

*A Glimpse of
The Birds of Berkeley*

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S the seasons come and go, a host of birds tarry within the confines of Berkeley, some to make their nests and rear their broods, others to sojourn for but a brief interval in passing from their summer to their winter haunts, and in the joyful return of spring. They inhabit the spreading branches of the live oaks, and the open meadows are their home. They dwell in the leafy recesses of the cañons and haunt the shrubbery of our gardens.

It is impossible to understand our birds without knowing something of their surroundings — of the lovely reach of ascending plain from the bay shore to the rolling slopes of the Berkeley Hills (mountains, our eastern friends call them); of the cold, clear streams of water which have cut their way from the hill crests down into the plain, forming lovely cañons with great old live oaks in their lower and more open portions, and sweet-scented laurel or bay trees crowded into their narrower and more precipitous parts;

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A Glimpse of the Birds of Berkeley of the great expanse of open hill slopes, green and tender during the months of winter rain, and soft brown and purple when the summer sun has parched the grass and flowers. These, with cultivated gardens and fields of grain, make the environment of our birds, and here they live their busy lives.

There comes a morning during the month of September when a peculiarly clear, crisp quality of the air first suggests the presence of autumn. It is something intangible, inexpressible, but to me vital and significant of change. In my morning walk I notice the first red tips upon the maple leaves, and catch the first notes of autumn birds. I hear the call of the red-breasted nuthatch, a fine, monotonous, far-away pipe, uttered in a succession of short notes, and upon looking among the live oaks, detect the little fellow hopping about upon the bark. He is a mere scrap of a bird, with a back of bluish gray and a breast of a dull, rusty-red hue, a cap of black and a white stripe over the eye—a veritable gnome of the bark, upon which he lives the year round. In its crannies he pries with his strong, sharply-pointed beak for his insect food, and in some hollow his little mate lays her eggs and rears her brood. With so many woodpecker traits he nevertheless differs widely in structure from that group, being more closely allied to the wrens and titmice. He is with us in greater or less abundance throughout the winter, and his very characteristic call may be heard from time to time both in the University Grounds and in the cañons.

With the nuthatches, come from their northern breed-

ing places, the pileolated warblers, and other shy wood-creatures which haunt the quiet, out-of-the-way nooks, and shrink from the presence of man. The pileolated warbler is one of the loveliest, daintiest creatures that visit us. As I walk in my favorite nook in the hills, Woolsey's Cañon, to the north of the University Grounds, I see a lithe, active, alert little bird, gleaning for insects among the leaves, now high up among the branches, and again darting hither and thither downward to where the fine thread of water has formed a pool, there to bathe an instant and then, with a lightsome toss of spray flirted from its wings, to resume its quest among the bay leaves. It is a waif of gold with a crown of jet, and its song, a sweet, sudden burst of woodland music, is quite in keeping with the singer.

Let me picture my cañon in the autumn time, when the open hill-slopes are covered with tarweed and dead grass, and the country roads are deep in dust. There is a quiet, almost sacred feeling about the place, shut in by steep hill-slopes, crowded with bay trees through which the sun filters in scattered beams, and carpeted with ferns and fallen leaves. Bulrushes, with their long, graceful filaments encircling their jointed stems, spring from the tangle of shrubbery, and the broad, soft leaves of the thimbleberry, now beginning to turn brown, fill in the recesses with foliage. Great slimy, yellowish-green slugs cling to the moist rocks, and water-dogs sprawl stupidly in the pools.

A loud, ringing call sounds above as a flicker comes our way and announces his presence with an emphatic

A Glimpse of the Birds of Berkeley ye up! He is with us all the year through, and an interesting fellow, I have found him. Not wholly a woodpecker, and yet too closely related to that family to be widely parted, he is an anomaly in the bird world. Sometimes he alights upon the ground and grubs for food like a meadow lark, while again he hops in true woodpecker fashion upon the tree trunk, pecking holes in the bark. He has the proud distinction of being the only California bird which habitually intermarries with an eastern representative of the genus—the golden-shafted flicker of the Atlantic States and the red-shafted flicker of the Pacific region intermingling in a most bewildering way, so that hybrids are almost as numerous in some sections as the pure species.

The flicker is a large, showy bird, somewhat greater than a robin in size, with a conspicuous white rump-patch, and with the shafts and inner webs of the wings and tail colored a bright scarlet. The male bird is also adorned with a streak of the same color on each side of the throat. The back is brown, closely barred with black, and the under parts are pinkish buff, marked with a large black crescentic patch on the breast and conspicuous round black dots on the lower portions of the body.

In the spring time the flickers bore a deep hole in a decayed oak limb and the mother bird lays there ten or more of the most beautiful eggs which ever gladdened a mother bird's heart, save that I fear her little home is too dark to give her so much as a peep at her treasures. They are white, with a wavy texture, like water marks in the shell, and, when fresh, beautifully flushed with pink,

more delicate in color than a baby's ear. When the young brood are all hatched what a clamoring and calling there is about that hole, what an array of hungry beaks are thrust out awaiting the morsel that the busy parent carries to them! But now, in the autumn time, the family cares are ended and the flicker roams the woodland contented and well fed. Long may his piercing, buoyant call ring amid our hills, and his coat of many colors adorn our landscape!

I cannot speak of noisy birds without recalling the jays, for they are the noisiest, rollicking, happy-go-lucky fellows that make their home in our cañons. They laugh and screech by turns, they question and scold. Even when on the wing they utter a succession of loud, insistent call notes, and upon alighting, mischievously question in a shrill squeak, "*well? well?*" I am speaking of the California jay which is the common species about Berkeley,—a long, rather slender fellow, without a crest such as the blue-fronted jay of the redwoods possesses. Its back is colored blue and brownish gray, and its breast is a lighter gray, edged and faintly streaked with blue. Its manners are often quiet and dignified when sitting still and eyeing an intruder, not without a half scornful, half inquisitive glance, I fancy; but with a sudden whim it is aroused to animation, flirting its tail, bending its head on one side and suddenly fluttering away with a loud laugh.

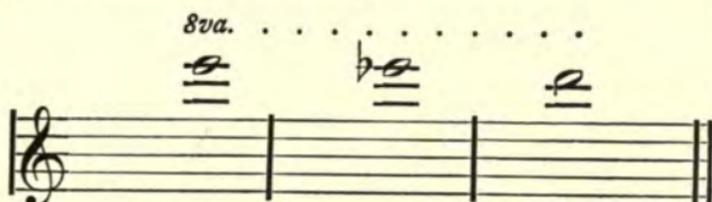
Another of my cañon friends is the wren tit, a bird which is found only in California, and without a counterpart, so far as I am aware, the world over. It is a

A Glimpse of the Birds of Berkeley friend y little fellow, considerably smaller than a sparrow, but with a long tail usually held erect in true wren fashion. Its plumage is soft and fluffy and its colors as sober as a monk's, brown above and below, but somewhat paler on the under portions where a tinge of cinnamon appears. The wren tit is a fearless, friendly little creature, hopping about in the tangle of blackberry vines almost within reach of my outstretched hand, but so quiet are its colors and so dense the thickets which it inhabits, that the careless eye might well overlook it. The little low chatter which it utters tells us of its presence, and if we wait quietly for a moment it may even favor us with a song. It is a simple strain, a high-pitched pipe—*tit-tit-tit-trrrrrre!* but a sweet and characteristic note in our cañons.

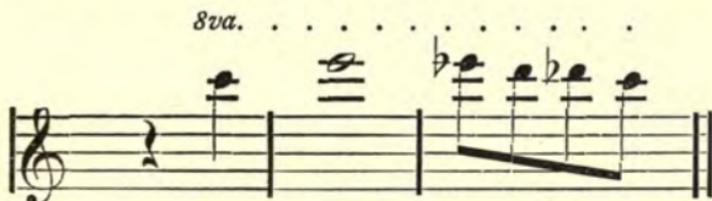
As autumn moves on apace the winter birds assemble in full force. The golden-crowned sparrows come flocking from their Alaskan and British Columbian homes, and the Gambel's white-crowned sparrows from their breeding places in the mountains,—the one adorned with a crown of dull gold, black bordered, and the other with a head marked with broad stripes of black and white. Both have backs of streaked brown and gray, and breasts of buff or ash. They are among our commonest and most familiar winter residents, dwelling in our gardens as well as in the thickets among the hills, and singing even during the milder rains. The call note of both species is a lisping *tsip*, and their songs have the same quality of tone—a fine, high, long-drawn whistle. I have written down the most usual song of each species

in musical form, and repeat them as follows. The golden-crowned sparrow sings :

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The song of Gambel's sparrow is a trifle more elaborate, commencing on an upward scale, instead of the downward, as in the former case. Loud and clear comes from the rose bushes the treble whistle;:



Gambel's sparrow sings not only all day long but occasionally at night. Often upon a dark, misty night in February or March I have heard a sudden burst of bird music, and recognized the very clearly-marked strains of this bird. Coming out of the dark, damp night, so sudden and so beautiful, and followed by so perfect a calm, I know of no more impressive bird music.

When the rainy months of winter are ended and the meadow lark is sounding his loud, rich strains from the field, and the linnet is fluttering and bubbling over with song, a host of merry travelers come hurrying to our trees and gardens. The jolly little western house wren

A Glimpse of the Birds of Berkeley bobs about in the brush, and, as the wild currant puts forth its first pink, pendulous blossoms, the beautiful little rufous humming-bird comes to dine upon them. I know not how he times his visit so closely, but certain it is that the pungent woody odor of these blossoms is inseparably linked in my mind with the fine, high, insect-like note of these pugnacious little mites in coats of shimmering fire, that come to us from Central America at the very first intimation of spring.

In April arrive the summer birds, full of the joy of the mating season. The Bullock's oriole, clad in black, orange, and gold, sings its loud, elated strain from the tree tops, the black-headed grosbeak carols in the orchard, the lovely, little, blue-backed, red-breasted lazuli bunting warbles in the shrubbery, and finally, the stately, russet-backed thrush, quiet and dignified in his coat of brown, with white, speckled breast, the most royal singer of our groves, sends forth upon the evening air such sweet organ tones that the whole night is full of melody.

I would that our birds might receive some measure of the appreciation which is due them, and that we might all turn at times from the busy affairs of life to listen to their sweet songs and winning ways. May they ever find within the confines of Berkeley a haven of refuge from that merciless persecution which is steadily reducing their numbers. May they find here loving friends ready to champion their cause, and may they ever be considered the chief ornament of our hills and gardens!

CHARLES A. KEELER.