

FROM THE CLUB LIBRARY

The paragraphs below are excerpts from manuscripts of several of our gifted fellow-members of the past. Their contributions to what was a Club project in the 1920's on bird biographies were quite in line with Dr. Stone's thoughts on *Cassinia*: to sweeten the sometimes cold ornithological observations with a touch of nice but factual writing.

THE CATBIRD

With birds as with mankind genius may often be found associated with clownishness, talent in certain lines is likely to be offset by deficiency in others, brilliancy may be accompanied by many eccentricities, a gracious demeanor in public may be qualified by churlishness in private, the splendid voice of the stage may be that of the harsh scold at home. Most of these things may be truthfully said of the Catbird. Unquestionably he is a bird of character. His nature is one of moods and sharp contrasts as is usually the case with talented but eccentric individuals. Possibly the most brilliant of our local songsters, his very name tells of the harshness of his note at other times. He is a bird of inconspicuous plumage and often he acts in a retiring and modest manner wholly consistent with his garb of Quaker drab; but one never knows when he may play the fool, and we have few birds more ridiculous in their antics than the Catbird when he is seized, as is often the case, with an attack of nerves.

GEORGE SPENCER MORRIS

THE BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER

There is not a more elegantly and delicately colored bird in our country than that tiny little gymnast, the Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. . . Those who have not seen a live gnatcatcher should imagine a greatly attenuated wren with a blue-gray oversuit and grayish white beneath, his shining black eyes set in a black frontlet, and the tip of his tail black with white edgings. While wren-like in his motions, especially in the use of his tail, there is much in his carriage that reminds one alternately of a flycatcher and a catbird. . . Make a catbird one-tenth its size, put some more of the monkey in him, and set him among the sprays of a budding oak tree, and you will have a Gnatcatcher. . .

The song, if you choose to call it so — a weak, squeaking "spee, spee, spee" generally repeated thrice with short intervals — is incessantly kept up for a fortnight after his arrival on the breeding grounds, but the real ditty is something reserved for more ecstatic moments, and sharp ears and faithful watching can hear it all. Only when the more tardy females begin to arrive can the Blue-Grays be said to sing. It is a tiny minstrelsy done in undertone and absolutely inimitable, — a mixture of thrush and wren and warbler. . .

SAMUEL NICHOLSON RHODES

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

The Kinglets . . . seem to form an essential part of those sharp, tingling autumn days when nature appears to be indulging in a final bit of action before settling down into the winter's sleep.

This little bird was confused by all the early writers on American birds with the very similar "Golden-crested Wren" of England, and although specimens were sent by Bartram to Edwards in London they were not considered to differ from the Old World species. It was called *Motacilla regulus* by Wilson and *Regulus cristatus* by Bartram, both names which had been applied to the English bird. Nuttall regarded the American bird as constituting a distinct species and named it *Regulus tricolor*, his action being adopted by Audubon. Lichtenstein, however, had come to the same conclusion several years before (1832) and his name, *satrapa*, having priority, must be adopted.

Wilson used the vernacular name commonly applied to the European species while Bonaparte preferred Golden-crested Goldcrest, another name applied to that bird. Nuttall used Fiery-crested Wren fashioned after the Fire-crest, another Old World species to which he thought ours more clearly allied. The term, Golden-crowned, was apparently first used by Edwards when figuring a specimen sent to him by Bartram, and no doubt the latter sent him the name as well as the bird since he uses it in his manuscript diary. The name, Kinglet, first appears in Audubon, being a translation of "Roitolet", a name used for these birds in France which also gave rise to the generic name, *Regulus*, used in this country since the time of Audubon Synopsis.

WITMER STONE

THE WOOD THRUSH SONG

Lovely as is the Veery's song in itself, it takes the accompaniment of moonlight and absolute stillness and far-off places to raise it to the plane of the major songs of Hermit Thrush and Wood Thrush.

And of these two major songs? I have never heard so silver-voiced a Hermit Thrush as one of three I several times listened to in the summer of 1909 in the Poconos. Where he sang, there sang on more than one evening, a Wood Thrush. Every time I heeded the Hermit Thrush I wondered at his music, but the liquid wood-wind notes of the Wood Thrush reached that within me that was far more intimate than wonder. The Hermit Thrush, if you like, catches an echo in his song from harps struck in some land happier than any man knows, and perhaps there is finer phrasing and a more aerial music in his song than in that of the Wood Thrush, but it has not the comparable of Wood Thrush song, the mellow roundness of note, the nobility of accent, the heart-easing and uplifting fall, the lyric cry so human yet so strangely free of the restlessness and sorrow of all things human.

CORNELIUS WEYGANDT

HERMIT THRUSH

Following back the headwaters of the streams that come rushing down to the Delaware from the mountains to the north and west, we find in the Poconos and in the Alleghanies the lower border of that summer home to which those silent transients of early spring were tracing their flight. Here on an evening late in June I have sat on the edge of a mountain lake shut in on all sides by a black fringe of spruce and hemlock and watched the sun sink from view and the shadows thicken when slowly and deliberately from some tree top across the water there came those liquid, indescribable notes, swelling and falling again, that seem to lift one beyond all earthly surroundings. And then I realized the eternal fitness of Nature, the perfect harmony between the bird's song and its true environment. With this spot as his goal is it any wonder that the Hermit holds himself aloof from those surroundings amidst which he is forced to dwell temporarily, or to pass in his journeys, but which he realizes are keyed to other songs than his?

WITMER STONE

HOUSE WREN

If one desires a lesson in tireless industry and devoted parenthood, let him sit on the porch beneath the wren box and watch the ceaseless toil of both parents as from daylight to dusk they flutter to and fro between the box and the neighboring flower beds and shrubbery, bringing an endless supply of spiders and green worms, and constantly removing the excreta from the nest as is their cleanly habit. And yet with all this hard work there is always time to pause for an instant for song. And what a wonderful song it is, delivered with an energy that seems as though it would shake the tiny quivering body to pieces. Never was a song more indicative of the character of the singer, so full is it of cheerfulness and energy. For the moment, music wholly dominates the small body which appears incapable of longer containing the pent-up melody within. The brilliant notes literally pour forth from the full throat in a rippling, bubbling, gurgling stream of harmony.

GEORGE SPENCER MORRIS