

## BIRDS' EGGS.



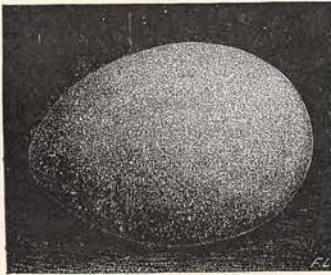
Phoebe-bird.

“**A**DMIRE the bird's egg and leave it in its nest,” is a wiser forbearance than “Love the wood-rose and leave it on its stalk.” We will try to leave these eggs in the nest, and as far as

possible show the bird and the nest with them.

The first egg of spring is undoubtedly a hen's egg. The domestic fowls, not being compelled to shift for themselves, and having artificial shelter, are not so mindful of the weather and the seasons as the wild birds. But the hen of the woods and the hen of the prairie, namely, the ruffed and the pinnated grouse, do not usually nest till the season is so far advanced that danger from frost is past.

The first wild egg, in New York and New England, is probably that of an owl, the great horned owl, it is said, laying as early as March. They probably shelter their eggs from the frost and the snow before incubation



Pinnated Grouse.

begins. The little screech-owl waits till April, and seeks the deep snug cavity of an old tree; the heart of a decayed apple-tree suits him well. Begin your

search by the middle of April, and before the month is past you will find the four white, round eggs resting upon a little dry grass or a few dry leaves in the bottom of a long cavity. Owls' eggs are inclined to be spherical. You would expect to see a big round-headed, round-eyed creature come out of such an egg.

The passenger pigeon nests before danger from frost is past; but as it lays but two eggs, probably in two successive days, the risks from this source are not great, though occasionally a heavy April snow-storm breaks them up.

Which is the earliest song-bird's egg? One cannot be quite so certain here, as he can as to which the first wild flower is, for instance; but I would take my chances on finding that of the phoebe-bird first, and finding it before the close of April, unless the season is very

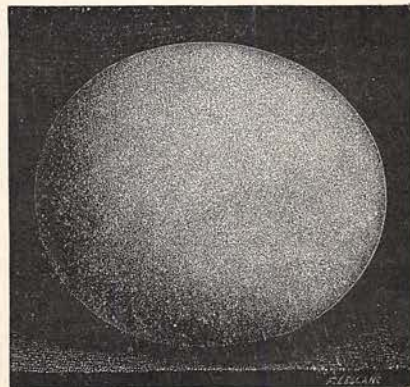
backward. The present season (1883), a pair built their nest under the eaves of my house, and deposited their eggs, the last days of the month. Some English sparrows that had been hanging around, and doubtless watching the phoebes, threw the eggs out and took possession of the nest. How shrewd and quick to take the hint these little feathered John Bulls are! With a handful of rattling pebble-stones I told this couple very plainly that they were not welcome visitors to my premises. They fled precipitately. The next morning they appeared again, but were much shyer. Another discharge of pebbles, and they were off as if bound for the protection of the British flag, and did not return.



Song-Sparrow.

I notice wherever I go that these birds have got a suspicion in their heads that public opinion has changed with regard to them, and that they are no longer wanted.

The eggs of the phoebe-bird are snow-white, and when, in threading the gorge of some mountain trout-brook, or prowling about some high, overhanging ledge, one's eye falls upon this mossy structure planted with such matchless art upon a little shelf of the rocks, with its complement of five or six pearl-like eggs, he is ready to declare it the most pleasing nest in all the range of our bird architecture. It was such a happy thought for the bird to build there, just out of the reach of all four-footed beasts of prey, sheltered from the storms and winds, and by the use of moss and lichens



Great Horned Owl.



Chipping Sparrow.



House Wren.



Short-billed Marsh Wren.



Carolina Wren.

blending its nest so perfectly with its surroundings, that only the most alert eye can detect it. An egg upon a rock, and thriving there,—the frailest linked to the strongest, as if the geology of the granite mountain had been bent into the service of the bird. I doubt if crows, or jays, or owls ever rob these nests. Phœbe has outwitted them. They never heard of the bird that builded its house upon a rock. "Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock."

The song-sparrow sometimes nests in April, but not commonly in our latitude. Emerson says, in "May-Day":

"The sparrow meek, prophetic-eyed,  
Her nest beside the snow-drift weaves,  
Secure the osier yet will hide  
Her callow brood in mantling leaves."

But the sparrow usually prefers to wait till the snow-drift is gone. I have never found the nest of one till long after the last drift had disappeared from the fields, though a late writer upon New England birds says the sparrow sometimes lays in April, when snow is yet upon the ground.

The sparrow is not a beautiful bird except in our affections and associations, and its eggs are not beautiful as eggs go,—four or five little freckled spheres, that, like the bird itself, blend well with the ground upon which they are replaced.

The eggs of the "chippie," or social sparrow, are probably the most beautiful of sparrow eggs, being of a bright bluish green with a ring of dark purple spots around the larger end.

Generally there is but little relation between the color of the bird and the color of its egg. For the most part the eggs of birds that occupy open, exposed nests are of some tint that harmonizes well with the surroundings. With the addition of specks of various hue they are rendered still less conspicuous. The eggs of the scarlet tanager are greenish blue, with faint brown or purplish markings. The blackbird lays a greenish-blue egg also, with various markings. Indeed, the favorite ground-tint of the birds that build open nests is a greenish blue; sometimes the blue predominates, sometimes the green; while the eggs of birds that build concealed nests, or lay in dark cavities, are generally white, as those of the various woodpeckers, chickadees, and nut-hatches. The eggs of the bluebird are bluish white. Among

the flycatchers, the nest of the phœbe is most concealed, at least from above, and her eggs are white, while those of nearly all the other species are more or less tinted and marked. The eggs of the humming-bird are white, but the dimutiveness of their receptacle is a sufficient concealment. Another white egg is that of the kingfisher, deposited upon fish-bones at the end of a hole in the bank eight or nine feet long. The bank swallow also lays white eggs, as does the chimney swallow, the white-bellied swallow, and the purple martin. The eggs of the barn swallow and cliff swallow are more or less speckled. In England the kingfisher (smaller and much more brilliantly colored than ours), woodpeckers, the bank swallow, the swift, the wry-neck (related to the woodpecker), and the dipper also lay white eggs.

A marked exception to the above rule is furnished by the eggs of the Baltimore oriole, perhaps the most fantastically marked of all our birds' eggs. One would hardly expect a plainly marked egg in such a high-swung, elaborately woven, deeply pouched, aristocratic nest. The threads and strings and horsehairs with which the structure is sewed and bound and stayed are copied in the curious lines and markings of the treasures it holds. After the oriole is through with its nest, it is sometimes taken possession of by the house wren in which to rear its second brood. The long, graceful cavity, with its fine carpet of hair, is filled with coarse twigs, as if one were to build a log hut in a palace, and the rusty-colored eggs of the little busybody are deposited there. The wren would perhaps stick to its bundle of small faggots in the box or pump tree, and rear its second brood in the cradle of the first, were it not that by seeking new lodgings time can be saved. The male bird builds and furnishes the second nest and the mother bird has begun to lay in it before the first is empty.

The chatter of a second brood of nearly fledged wrens is heard now (August 20th) in an oriole's nest suspended from the branch of an apple-tree near where I write. Earlier in the season the parent birds made long and determined attempts to establish themselves in a cavity that had been occupied by a pair of bluebirds. The original proprietor of the place was the downy woodpecker. He

had excavated it the autumn before and had passed the winter there, often to my certain knowledge lying abed till nine o'clock in the morning. In the spring he went elsewhere, probably with a female, to begin the season in new quarters. The bluebirds early took possession, and in June their first brood had flown. The wrens had been hanging around, evidently with an eye on the place (such little comedies may be witnessed anywhere), and now very naturally thought it was their turn. A day or two after the young bluebirds had flown, I noticed some fine, dry grass clinging to the entrance to the cavity; a circumstance which I understood a few moments later, when the wren rushed by me into the cover of a small Norway spruce, hotly pursued by the male bluebird. It was a brown streak and a blue streak pretty close together. The wrens had gone to house-cleaning, and the bluebird had returned to find his bed and bedding being pitched out-of-doors, and had thereupon given the wrens to understand in the most emphatic manner that he had no intention of vacating the premises so early in the season. Day after day, for more than two weeks, the male bluebird had to clear his premises of these intruders. It occupied much of his time and not a little of mine, as I sat with a book in a summer-house near by, laughing at his pretty fury and spiteful onset. On two occasions the wren rushed under the chair in which I sat, and a streak of blue lightning almost flashed in my very face. One day, just as I had passed the tree in which the cavity was placed, I heard the wren scream desperately; turning, I saw the little vagabond fall into the grass with the wrathful bluebird fairly upon him; the latter had returned just in time to catch him, and was evidently bent on punishing him well. But in the squabble in the grass, the wren escaped and took refuge in the friendly evergreen. The bluebird paused for a moment with outstretched wings looking for the fugitive, then flew away. A score of times during the month of June did I see the wren taxing every energy to get away from the bluebird. He would dart into the stone wall, under the floor of the summer-house, into the weeds — anywhere to hide his diminished

head. The bluebird with his bright coat looked like a policeman in uniform in pursuit of some wicked, rusty little street gamin. Generally the favorite house of refuge of the wrens was the little spruce, into which their pursuer made no attempt to follow them. The female would sit concealed amid the branches, chattering in a scolding, fretful way, while the male, with his eye upon his tormentor, would perch on the topmost shoot and sing. Why he sang at such times, whether in triumph and derision, or to keep his courage up and reassure his mate, I could not make out. When his song was suddenly cut short and I glanced to see him dart down into the spruce, my eye usually caught a twinkle of blue wings hovering near. The wrens finally gave up the fight, and their enemies reared their second brood in peace.

That the wren should use such coarse, refractory materials, especially since it builds in holes where twigs are so awkward to carry and adjust, is curious enough. All its congeners, the marsh wrens, the Carolina wren, the winter wren, build of soft flexible materials. The nest of the winter wren and of the English "Jenny wren," is mainly of moss, and is a marvel of softness and warmth.

One day a swarm of honey-bees went into my chimney, and I mounted the stack to see into which flue they had gone. As I craned my neck above the sooty vent, with the bees humming about my ears, the first thing my eye rested upon in the black interior was two long white pearls upon a little shelf of twigs, the nest of the chimney swallow, or swift, — honey, soot, and birds' eggs closely associated. The bees, though in an unused flue, soon found the gas of anthracite that hovered about the top of the chimney too much for them, and they left. But the swallows are not repelled by smoke. They seem to have entirely abandoned their former nesting-places in hollow trees and stumps and to frequent only chimneys. A tireless bird, never perching, all day upon the wing, and probably capable of flying one thousand miles in twenty-four hours. They do not even stop to gather materials for their nests, but snap off the small dry twigs from the tree-tops as they fly by. Confine one of these swallows to a room and it will not perch, but after flying till it becomes bewildered and



Scarlet Tanager.



Kingbird.



Baltimore Oriole.



Bluebird.



Chimney Swallow.



Barn Swallow.



Chickadee.

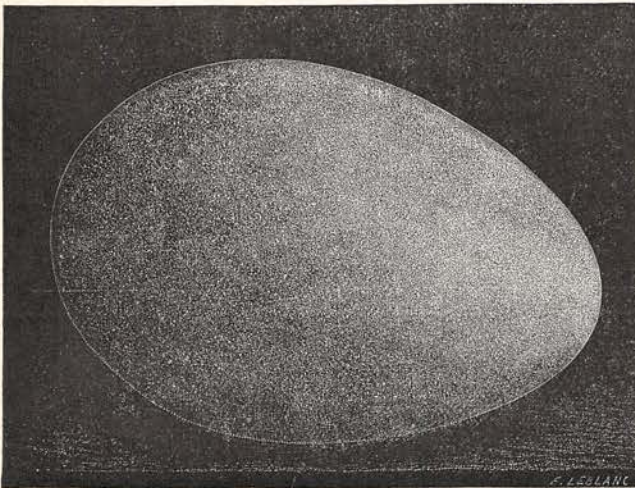


Golden-crowned Thrush.

exhausted, it clings to the side of the wall till it dies. I once found one in my room on returning after several days' absence, in which life seemed nearly extinct; its feet grasped my finger as I removed it from the wall, but its eyes closed and it seemed about on the point of joining its companion which lay dead upon the floor. Tossing it into the air, however, seemed to awaken its wonderful powers of flight, and away it went straight toward the clouds. On the wing the chimney swallow looks like an athlete stripped for the race. There is the least appearance of quill and plumage of any of our birds, and with all its speed and marvelous evolutions the effect of its flight is stiff and wiry. There appears to be but one joint in the wing, and that next the body. This peculiar inflexible motion of the wings, as if they were little sickles of sheet iron, seems to be owing to the length and development of the primary quills and the smallness of the secondary. The wing appears to hinge only at the wrist. The barn swallow lines its rude masonry with feathers, but the swift begins life on bare twigs, glued together by a glue of home manufacture as adhesive as Spaulding's.

I have wondered if Emerson referred to any particular bird in these lines from "The Problem:"

"Know'st thou what wove yon wood-bird's nest  
Of leaves, and feathers from her breast?"



Eider-duck.

Probably not, but simply availed himself of the general belief that certain birds or fowls line their nests with their own feathers. This is notably true of the eider-duck, and in a measure of our domestic fowls, but so far as I know is not true of any of our small birds. The barn swallow and house wren feather their nests at the expense of the hens and geese. The winter wren picks up the feathers of the ruffed grouse. The chickadee, Emerson's favorite bird, uses a few feathers in its upholstering, but not its own. In England, I noticed that the little willow warbler makes a free use of feathers from the poultry-yard. Many of our birds use hair in their nests, and the kingbird and cedar-bird like wool. I have found a single feather of the bird's own in the nest of the phoebe. Such a circumstance would perhaps justify the poet.

About the first of June there is a nest in the woods upon the ground with four creamy white eggs in it spotted with brown or lilac, chiefly about the larger ends, that always gives the walker who is so lucky as to find it a thrill of pleasure. It is like a ground-sparrow's nest with a roof or canopy to it. The little brown or olive-backed bird starts away from your feet and runs swiftly and almost silently over the dry leaves, and then turns her speckled breast to see if you are following. She walks very prettily, by far the prettiest pedestrian in the woods. But if she thinks you have discovered her secret, she feigns lameness and disability of both legs and wing, to decoy you into the pursuit of her. This is the golden-crowned thrush, or accentor, a strictly wood-bird, about the size of a song-sparrow, with the dullest of gold upon his crown, but the brightest of songs in his heart. The last nest of this bird I found was while in quest of the pink cypripedium. I suddenly spied a couple of the flowers a few steps from the path along which I was walking, and had stooped to admire them, when out sprang the bird from beside them, doubtless thinking she



High-hole.



Whip-poor-will.

was the subject of observation instead of the flowers that swung their purple bells but a foot or two above her. But I never should have seen her had she kept her place. She had found a rent in the matted carpet of dry leaves and pine needles that covered the ground, and into this had insinuated her nest, the leaves and needles forming a canopy above it, sloping to the south and west, the source of the more frequent summer rains.

At about the same time one finds the nest above described, if he were to explore the woods very thoroughly, he might chance upon two curious eggs lying upon the leaves as if dropped there by chance. They are elliptical, both ends of a size, about an inch and a quarter long, of a creamy white spotted with lavender. These are the eggs of the whip-poor-will, a bird that has absolutely no architectural instincts or gifts. Perhaps its wide, awkward mouth and short beak are ill adapted to carrying nest materials. They are awkward upon the ground and awkward upon the tree,



Cedar-bird.

being unable to perch upon a limb, except lengthwise of it.

The song and game birds lay pointed eggs, but the night birds lay round or elliptical eggs.

The egg-collector sometimes stimulates a bird to lay an unusual number of eggs. A youth, whose truthfulness I do not doubt, told me he once induced a high-hole to lay twenty-nine eggs, by robbing her of an egg each day. The eggs became smaller and smaller, till the twenty-ninth one was only the size of a chippie's egg. At this point the bird gave up the contest.

There is a last egg of summer as well as a first egg of spring, but one cannot name either with much confidence. Both the robin and the chippie sometimes rear a third brood in August, but the birds that delay their nesting till midsummer are the goldfinch and the cedar-bird, the former waiting for the thistle to ripen its seeds, and the latter probably for the appearance of certain insects which it takes on the wing. Often the cedar-bird does

not build till August, and will line its nest with wool if it can get it, even in this sultry month. The eggs are marked and colored as if a white egg were to be spotted with brown, then colored a pale blue, then again sharply dotted or blotched with blackish or purplish spots.

But the most common August nest with me—early August—is that of the American goldfinch, better known as the yellow-bird,—a deep, snug, compact nest, with no loose ends hanging, placed in the fork of a small limb of an apple-tree, peach-tree, or ornamental shade-tree. The eggs are a faint bluish-white. While the female is sitting, the male feeds her regularly. She calls to him on his approach, or when she hears his voice passing by, in the most affectionate, feminine, child-



Nest of Humming-bird.

like tones, the only case I know of where the sitting bird makes any sound while in the act of incubation. When a rival male invades the tree, or approaches too near, the male whose nest it holds pursues and reasons or expostulates with him in the same bright, amicable, confiding tones. Indeed, most birds make use of their sweetest notes in war. The song of love is the song of battle too. The male yellow-birds flit about from point to point, apparently assuring each other of the highest sentiments of esteem and consideration, at the same time that one intimates to the other that he is carrying his joke a little too far. It has the effect of saying with pleased and happy surprise, "Why, my dear sir, this is my territory, you surely do not mean to trespass; permit me to salute you, and to escort you over the line." Yet the intruder does not always take the hint. Occasionally the couple have



Yellow Warbler.

a brief sparring match in the air, and mount up and up, beak to beak, to a considerable height, but rarely do they actually come to blows.

The yellow-bird becomes active and con-

spicuous after the other birds have nearly all withdrawn from the stage and become silent, their broods reared and flown. August is his month, his festive season. It is his turn now. The thistles are ripening their seeds, and his nest is undisturbed by jay-bird or crow. He is the first bird I hear in the morning, circling and swinging through the air in that peculiar undulating flight, and calling out on the downward curve of each stroke, "Here we go, here we go!" Every hour in the day he indulges in this circling, billowy flight. It is a part of his musical performance. His course at such times is a deeply undulating line, like the long gentle roll of the summer sea, the distance from crest to crest or from valley to valley being probably thirty feet; this distance is made with but one brief beating of the wings on the downward curve. As he quickly opens them they give him a strong

upward impulse, and he describes the long arc with them closely folded. Thus falling and recovering, rising and sinking like dolphins in the sea, he courses through the summer air. In marked contrast to this feat is his manner of flying when he indulges in a brief outburst of song in the air. Now he flies level, with broad expanded wings nearly as round and as concave as two shells, which beat the air slowly. The song is the chief matter now, and the wings are used only to keep him afloat while delivering it. In the other case the flight is the main concern, and the voice merely punctuates it.

I know no autumn egg but a hen's egg, though a certain old farmer tells me he finds a quail's nest full of eggs nearly every September; but fall progeny of any kind has a belated start in life, and the chances are against it.

*John Burroughs.*

[The illustrations in this article are all made from eggs in the collection of North American birds' eggs, belonging to Robert R. Brown, Esq., New York City.—EDITOR.]

## THE HOTEL EXPERIENCE OF MR. PINK FLUKER.

### I.



"FOOL WHO?"

MR. PETERSON FLUKER, generally called Pink, for his fondness for as stylish dressing as he could afford, was one of that sort of men who habitually seem busy and efficient when they are not. He had the bustling activity often noticeable in men of his size, and in one way and another had made up, as he believed, for being so much smaller than most of his adult acquaintance of the male sex. Prominent among his achievements on that line was getting married to a woman who, among other excellent gifts, had that of being twice as big as her husband.

"Fool who?" on the day after his marriage he had asked, with a look at those who had often said that he was too little to have a wife.

They had a little property to begin with, a couple of hundreds of acres, and two or three negroes apiece. Yet, except in the natural increase of the latter, the accretions of worldly estate had been inconsiderable till now, when their oldest child, Marann, was some fifteen years old. These accretions had been saved and taken care of by Mrs. Fluker, who was as staid and silent as he was mobile and voluble.

Mr. Fluker often said that it puzzled him how it was that he made smaller crops than most of his neighbors, when, if not always convincing, he could generally put every one of them to silence in discussions upon agricultural topics. This puzzle had led him to not unfrequent ruminations in his mind as to whether or not his vocation might lie in something higher than the mere tilling of the ground. These ruminations

had lately taken a definite direction, and it was after several conversations which he had held with his friend Matt Pike.

Mr. Matt Pike was a bachelor of some thirty summers, a foretime clerk consecutively in each of the two stores of the village, but latterly a trader on a limited scale in horses, wagons, cows, and similar objects of commerce, and at all times a politician. His hopes of holding office had been continually disappointed until Mr. John Sanks became sheriff, and