, May 16; last, July 10; common June 6. Chipmunks and small boys are their enemies.

*Harporhynchus rufus*, Brown Thrasher.

First, April 21, 1; next, April 22; common April 25. Found everywhere among trees and brush; less common in deep woods. It nests anywhere, either on the ground—rare position—or in bushes or trees. The Osage Orange hedge rows are decidedly the preference here; the proportion of nests in hedges to nests elsewhere is as 4:1. I have never found a nest above 8 ft. up—4 ft. is the normal height.

The nest is large and sprawling with its profusion of sticks, outwardly. Inside the sticks is a layer of leaves and grass, against which the lining of rootlets is laid. The rootlets are never absent nor does any other material enter into the composition of the lining. The nest is built on or into its support, never "saddled."

The 4 (common) or 5 (less common) eggs vary in size and shape as well as in color and markings. Ovate is the common form, but both short and elongated ovate are not rare. The ground color varies from a pearl gray or almost white to a beautiful pearl blue. The latter color is not common. The spots vary from burnt umber and walnut brown to drab. Some specimens are heavily blotched and spotted over the entire surface, the blotches becoming larger at the greatest girth of the egg; while the others are scarcely blotched, though well spotted with all these colors. The one has the appearance of a decidedly brown egg while the other is very light. The bluish shaded specimens fade after being blown.

White-rumped Shrike, field mice and small boys bother this bird when it builds in the hedge; the chipmunk and Jay in the woods. First nest, May 5; last, June 28; height of season, May 18.

## REPORT OF WILLARD N. CLUTE, BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

Wood Thrush. First seen May 4, one; next seen May 6. Found in the uplands.

Wilson's Thrush. First, May 9, three; next seen May 10; common May 11. Generally near water; especially along creeks in the woods; in swamps, if wooded; in fact, anywhere near water. It may also sometimes be found in dry woods.

Hermit Thrush. First, April 11, one; next seen April 14.

American Robin. First, March 12, one; next seen March 13; common March 17. Seldom found in the deep woods—usually in the vicinity of man.

Catbird. First, May 10, one; next seen May 11; common May 12. Found along streams.

Brown Thrasher. First seen, April 20, two; next, April 24; common April 26. Found in open woods; they seem to prefer a wood moderately clear of underbrush.

Nesting: Wilson's Thrush, nest generally placed on the ground in damp situations in the woods; composed of leaves, grasses and fine strips of bark, and lined with fine rootlets. The earliest nest found May 20. Two broods are sometimes raised. Eggs, 4, blue.

American Robin, nests in vicinity of man, placed anywhere about the house or out-buildings, such as on a beam, or post, in corners of rail fences, on window cornices, and in fact any convenient shelf. Nests of this bird are very common in orchards. In the woods, the Robin seems to prefer a pine in which to place its nest. I have found many nests on tops of stumps in newly-cleared tracts, and in two instances have known these birds to build nests in a dead and leafless tree along a city street, and hatch out their young without molestation. Another nest found was in a hole in an apple tree. The nest was situated about six feet from the ground. The hole was formed by the rotting away of a large limb; it was about ten inches deep and eight inches across the entrance. The nest was composed of the same material and did not differ in size and shape from other Robins' nests. The composition of the nest differs in different locations; when near the house it is composed of twine, rags, grass, etc., and

lined with mud and grass; when at a distance from man, the twine and other materials which may be picked up around buildings are omitted, and the nest is built of grass, rootlets and weed-stalks. I have never found a nest that did not contain the mud lining, though it differs in thickness in different nests. The lining is generally of grass blades though, in the woods. I have seen the nest lined with pine needles.

The bird begins breeding in this locality about April, and two, sometimes three broods are reared during a season. The eggs are three or four, rarely more; blue.

Catbird. In this vicinity the nests are seldom found anywhere except in thorn-bushes; sometimes are placed in thick clumps of berry-bushes, but not often. The nest is generally from four to six feet from the ground, but I have found one nest two feet from the ground, and another fifteen feet from the ground in an iron-wood tree. The nest is usually composed of coarse twigs, strips of bark and weeds, lined with rootlets.

The eggs are four in number; I have found five—dark greenish-blue. The earliest nest I have found in this vicinity was taken May 20, 1887. By the end of May nests are common. I believe two broods are raised during the season.

Brown Thrasher, nests on the ground or in a brush-pile. Nest composed of grass, weed-stalks and leaves, and lined with rootlets. The eggs are four or five, light bluish-green, speckled with brown all over. I believe but one brood is raised during a season.

#### REPORT OF FRED W. CURTIS, WAUWATOSA, WIS.

##### Robin, *Merula migratoria*.

First were found March 9, two birds seen; next seen March 12; became common March 15. Frequents the vicinity of dwellings, groves and orchards. May 3 a set of 3 eggs taken, incubation advanced. Measurements: 1.08x.78; 1.10x.80; 1.06x.78. Color, a uniform blue.

Nest composed of grass, straw and roots, lined with dry grass and plastered with mud, and placed 8 feet from the ground in a maple. Nests were found containing from three to five eggs. Eggs were found as late as July 1. A nest examined July 20 contained young birds, about one-third grown.

Catbird, *Galeoscoptes carolinensis*.

First one found May 3; next, May 4; common May 7. Favorite haunts are thickets and orchards. A set of four incubated eggs found June 9. Measurements: .91x.67; .91x.68; .91x.67; .93x.66. Color, a very deep bluish-green. Nest made of sticks, bark and leaves; very roughly constructed, placed two feet from the ground, in a thick bush. Nesting of the Catbird is late in this locality.

Wood Thrush, *Turdus mustelinus*.

First were seen May 5, two; next, May 6; common May 7. Found in low damp tickets, in the vicinity of streams. June 9 a set of incubated eggs measuring 1.00x.71; .96x.71; .96x.71; 1.00x.71. Nest composed of leaves and strips of bark from weed-stalks, straw with mud on the inside, rather shallow, placed upon a limb of a thorn tree, four feet from the ground, near a stream. The usual complement of eggs appears to be three or four. Color, a light blue.

#### REPORT OF REUBEN M. STRONG, WAUWATOSA, WIS.

Robin. Very common breeder. Our most common summer resident excepting the English Sparrow. Arrives about the fifteenth of March.

Wood Thrush is a common migrant and also breeds.

Wilson's Thrush. Common migrant. I have found two sets, one of four eggs and the other of two.

Catbird. Next to Robin in abundance. Arrives in April. Breeds.

Brown Thrasher. Common summer resident. Breeds. Arrives the middle of April.

#### REPORT OF E. EUGENE FERNHOLZ, JEFFERSON, WIS.

Wood Thrush. Tolerably common summer resident. Breeds.

Robin. Abundant summer resident. Breeds.

Catbird. Common summer resident. Breeds.

Brown Thrasher. Not very rare summer resident. Breeds.

Nests are found in bushes and on the ground.

## REPORT OF H. P. T. WEATHERN, FARMINGTON, ME.

*Hylocichla Mustelina*, Wood Thrush. Common summer resident. Breeds.

*Merula migratoria*, Robin. Abundant summer resident. Breeds.

*Galeoscoptes carolinensis*, Catbird. Common summer resident. Nests always found along banks of streams.

*Harporhynchus rufus*, Brown Thrasher. Common summer resident. Breeds.

## REPORT OF JOHN B. LEWIS, EUBANKS, KENTUCKY.

Wood Thrush. Common summer resident.

Brown Thrush. Tolerably common summer resident.

Catbird. Abundant summer resident.

Robin. Generally a transient visitant, but occasionally breeds.

## REPORT OF W. N. COLTON, BIDDEFORD, ME.

Wilson's Thrush and Hermit Thrush Common summer residents.

American Robin and Catbird. Abundant summer residents.

Brown Thrasher. Rare summer resident.

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 SYNONYMS.

Following is a list of the synonyms applied to various members of the Thrush family in different localities:

*Turdus mustelinus*, Wood Thrush—Flute Bird and Swamp Robin in New York, and is reported by Burroughs as called "Swamp Angel" by the people in the Adirondack region, on account of being found, during the period of song, in the deepest and most remote forests, usually in damp and swampy localities. Also known as Song Thrush and Wood Robin in District of Columbia and other places.