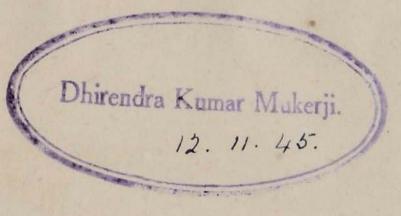
A BOOK OF COMMON BIRDS

EDMUND SANDARS

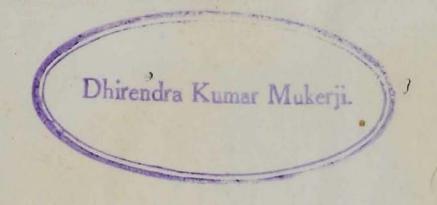




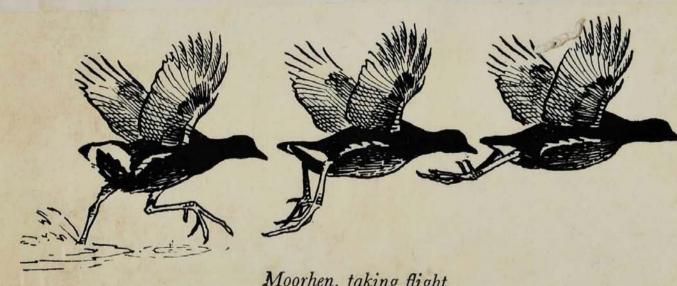








A BOOK OF COMMON BIRDS



Moorhen, taking flight



DHIRENDRA-KUMAR MUKERJI. 12.11: 45.

A BOOK OF COMMON BIRDS

Written and Illustrated by

EDMUND SANDARS



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THE BIRDS

The idea of this book is to tell you something about the commonest of the birds which you are likely to see in this country if you look about you. Very often you can tell from the shape, flight, or habits of a bird that it belongs to a certain family, long before you can-name it properly. This little book tries to point out the differences between the families. There are a few birds which are very common and yet have no near relations here, so I cannot speak of their families and have grouped them together at the end.

Before turning to the different families, there are a few

things which you ought to know about all birds.

Birds have four limbs like ourselves, and, again like ourselves, they walk, run, or hop upon two of them only. The fore limbs, which are our arms, are the bird's wings and they are used wholly for flight. Birds have their bodies and wings covered with feathers in place of the hairs which are found on all other animals, and their feathers make a warm coat for their bodies. Upon their wings and tails the feathers grow stiff and long and make the spreading surfaces which enable them to fly through the air and steer themselves. If you look at a Sparrow on a hot summer day, and again in the snows of winter, you will hardly recognize him for the same bird. This is not because of any change of colour, but because in summer he lays his feathers down flat so that they make a thin coat, while in winter he fluffs them out so that they are like the warmest and thickest fur coat you could imagine. This gives you some idea of the usefulness of feathers as a garment. They suit all weathers.

Birds have no teeth and no soft lips, such as we, and all the animals, have. They have beaks instead, which are hard, horny mouths with which to bite and tear their food.

They all lay eggs, and the mother sits upon them after they are laid, giving them the warmth of her body until the

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young birds are developed, when with a blow of their little beaks, they break the eggshells and come out. Often the father takes his turn at hatching the eggs, and, even if he does not do this, he usually brings food to his mate while she is sitting on them.

When the young are hatched they can sometimes feed themselves, as chickens can, but more often they are naked and able only to open their mouths. When this is the case, one of the parents has to keep them warm by sitting on them and to go out to get them food. In this also the father is usually helpful.

Many birds build nests and in the complicated weaving together of sticks, or grasses, which is needed for the building, they use their beaks only, never their feet. Almost all our small birds are what are known as "Perching Birds," because when they rest on the twigs of trees, they grip the small branches with their feet, and they usually sleep perched with their heads tucked under their wings as you have seen a Canary do on his perch. Most of the perching birds hop instead of walking, while all the other kinds run or walk.

There is often a distinct difference between the colouring of a male bird and his mate, though this is not always the case. Most of the pictures in books (including those I have made for this one) show the colouring of the males in spring, for that is the time when it is easiest to see the differences between the birds. The males differ more than the females. If you saw a series of pictures of the females in winter, you would find it much harder to tell them apart. You would think that almost all were just little brown birds. There is a good reason for this because it is more important that the hen birds, who have to sit still for days upon their eggs and young birds, should not be too easily seen by their enemies. So it is a safe general rule to say that, when there is any difference between the males and the females, the females are dressed in quieter colours. The males can afford

fine peace time uniforms, while the females must be content with khaki.

The voices of birds are sometimes wonderfully musical and beautiful, and once you have heard the waking chorus of songsters on a May morning at sunrise, you will never forget it. Some people will tell you that the most conspicuously coloured birds are not singers, but you will doubt this when you remember that the most beautiful singer we have and, without doubt, the most easily seen of all our birds, is the Blackbird.

Of one side of bird life much is said later in this book and that is Migration. What it means is this: nearly all birds take two long journeys every year. In the autumn they go from the places where they build their nests and spend the summer to warmer lands where they spend the winter, coming back to their homes in the following spring. Some of the facts about this wonderful travelling habit will be found in what I have said about the Thrush family and the Cuckoo.

In most of the pictures I have painted for this book one bird is drawn as large as was convenient for our page, with its name under it in CAPITAL letters, and others usually smaller (as if they were further away) round about it on the same page. When they are drawn smaller, their names are in smaller type.



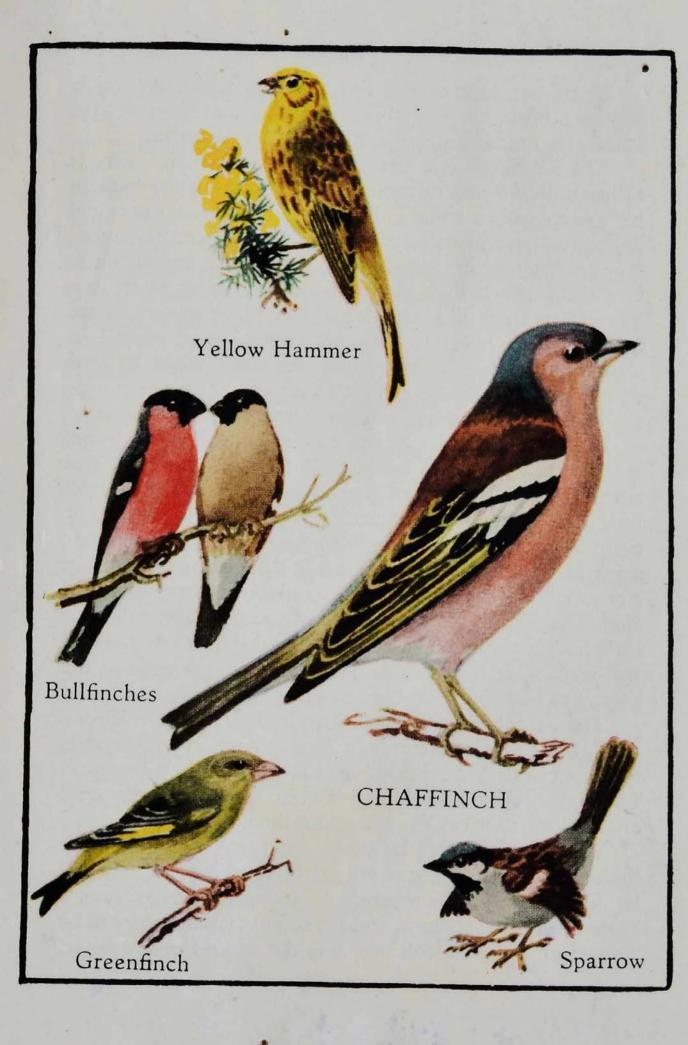
THE FINCHES

There are eighteen birds in this country which belong to this family or are very near relations. They are all about the same size as the Sparrow, who is one of them. Their beaks are broad and strong near the head. This strength and toughness make them perfect tools for cracking hard seeds, or for biting into the cases which hold the hips and haws of our hedgerows. A little bird which only eats spiders, gnats, or flies, can do so with a soft delicate beak, but this would make poor work of a ripe grain of wheat or a hard-cased seed. Hence the strong hard beaks of the Finches. By their noses you shall know them.

They eat, then, mainly seeds, but also insects, and their young are almost wholly fed upon insects or worms. The search for food takes them much to the ground, as well as to the twigs of shrubs and trees. On the ground they hop, and in the trees they perch, with the one hind toe bent under the twig so as to grip it and meet the other three. Their legs are made so that when their breasts sink down upon their feet, the claws remain closed. In this way they can sleep

without making any effort to hold on to the perch.

Finches differ much in colour. In some the males are like their wives, in others quite unlike. One or two are accomplished singers, others mere chirpers. All build skilfully made nests, though, while some are jewel-cases of neatness, one at least (the Sparrow's) is untidy and, unlike the others, is covered over and has a side entrance. Most of the Finches are travellers and migrate in the spring and autumn, but all our common kinds are called residents, because some of each kind are here both in winter and summer. All lay from three to six eggs at least twice in the year, and the Sparrow may lay as many as 11 eggs and bring up four broods a year. In the autumn most of the Finches flock together and go about in large numbers to look for food.



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There are four of the Finch family which are really common birds all over this country: the Sparrow, the Chaffinch, the Greenfinch and the Yellow Hammer.

The Chaffinch is a beautiful little bird. The hen is rather dull and unnoticeable, except for the white bars on her greeny-brown wings. But the cock wears a smart and dapper uniform of delicate colours. In the summer, when they are bringing up their broods, their food consists chiefly of insects, which they catch on the ground or in the air. Their nests are built in the fork of a shrub or tree, or on the top of a level bough. They are covered with moss held together with spiders' webs and are often made to look exactly like the branch on which they lie. These tiny cups are lined with horsehair and are extremely beautiful.

But the great pride of the cock Chaffinch is his song. He sits on a favourite bough, not far from the nest, and never tires, all day long, of repeating his joyous and cheerful little tune. There is a short silence and then he sings it again, always the same, a perfectly finished song. He never stops in the middle, as some birds do; he never puts in any unmusical squawks; and he never goes rambling on aimlessly. From February to June you may see his bright little body pouring out his lovely song. He is not shy and will readily get used to coming on to your tea table in the garden to gather any crumbs you may offer him.

The Greenfinch is a much shyer bird and has no true song at all, but a single, tiresome, trilling, whistle, which sounds to some people like "Poo-i" and to others like "Tsweee." Its food is mainly seeds and it even feeds its young ones on seeds which it has chewed up for them.

Your attention will be drawn to the Yellow Hammer by his song, and then you will see him at his best. He will be perched up on the top twig of a roadside hedge, or of a gorse bush, near his nest, and his bright yellow head will be thrown up so as to look very like the flowers of the gorse. His song is short, and we are told that it sounds like the words "A little bit of bread and no cheese." Until the last word of the song, which is louder and higher pitched than the rest, the whole is made up of a hurried, tinkling, chatter rather like the rattling together of broken glass. Then comes the long-drawn high note of the "cheese," which lasts as long as all the rest of the song. He will repeat this single short phrase, with brief intervals of silence, for hours, from the middle of February till the end of August. His mate is much less bright, and her head is a dull olive green. The Yellow Hammer is rather a mournful looking bird, inclined to droop its wings and tail and dangle its legs when flying. Except in summer, when they have to get insects for their young, they stay nearly all the time on the ground, on which (or very near it) their nest is built.

The Sparrows you must study for yourself. They will always be near your home, or wherever corn is stored, or wherever grain is scattered to hens. Where there are no men, there are no Sparrows, for they depend on getting much of their food at our expense. They do much harm in eating our corn, but they help us by eating insects, on which they also feed their young. I have seen a cock Sparrow in a London parking place who had found out that motors often had dead insects caught in their radiators, and he was flying up to pick them out when the cars stopped!

One other Finch which is not nearly so common, but which may be seen in woods, orchards, and thickets, all over the country, is the Bullfinch. Both male and female sing a soft, low, flute-like, song. They mate for life. They are not sociable, but live alone in couples. The couple are always together and they kiss. The hen birds have brown breasts instead of the wine-red waistcoats of the cocks. They eat buds and seeds as well as insects, take heavy toll of our fruit, and chew seeds for their young.

THRUSHES AND BLACKBIRDS

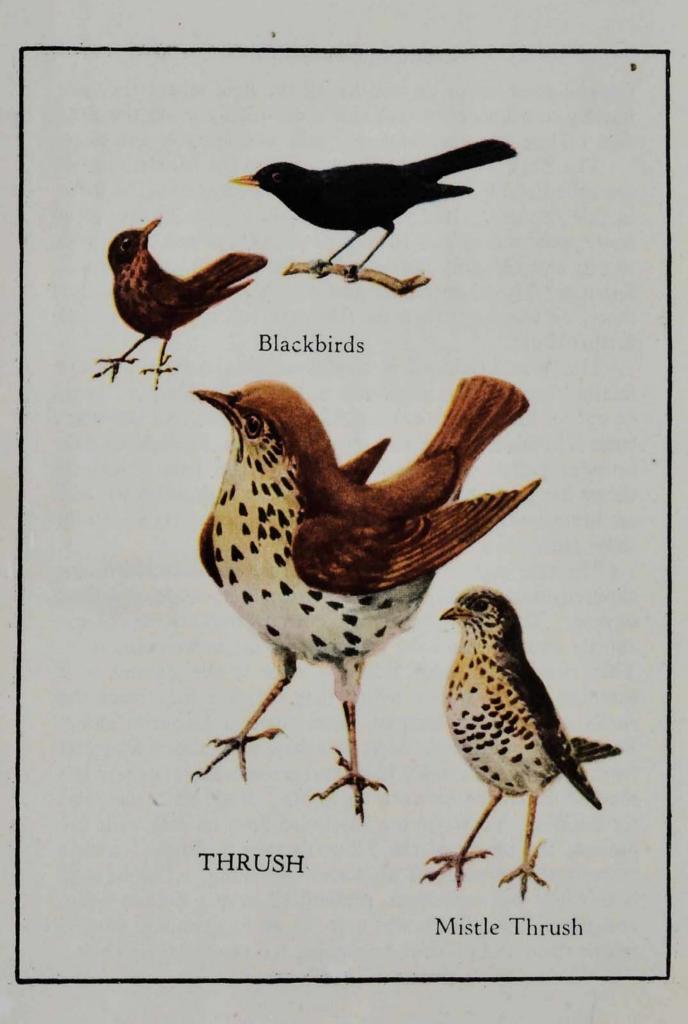
UNDER this title I include the larger members of the Thrush family. There are other smaller birds which are classed as Thrushes, but they will have a separate chapter.

There are six of these large Thrushes and the first thing to learn about them all, large and small, is that they are what are called migrants. This means that they do not spend the summer and the winter in the same place. Each pair of birds nests in the summer in the district where it was born, and, when autumn comes, they move southwards, or westwards, to a warmer climate where they spend the winter. You will notice that the two birds which are the commonest with us—the Song Thrush and the Blackbird—are found all over this country in winter as well as in summer. But the Thrush you see in January is rarely the same Thrush which you saw nesting, or heard singing, in May. That one has gone south, and its place is taken by another who nested further north.

One of these large birds, the Ring Ouzel, is called a summer visitor, for it leaves us in winter, and, as it is rarely seen except in mountain districts, I shall not speak of it again. Others are called winter visitors, like the Fieldfare and Redwing, which nest in the far north and only come to us in winter.

The Redwing looks just like a common Thrush except when flying, as only then can the orange red under its wings be seen. Just after they come to us in September you will perhaps notice that flocks of Thrushes are of this kind. They leave us in May, before they begin to sing, which they do only in their nesting places in Norway or other northern lands.

The Fieldfare is a larger, grey-headed Thrush and also comes to us in flocks only for the winter. You will see them best when walking along a country road. As you go, a



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flock of some 30 or 40 will fly off the field where they are feeding to a hedgerow tree and then will fly on to the next one. They are very shy and will not let you get near. The Song Thrush, the Blackbird and the Mistle Thrush

The Song Thrush, the Blackbird and the Mistle Thrush are called residents because there are always some of them in this country. In Spain they think of the Thrush as a winter migrant, or as a bird of passage: a silent bird, good to eat, and certainly not as a "Song" Thrush, because in Spain our Thrushes neither nest nor sing, but merely winter there, or travel through on their way to and from places further south.

The cock Blackbird is totally unlike the others of the family because, true to his name, he is pure black all over, except for his orange beak and his golden eye. All the other large Thrushes are brown, or grey brown, birds with pale breasts spotted with dark feathers. The hen Blackbird shows her kinship with the others as she is dark brown and on her slightly paler breast the dark spots of the family show out.

The two common birds, the Thrush and Blackbird, are close cousins. Few gardens are without them at any time of year. Though so constantly about us, they are never tame and fly away with a loud squawk as soon as we come near. They bend their heads sideways close to the ground as if listening for the worms which they eat, and they crack the shells of snails by banging them upon a favourite stone. Both birds build their nests at a height of about four feet from the ground, usually in an evergreen bush, but there is a marked difference between the nests. Both birds use mud for building, but while the Blackbird lines its nest with dry grasses, the inside of the Thrush's nest is finished with a smooth plaster made of mud and cow-dung. The hens of both birds will sometimes pretend to have a broken wing, and flutter away from the nest so as to persuade you to follow them and prevent your going too near to their young.

Thrushes and Blackbirds

They both bring up two or three broods a year. They feed mainly upon insects, worms and snails, but they also eat so much of our fruit that we have to put up nets to protect it.

Both birds are famous for the great beauty of their song, which is clear, musical, and varied. The songs are much alike, but that of the Blackbird is the finer of the two. Many people think that it is the most beautiful of all our bird songs. At first you will not know them apart, but you will be sure that the singer is either a Thrush or a Blackbird. One thing that will help you is that the Thrush keeps repeating a short phrase which sounds like the words "Did he do it?" Another is that he sings again in the autumn, while the Blackbird sings only in the spring.

The Mistle Thrush is a larger bird than the Song Thrush and stands more upright when on the ground. The arrangement of the black spots on his chest is different and he is much wilder, and rarely seen near our houses except when nesting. It is strange that so shy a bird should often nest in the forked branches of a tree, close to a building. The cock's fine, low-pitched song is heard chiefly in autumn and

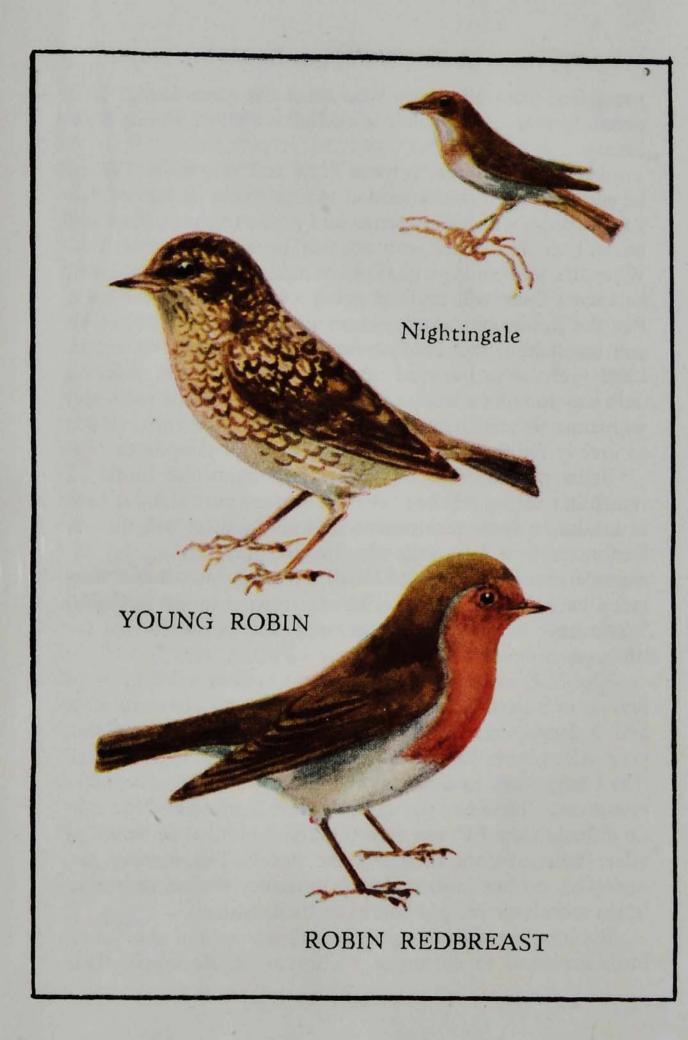
winter.

THE SMALLER BIRDS OF THE THRUSH FAMILY

Only one of these little birds is common in this country. He is, however, so constantly about us, so unmistakable, and so unlike any other bird in his manners as well as his dress, that, even if he had no relations, he would deserve a chapter to himself.

Robin Redbreast-you may call him by his full name or by either part of it-is, as you all know from Christmas cards, with us in the winter snows as well as in the summer. Like all the Thrushes, he is a traveller and many Robins which come here in the spring go abroad to the south for the winter. More than all other birds he knows the pride of the landowner. Every pair of Robins has a plot of ground which belongs to it and on to which no other Robin may trespass without an immediate and fierce attack by the If there is more than one pair of Robins in your garden, you will be able to make a map of the exact boundaries which divide their estates by watching the fights which take place whenever one oversteps its own bounds. the winter the two birds dissolve partnership and divide the estate between them. He or she (they look just alike) will as surely chase the other out as they chased strangers from their household grounds in the summer. If you feed crumbs at a bird-table in winter, as I hope you do, only one Robin will feed at it without a fight. No stranger, mate, or child, will be allowed to take a mouthful.

They are fierce and quarrelsome little fellows and will often try to drive away other birds, but their attacks on other kinds of birds are not half so fierce as their attacks upon other Robins. Some people say that all birds are like this. It is clear that birds which have to get food for a hungry family are saved time and trouble if there is a space round their



nests free from all others who want the same food. It is certainly true of many birds and above all of Robin Redbreast.

The Robin is quite fearless of us and very wise. When he sees you go into the garden with a spade he knows that your digging will bring worms and grubs to the surface and he will sit and watch you so that he can pick them up. When he sees you picnicking, or taking tea on the lawn, he knows there will be food going and is soon on the spot. But the Robin very rarely allows liberties. He will not let you touch him, and keeps carefully just out of your reach. Lord Grey, who knew so much about birds, said that the only way to tame a Robin so that he forgets all his rules and will come to your hand is to give him meal worms. He is so greedy for these that he throws away all prudence.

Some people seem to have a fascination for birds. I remember seeing a Somerset farm worker pass along a road at his lunch hour and hearing him give a short whistle. A Redbreast flew out from the hedge and, settling on his shoulder, took a crumb of bread from his mouth and hastened back to the hedge. The man turned to me and said, "You have never seen that before! He has done that for

three years now!"

The Robins build their nest in a hole in a bank, or in ivy, or in a garden flower pot. It is not an elaborate nest and is largely made up of dead leaves and moss. Some very odd places have been chosen. The strangest of all that I know was the open tray behind the steering wheel of a motor car. Here five young birds were hatched and brought up although the car was driven daily. In all they travelled 1,200 miles, before they left the nest! The mother sat, unruffled, on her journeys, and the father waited with food in his mouth to feed his family on their return.

Robins raise two or three broods a year and the young birds are hard to recognise. They are quite unlike their

Smaller Birds of the Thrush Family

parents, being speckled, brown birds, whose loose, untidy feathers make them look bigger than their elders. You might think that they were young Song Thrushes. Watch for yourself the perky, alert, quick, swaggering movements of the Redbreast, and his bobbings and swayings when posing before his mate. His song will give you pleasure all through the year. Except during August while they are moulting, there is no time when Robins do not sing and, what is most unusual among birds, the hen sings as well as the cock. At least she does so in the winter when she has her own separate estate to defend. Certainly in this case the reason for the song is to warn other birds off her bit of garden. The song is clear and beautiful, though not so loud as that of the Thrush or Blackbird. It is almost the only real song we hear in mid-winter.

There is one other of the small Thrushes that must be mentioned, a summer visitor to the south and east of England only: the Nightingale. You will probably never see him. He is very shy and spends almost all his time in the densest cover of copse or thickset woodland tangles. If you do see him, you will not find him interesting, or take him for anything but a dull little brown bird. His wonderful, ever changing, liquid song, the keen, gurgling energy of which has earned him admiration all over Europe and much of Asia, you may hear broadcast from a radio set, but, unless you are led, at night, to some favoured place in the south of England you are unlikely to hear it from his own throat in this country. When you have heard the Nightingale, even broadcasting, you will know his notes from those of any other bird. He does sing both by day and night, but as most birds do not sing after dark, he then has the stage to himself, and marvellously does he make use of it.

THE TITS

To many of us one of our earliest memories is that of the day when a schoolfellow called us mysteriously aside, led us into the orchard, and lifted us up to some twisted trunk and told us to peep into a small hole. Down the hole, at a short distance from the entrance, could be seen two brilliant sparks—the light reflected from two eyes—and, when our eager face went too near, or a finger was poked into the tiny hole, a loud hiss was heard and our curiosity was turned to alarm. The owner of this hole was a Blue Tit.

Later we learned that Tits' nests are built in any convenient hole, which they line with moss to make it soft and comfortable. This is why they are special favourites with people who put nesting boxes into their gardens. At the Museum in South Kensington there is a letter box which was used for three years by a pair of these birds who nested in it. Each year it was filled nearly to the brim with moss and grass after their nest of the previous year had been taken away.

The eggs of all the Tits are very small. They are pure white flecked with little russet specks, and ten or a dozen are hatched at a time. Sometimes twenty eggs have been found, but this is because two birds had laid in the same nest. The cock bird always helps his mate to build the nest, and, though he does not share the work of hatching the eggs and keeping the young warm, he feeds the hen while she is sitting on the eggs and helps her to feed the young. Usually they have only one brood in the year. After they have left the nest, the little ones may be seen perching in a row on a branch while their parents feed them, and a pretty sight it is. They stay with the old birds until the next spring.

All the members of the Tit family are very much alike in their shape and their movements. If you see a very small bird, like a little round ball of fluff, hanging upside down



A Book of Common Birds

from a tree, and hunting for insects with quick, lively movements, you can say "That's a Tit," but you will not know which Tit it is, until you can see the colour.

Beside the Blue Tit, there are four other Tits which you are likely to see. The Long-Tailed Tit has the smallest body of any of our birds, although, as you might guess from his name, he has a very long tail. The biggest of the Tits is the Great Tit, who has a black shirt-front showing between the sides of his yellow waistcoat. His habits are not nice. He has a powerful beak and will kill any smaller bird whom he can master and then feast on its brains. There are two smaller black-headed Tits, the Coal Tit and the Marsh Tit. These are very much alike except for one thing. The Coal Tit has a white patch on the back of his neck, and the Marsh Tit has not. But it is hard to remember which is which.

One thing about the Tits is unusual. They are among the very few birds which spend the summer and winter in the same place. Most birds make two journeys in the year, going southwards in the autumn to a warmer climate for the winter, and northwards in the spring to a cooler climate for the summer. These journeys are called migrations. The Tits do not migrate. When the winter comes, and all the business of laying their eggs and bringing up their young is over for the year, they do not travel southwards. They collect into quite large flocks, often in company with other small birds, and go to the woods. There they fly hurriedly from tree to tree, in a tireless search for food, but they do not go far from their birthplace and, when the spring comes again, they are on the spot to seek their mates and nesting places.

Their small busy "Zee-zee-zeeing" voices are hard to distinguish from each other unless you know them well, but the Great Tit's voice is easy to recognise. He keeps on saying, over and over again, what sounds like the one word:

The Tits

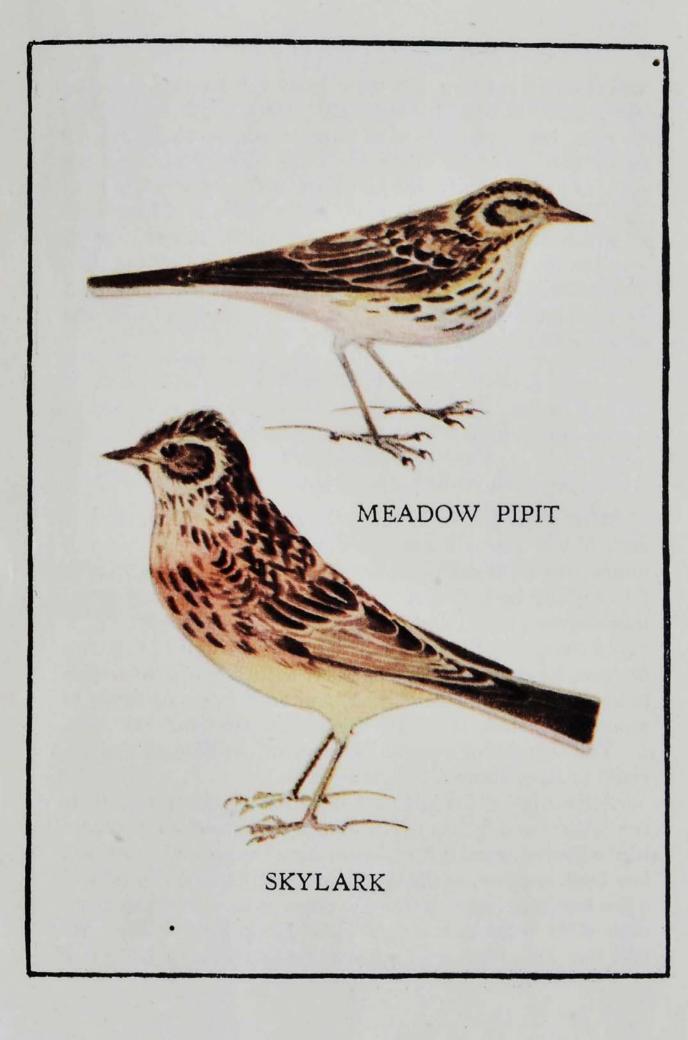
"Teacher, Teacher." This sounds rather like sawing wood.

Throughout the year the Tits will eat almost anything, particularly those insects which do much harm to our trees. They also eat buds and fruit, which does not please the gardener. In the winter, like many other creatures, they have a great craving for fats. People who kindly feed the birds in their gardens know that if they hang up by a string a half coconut full of butter or lard, so that it dangles upside down, it will be the Tits which will come and empty it. They alone can take up the acrobatic positions which are needed to get at the fat.

THE LARKS AND PIPITS

PERHAPS more poetry has been written about the Skylark than about any other bird. This is not due to his looks or to any strange or interesting habits. Skylarks, and their relations the Pipits, are rather unnoticeable little birds of a dull brown, with cream coloured breasts spotted with a few dark marks. They look much alike and most of them live on the ground. They all nest upon the ground, making a slight grass nest in a shallow scratching either in open ploughed land, or meadow, or heather, where 3 to 6 eggs are laid, and two, or sometimes three, broods are brought up each year. They run instead of hop, and, with their sharp pointed beaks, gather their food, which consists chiefly of insects, worms, spiders, and, later in the year, small seeds of weeds and the leaves of turnips or other roots. When they are doing this we do not often see them. A short flight from beneath your feet when you cross a root field is about all you will see, and, when you do see them, the sharp pointed wings are all that will catch your eye. Sometimes you will see them dust-bathing on a country lane and you may notice the brown feathers of the forehead cocked up in a perky little crest. If so, the bird will probably be a Skylark. If not, it will be the much commoner Meadow Pipit or Titlark. They are seen so little that it is hard to believe that there are more Meadow Pipits in this country than there are Sparrows. None of these birds is seen in towns or villages except when severe winter frosts drive them to the neighbourhood of man in search of food. If the dull little bird is perched upon a tree or bush it is probably a Tree Pipit, or if by a rocky sea coast, a Rock Pipit. In any case you may well say "Why all this talk about poetry?" And then something happens which makes you understand.

Out from the green young wheat in spring, or from the stubbles in autumn, the long pointed wings of a Skylark



will rise and the slim, fan-tailed body will soar up, pouring out a clear, earnest, trilling song. Up and yet still higher he rises, his rippling flood of sweet music becoming fainter as he goes, but still filling the clear country air with his carol of joy and gladness—his praise of God who made him, and gave him strength to soar, and a home and happiness of which to sing. Still further he mounts, almost straight into the sky, until you can hardly see him, but all the time you, and his grateful mate, listening from the earth, can still hear his unbroken melody. Then you understand why one of our poets wrote:

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

After many golden minutes, the notes change in character and, if you can still see the quivering songster, you will notice that he is sailing down with wings outspread, as he falls rapidly back to earth. The song ends abruptly as he touches the ground and disappears from your sight.

In the spring time you may be lucky enough to hear two or three Skylarks singing together, each seeming to rise as soon as he hears his neighbour, and each flying up again to

repeat his melody soon after his return to earth.

This wonderful song is the glory of the Skylark and his claim to fame above all his fellows.

After him, the Pipits are only poor performers, their songs short and feeble. The Meadow Pipit—the only other bird which is common here—rises from the ground, or from a low bush or stone, to the height of a small tree and produces a few pleasant, but rather tinny, notes as he sails down again with wide outspread wings. The Rock Pipit is like him, and the Tree Pipit does much the same from a hedgerow

The Larks and Pipits

and finishes his canary-like ditty from a favourite perch on a tree.

Tree Pipits, alone of the family, are not to be found in this country in the winter. They collect together into flocks about the end of September and leave us to spend the winter in the south. They do not come back until late in April.

The Skylark and the other two Pipits are also great travellers. Large flocks pass across this country, while some come to us in the spring and leave us in the autumn, and others come to us in the autumn and leave us in the spring. Some of them, either from the north or from the south, are with us at all times of the year, and from the end of January to November the Skylark's song may be heard, except during August when the birds are moulting.

The males do not build the nests or sit on the eggs, but they help by bringing materials to the hens for building, and by feeding them while sitting. They also help to feed

the young birds all through the spring and summer.

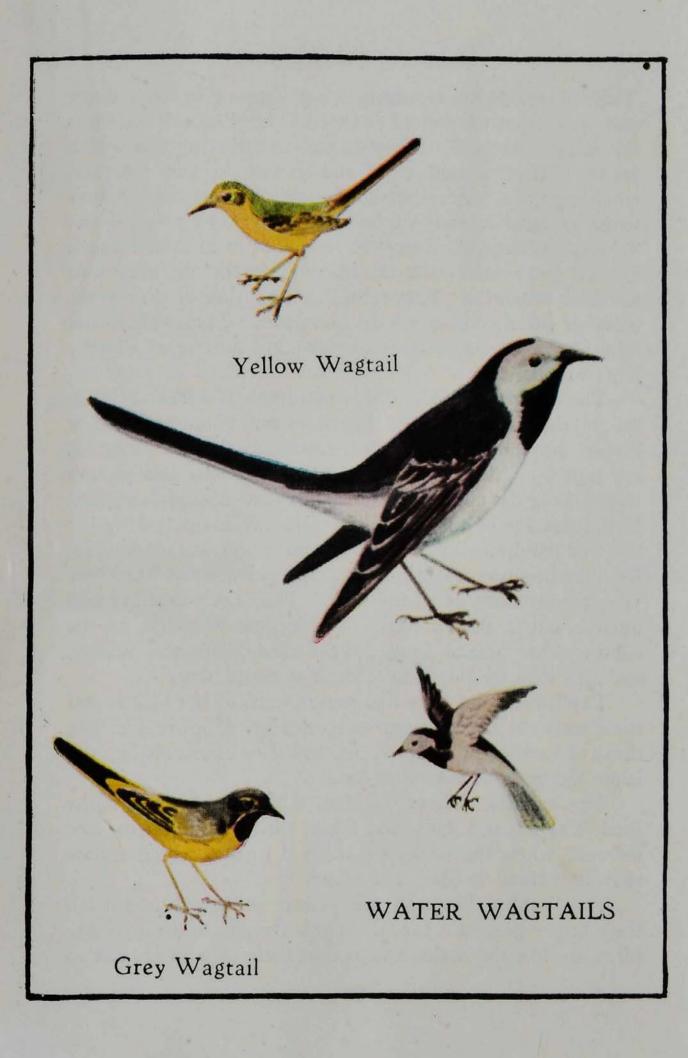
THE WAGTAILS

50

When you see a Water Wagtail dancing for his dinner on a smooth lawn leading down to a river bank, you will think that he is like one of the dainty little fairies of our story books. Lightly and gracefully he runs a few steps, stops, and walks a yard or two, and then flies to a height of a few feet in the air, snaps at a passing fly, and is down again on the grass in an instant; walking, pausing, running, and flying, with a grace and delicate neatness of movement which is truly fairylike. All the time the bird is on the ground, his long tail, folded into a closely shut fan, wags without ceasing. He only spreads it out to direct and steer him when he takes to the air. The wagging is not from side to side, as dogs wag their tails, but up and down, balancing his steps as he picks his way over the grass. bends from time to time to snatch at some tiny insect, or watchfully scans the air for any passing gnat or fly. It is a lovely sight and one which you will never forget. You can never fail to recognise the little grey and white fairy when you see it again.

These birds are the only members of the family who are at all common, but they are to be seen all through the year on almost every lawn or pasture near fresh water throughout the country. They are usually near a river or lake. Their work as destroyers of gnats and flies (for they eat little else) is of the greatest value to us, and so their beauty is not their only claim to our gratitude.

In April a pair of Wagtails look for a hollow in the ground, or a hole in some bank of the stream, and there they build a nest. Five to six eggs are laid in it and in the course of the year they bring up two or three broods of young birds. Both parents feed them incessantly, tripping and fluttering about to get the insects needed, and coming back with their beaks full to give them their food in the shelter of the nest.



Their longer flights are straight, but dipping in loops down and up again, with the tail outstretched. You will see them following cattle, too. They do this to catch the flies which always collect around cows and horses in hot weather, troubling the animals so much that they have as much reason to be grateful to the Wagtails for their work as we have. When night falls, they roost in reed beds or in thick bushes. During the winter months, many of them are absent in southern countries. They return in the spring, so that we see more in summer than we do in winter. Those which are here in winter collect together at night and roost in very large numbers.

The other two birds of this family are the Yellow Wagtail and the Grey Wagtail. Neither is very common. They divide the country between them. The Yellow Wagtails are found on the downs, pastures, commons, and plough lands of the flat country in the south east of England, going to the streams in autumn. The Grey Wagtails live by the hilly, or mountain, streams of the north and west of Britain. Both feed on tiny water snails as well as insects. The Grey Wagtails are with us all the year. They flock together and move about in the autumn. The Yellow Wagtails, on the contrary, are absent from Britain throughout the winter, and stay with us only from March to September.

The habits, and fairy like movements, of both birds and their constant tail-wagging and dipping flight are just like those of their commoner cousin, and they can never be mis-

taken for birds of any other family.

The common Water Wagtail, which is also called the Pied Wagtail, is a grey and white bird except during the summer when the cocks are really "pied", which means sharply marked in black and white.

The Yellow Wagtails are yellow underneath, but all their upper parts are green. Their females and the young birds are like the males except that their colours are not so

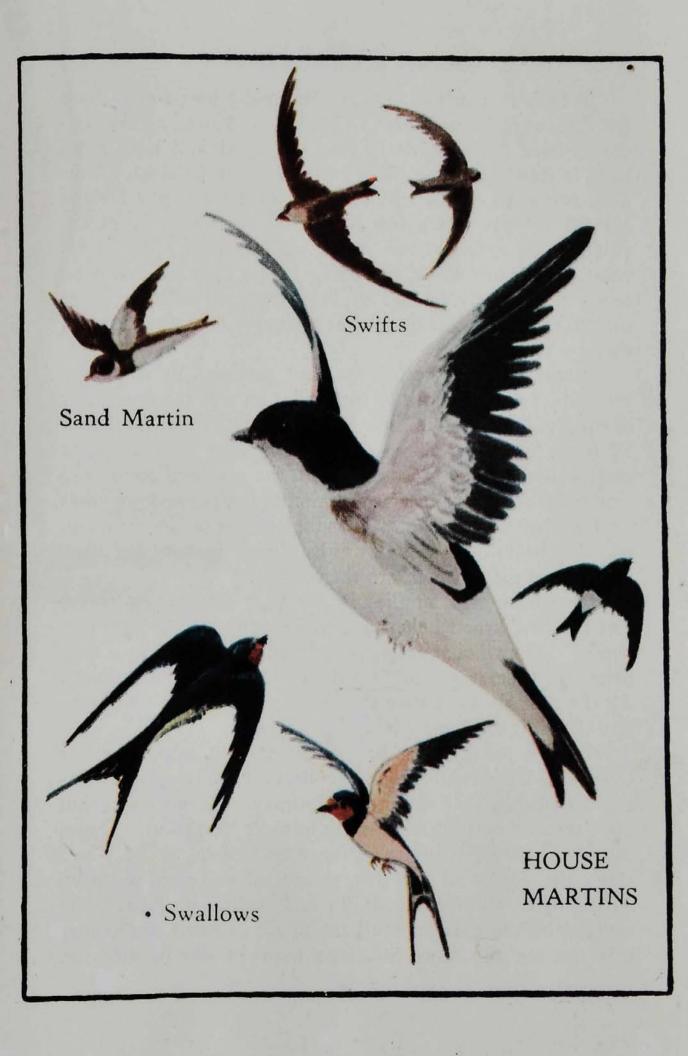
The Wagtails

bright. The so-called Grey Wagtail is also yellow underneath. It has a grey head and shoulders which shade into green lower down the back, and it has some white on the sides of the neck and under the chin. The white under the chin becomes black in the cocks in summer.

You will see from this that the names of the Wagtails do not describe them well. The bright yellow of both the two rarer birds is the first thing to attract one's eye, and the Yellow Wagtail is little yellower than the Grey Wagtail. If the word "grey" suits any of them it is the common Water Wagtail. The word "pied," as we have seen, applies only to the summer plumage of the males of that bird. When the young birds are most numerous, at the end of summer, many lawns seem crowded with them, and when we see them in these large numbers, we see how few of them are pied. The name Water Wagtail fits all three birds and, in fact, it is the Grey Wagtail which is most rarely seen away from water. But, however badly they may have been named, they are among the most graceful and fascinating of all our birds.

THE SWALLOWS

The Martins, bluish-black and white birds, return to this country in April, after an absence of six months in a warmer climate. They fly to the sites of their old nests and may be seen for some time clinging to the sides of houses high up under the protection of the roof, or of a stone ledge, with their short wide beaks touching the walls. People say they are kissing the homes of their childhood in greeting. They are also looking at the rims of their old mud nests to see whether they are solid enough to use as foundations for the new nests, and choosing suitable new sites. Very soon after their arrival, they begin to build, or re-build. Each pair of Martins makes its beautiful little hut with mouthfuls of mud, a tiny bit at a time. You will see them on the ground at soft-edged, muddy puddles, or apparently drinking from the gutters and footpaths of country lanes after rain. They are not only drinking, but collecting mud, and they fly with it to the house walls where they begin to plaster it on, high up under the eaves, in the shape of a half circle. This curved outline is soon built up with little balls of mud until the whole shell of the nest is finished. It forms a half cup, and is firmly fixed at the lower edge to the wall and at the upper to the overhanging projection of the roof or ledge. At one side at the top a small hole is left to serve as a door. If they can find a corner to build in, a quarter cup is enough. They work hard all day carrying the mud and plastering it on, and the wet piece which they have built in the day (sometimes two or three inches deep) looks quite different from the dried work of the day before. When it is finished it will be lined with a little grass and a few feathers from the birds' breasts. If you see untidy straws sticking out of the door, it means that robber Sparrows have stolen the nest. This happens all too often, though the Martins fight hard to defend their homes.



In May four or five eggs are laid and both parents share the duty of hatching them. The one not sitting on the nest comes back from flights to feed the other and both work hard to feed the young birds when they are hatched. This duty is carried on without stopping until the young are old enough to fly. For a few days after their first flight the young birds may be seen sitting along a roof edge, or on nearby telephone wires, still being fed by their parents, who tempt them to fly further by bringing food in their beaks near to them, but not quite near enough to their mouths for them to reach it.

Except when gathering building material, or when the young birds are just out of the nest, you will rarely see any of the Swallow family on the ground or perching, until they all begin to gather together for their long autumn flight southwards. They fly to and from the nest and about and around in the air, sometimes skimming the grass, sometimes circling the trees, and sometimes high in the sky above them, whirling backwards and forwards, always seeking the flies, beetles and gnats which are their food.

They have two families in the year (sometimes three) and the first brood helps to feed its younger brothers and sisters. The whole family, young and old, roost in the nest from the time it is built until they leave in the autumn. All the time they are here the males make a little twittering

sound, but it can hardly be called a song.

As soon as the last brood can fly (in September or October) Martins and Swallows collect on the telegraph wires and then begin their southward journey. To such untiring fliers there is nothing exhausting in their migration. Down the world they go through France and Spain or Italy and along the coasts all the way to central and even southern Africa, flying and feeding all day and resting at night. The watcher on the coast of southern Spain in April or October may not see any more Swallows than he did in summer,

but he will notice that in spring they are all flying north and in autumn all flying south. In our cold winter air there are no insects to keep them alive, and so they go to a second summer in the southern hemisphere.

There are two other birds of the Swallow family which come to us for the summer. One is the Sand Martin, brown above and white beneath, which makes its nest by boring deep holes in upright sand, or clay, banks. Though their colonies are sometimes large, there are not nearly as many Sand Martins as House Martins, because few districts suit them for building.

The Swallow is larger than the Martin, with longer wings and a longer forked tail, and a touch of red on its chin and forehead. At first you will find it hard to tell them apart, but, once the rule is learned, you will have no difficulty. A Swallow looks black if you see only its back, or white if you see only its front: a Martin always shows both black and white, because its body behind is white. The Swallow's nest is indoors in some barn or shed, an open saucer of mud lined with feathers and lying on a beam. It is not an enclosed mud-hut and is not under the eaves. Before leaving in autumn, they flock together, and roost in osier beds or in trees.

One other bird, which does not belong to the Swallow family, lives the same aerial life, feeding on insects. This is the Swift, which is dark brown all over, has long sickle-shaped wings and a high, piercing scream as it dashes round and round in the air. It never rests except at the nest, which is made of a few grass straws or feathers caught floating in the air and put loosely together. This is built inside a church tower, or some other tall building (which the bird enters by a hole) or under open eaves. The Swift is only with us from May to August, and also spends our winter in South Africa. It is almost the swiftest flyer of any of our birds.

THE CROWS

ONE of the commonest sights in the country, wherever there are tall trees in the neighbourhood, is a large black bird called the Rook, which belongs to the Crow family. High up among the small branches of the trees, the Rooks build their colonies of nests. Big cup-shaped masses of crisscrossed and twisted twigs can be seen from a great distance when the leaves are off the trees. There may be dozens of nests in the same clump of trees and even many nests in the same tree. These "rookeries" are deserted during the autumn and winter. Then the birds roost in very large numbers in other tree-tops from which they fly out in the early morning to feed together on the fields until evening, when they collect again to fly back to their sleeping quarters. Early in the spring they go back to the rookeries and may be seen strengthening the old nests, repairing any harm done by the storms of winter, or building new nests where needed. You may watch them, males and females (you can't tell them apart), stripping the bark off twigs to twist into the nests, and breaking off fresh branches for building. Under the rookery will be found many broken twigs. This is because Rooks when building never go to the ground to pick up a stick. Their instinct teaches them that these sticks may be rotten and they trust only to the strength and soundness of branches they themselves have tested and found true. Just as a Lion is said to eat only what he himself has killed, so a Rook will build only with twigs he has picked. only hand he has with which to build is his beak, so he drops a great many twigs. These are all left to rot while the builder makes another flight to collect new branches to replace them.

In March or April 3 to 6 eggs are laid and then the tree tops are filled with the loud and constant cawing of the birds as the male brings food to the sitting female. He also does



his share of sitting on the eggs. Later, both parents feed and brood the squawking, hungry young birds.

Rooks are perhaps the most talkative of all our birds. Although they make no sound which we call singing, all the Crow family have the best voice organs of any birds, and they use them to talk. No one who hears the many different notes of a Rook's voice can doubt that the other Rooks under-

stand their meaning, even if we do not.

When out feeding, or collecting food for their families, they still have the habit of keeping together in large numbers, and may be seen black-dotting the stubbles, or pastures, or lining the newly ploughed furrow behind the tractor, walking with a clumsy waddling gait, or hopping sideways as they go. Their flight is not swift, but easy and light. Steady, rather slow wing beats, or glides with outstretched wings, are used and they show great mastery of the air as they alight delicately on the finest topmost twigs. They live much in company with other birds, feeding, or playing in flight, with Gulls, Lapwings, Starlings, or their own cousins, the Jackdaws.

They are very useful birds to us. They eat a vast number of insects and their grubs all through the year. In the winter there are fewer of these to be found except underground, but the Rooks still find them there. Although Rooks certainly eat some of our corn, they more than repay for this by the protection against insects which they give us

all through the year.

I have chosen the Rook as the example of the Crow family, and not the Crow. This is not only because, unlike the Crow, he is useful and deserves our liking and protection, but because he is by far the commonest of his family. There are four others which you will be likely to see. First comes the Crow or Carrion Crow. This is a wholly black bird, and hard to tell from a Rook. It is rather larger, flies with yet slower wing beats, and, while an old Rook rubs the feathers off its face and shows bald black skin, the Crow does not. Its

The Crows

voice is deeper and hoarser, and there are other little differences, but, above all, the Crow is solitary. If you see more than two birds together, they are Rooks, not Crows.

Carrion Crows are not found in Ireland or most of Scotland, but they are replaced there by the Hooded Crows which are like them in every way except in their looks. They are grey and black and may be seen in the east of England in winter.

The Jackdaw's habits are much like the Rook's except that he breeds in holes in buildings or trees. He is only half the size of a Rook and has a dark grey neck and a higher pitched, sharper voice. The Magpie's black and white wings and body, and long tail, can never be mistaken for those of any other bird. The Jay you will seldom see, though his harsh, metallic screech often rings out in the woods. He is the only one of our "Crows" who is not a black bird. He is brilliantly coloured—reddish brown, orange, white and bright blue.

All the Crow family are harmful, except the Rook, because destroying and eating eggs and young birds is their main business all through the summer. A single pair of Crows has been known to destroy a whole rookery in one season. The Jackdaw is not quite so bad as the others, but he has a taste for eggs too.

THE PIGEONS

In town and in the country alike we are rarely far from some of these birds. Two of them, the Wood Pigeon, or Ringdove, and the tame Pigeon of our dovecotes, are very common. The Wood Pigeons are always with us, although their numbers are greatly increased in the winter months by vast flocks which come to us from the colder parts of north

Europe.

Wood Pigeons are among the wildest of our birds. They will see you before you can see them. Wherever you go in the country where there are trees, the first sign of a Pigeon will be the smack of his wings coming together as he dashes out of a tree on the side farthest away from you. Their flight is straight and swift and their eyesight wonderfully keen. It is almost hopeless to try to creep near enough to them to see them well, no matter how quiet you try to be. A way of getting a good view of them is to hide yourself near to a pond on a hot summer day and wait for them to come to drink. Pigeons need a lot of water and drink both fresh and salt water. When waiting you must be completely hidden and hardly move an eyelid. The slightest move or sound, the cracking of a twig, or the glint of an upturned face, will drive the bird away at once. There, if you watch silently, hidden under a mass of branches or bracken, you will learn somethingeven if it is only about the habits of midges!

Pigeons, coming down after a flight, to feed or drink, or to roost in the trees for the night, will show all the skill of an airman in making an up-wind landing and, for some minutes after perching, they will peer about to assure themselves of their safety. Only during the breeding season do they seem to be slightly less watchful. Then they may be seen in the tree tops building their flimsy nests of twigs.

To those who have known this timid woodland bird in the country it seems hardly possible that the fat Pigeon which



A Book of Common Birds

waddles boldly at our feet in the London Parks should be the very same kind of bird. But it is. About 30 years ago the Wood Pigeons began to make the Parks their home. They found that the men there did not carry guns, and not only did not kill them, but threw down crumbs to feed them. This strange kind of man produced a changed race of Ringdoves. Now if we want to see them closely, the only place where we shall find them fearless and tame is in the Parks of a noisy, bustling, crowded town.

The male Pigeon is a model of what a bird-father can be. While the nest is being built by the female, he brings all the materials to her and, when the eggs are laid, in March or early April, he sits on them, turn and turn about with his mate, to hatch them. The eggs are white and there are two of them. When the young are hatched, both parents share the duties of feeding them until they can fly. They are born naked and helpless and are called "squabs"—a name as ugly as they look themselves while without any feathers. The only food which the squabs can digest is what their parents have already partly digested in their own crops. They pump this up again as a liquid (which we call "pigeon's milk") and pass it from their beaks into those of their young.

Two broods are hatched in the year. From February to October we hear the male serenading his mate with a formal song:—" Coo-roo-coo, coo-roo!" This song he will repeat again and again, and its caressing melody, repeated from tree to tree as it is answered by other Pigeons, does much to add to the beauty of our spring and summer. But there is one thing which you should notice about the Wood Pigeon's song. Although it is a perfect musical phrase, and ends upon a note which fully satisfies our ears, the bird does not seem to know this. He will repeat the phrase (usually three times), but he will then begin it again and break off, generally after one or two notes, without finishing it, leaving us to wonder what interrupted him.

The Pigeons are vegetarians, eating acorns, corn, clover, or turnip leaves, peas, and beans, so they are not very popular with farmers. As many as 61 acorns have been found in the crop of a Wood Pigeon. They also eat a certain number of grubs and worms as well.

In this family we have, beside the Ringdove, three other

Doves, the Rock, Stock and Turtle.

The Stock Dove is much smaller than the Wood Pigeon, but lives much the same life. The chief difference between them lies in the fact that the smaller bird makes no effort to build a nest, but lays her eggs in a hole, either in a hollow tree, or in the ground, in a rabbit burrow or in the nest of a squirrel.

The third of our native Doves, the Rock Dove, is the bird from which all the tame Pigeons have sprung. When wild, it is a cliff dweller, nesting in rocky caves or on the ledges of stone on the cliffs which border our steeper coasts. You can tell it, or its tame relations, from their larger cousin, the Ring Dove, by the fact that they hardly ever perch on a tree. Their feet are accustomed to walking and standing on flat surfaces, and you will see them on ledges of rock, roof tops, cornices, or window ledges, but not on the boughs of a tree. The wonderful sense of direction which leads these birds back to their nests, to relieve their mates, however far away they may have been taken, has been used by Man to breed from them the race of Homing (or Carrier) Pigeons. All these Pigeons are found here all through the year.

The last kind of Pigeon, the Turtle Dove, is a southerner who comes to our shores only for the summer, to show us its beautiful fan-tail and to nest here. It leaves us in October and winters in north-east Africa, and when it is here, it does

not go north of the Midlands.

THE WOODPECKERS

WHEN an underground railway is being made, the engineers plan that the track should run downhill out of every station and rise again, uphill, to the next. The reason for this is that it saves power both in starting and in stopping the trains. They drop, as it were, out of one station and are slowed up by the hill rising to the next. The flight of the Woodpeckers is rather like this. They swoop down and up, very steeply, and for the same reason. They fly from tree to tree, and when they arrive they cling to the bark, with head up, supported by the short stiff feathers of the outspread tail. The easiest way to reach this position and stop is to turn suddenly upward at the end of a downward glide. In a longer flight this same course is followed, and the bird moves onward in a series of loops. The line of his flight looks like the garlands of flowers, caught up at intervals, such as you might see painted, or carved, upon some buildings.

The loops of a Green Woodpecker's flight are traced in brilliant green, for he is quite unlike any of our other birds and looks more like a bright green parrot from the Zoo. He has a rich apple-green body, shading to bright yellow near the darker tail, and a deep crimson head, with a pair of black and crimson moustaches. The female has less red on her head and a black moustache. The Green Woodpecker has a loud mocking laugh, which rattles out, scornfully, as he

flies.

We have two other Woodpeckers, the Spotted and the Barred, and all three live much the same lives. They nest in soft and decayed trees, boring a hole into the wood with their straight, strong beaks. They usually bore a new nest-hole each year. While at work they have to watch very carefully to prevent Starlings from stealing their nests. These birds often succeed in driving out the Woodpeckers after the nest is finished.



They lay 5 to 7 eggs and have only one brood in the year, and they stay with us both winter and summer. They are mostly found in the south of Britain, although the

Spotted Woodpecker is found in parts of Scotland.

Their food is almost wholly made up of ants and other insects collected from the bark of the trees. Green Woodpeckers spend much of their time on the ground looking for ants, and both they and the Spotted Woodpeckers eat seeds, nuts and acorns. When on the trees feeding, they may be seen working upwards in a spiral, circling the trunk, and warily keeping to the farther side whenever they see you, so as to have the protection of the tree. When a Woodpecker gets to a height, he swoops off, and, after a steep loop, comes down to the base of another tree, or sometimes, by circling in the air, to the bottom of the same tree trunk, where again he settles, head up, and begins his search for food. If you can get a good view of him, you will see that his four toes are not placed three pointing forward and one backward like those of most birds, but two pointing forward and two backward. This, with his strong claws, gives him a more powerful grip on the bark. A Woodpecker never turns head down when climbing, but sometimes, if he wishes to retrace his steps, he will hop backwards for a short distance.

The Woodpeckers (particularly the Spotted) have another unusual habit known as "drumming." This seems to take the place of the song of other birds, as it is only done during the mating season in spring. It serves as a notice that the tree belongs to the drummer, and is a challenge to other Woodpeckers. Exactly how the drumming noise is made is not known, but when making it the bird rattles his bill at high speed against the bough of a tree. The sound is loud and may be heard from a long way off, but the performance

does not very often take place.

The Spotted and Barred Woodpeckers look much alike in pictures. Both are black and white birds with some

The Woodpeckers

crimson on their heads, but the Sported Woodpecker (though only half the size of the Green) is much larger than the Barred. He has a crimson bar across the back of his head and a crimson splash under his tail. He is remarkably silent except for his occasional drumming and rarely comes to the ground.

The tiny Barred Woodpecker is no bigger than a Sparrow and seldom leaves the higher branches of tall trees, so that you will hear his cry of "Pick-pick-pick" oftener than you will see him. He has white bars across his back and a crimson cap on his head. The females of both these birds have no crimson on the head.

It is believed that the males alone do the boring of the nest and neither of them shouts out the cackling laugh of the Green Woodpecker, or Yaffle, as he is sometimes called.

We have one other very common, little, brown, mouse-like bird—the Tree Creeper—which busily climbs the trees all through the year and all over the country, seeking for insects in the bark, in much the same way as a Woodpecker. But it is not a Woodpecker. It has its toes arranged like those of other small birds. It cannot use its slender, curved beak for boring, and it builds a nest behind loose bark or in its crevices.

In the south of England is yet another bird, the Nuthatch, which, though not a Woodpecker, climbs the tree trunks with even greater skill. He is our only bird who can hop down a trunk as easily as he can hop up. When he eats a nut he first tucks it into a crevice of the bark and then uses his powerful beak to peck through the shell to the kernel. He leaves the empty shell in place and when you see such shells in the bark you will know a Nuthatch has been there. He uses any old hole in a tree for a nest and builds up the entrance with mud so as to make it the right size.

THE BIRDS OF PREY

We have sixteen birds in this country which are known as Birds of Prey. This means that they live by killing animals and other birds and eating them. They are the Hawks, which hunt by day, and the Owls, which hunt at night. Some of them are quite willing to eat creatures which are already dead. Others are more nice in their tastes and will only eat what they kill. None of them will touch vegetable food of any kind. They catch and eat other birds, rats and mice, snakes, frogs, or even insects and worms. The great Golden Eagle, which still survives in the Highlands of Scotland, will sometimes snatch up a lamb, or a young deer, and carry it off, though he chiefly lives on mountain hares and grouse. The Owls live mainly upon mice. Unfortunately all the Hawks look much alike and so do all the Owls. Men usually think that they are all mischievous and do not trouble to find out before shooting it what each one eats and whether it does us good or harm.

The Hawks and the Owls have many things in common. They have strong, sharp-edged, hooked beaks, curved so as to tear and slice the flesh of their victims, and they have long, strong, sharp claws on all four toes, with a grip like steel. They are usually brown or grey birds with paler undersides. The colours are broken up by spots which make them rather unnoticeable among the trees. There is a great difference, however, between the habits of Hawks and of Owls. The Hawks have wonderful eyes and can see very small objects at a great distance. They depend on their speed and strength to catch their prey. The Owls have the largest eyes of any of our birds and the wonder of their sight is that they can see in the dark. They also have very sharp ears and much of their hunting is done by hearing. In daylight an Owl is blinded and dazzled.

The Kestrel is the only member of the Hawk family



which you will often see, and you will recognise him because of his peculiar habit of hovering. That means that he stays in one place high up in the air for a long time, motionless except for his wings which beat swiftly to keep him in place. His tail is outspread and his head bent down towards the ground far below. He is perhaps looking for a field mouse, or even a tiny ground Beetle, so that will give you some idea of the power of a Hawk's eyes. If he sees nothing he will move on, with flapping and sailing flight, to a new hovering position, where he will again wait and watch. A Kestrel is often called a "Windhover" and, because he is a Hawk, is foolishly shot and hung up to rot upon the fence which the gamekeeper calls his "museum". It is true that a Kestrel will sometimes bag a young Pheasant chick, but this is a rare event in his life, and the immense good which he does by his never ceasing hunt for mice and insects more than repays us for any small birds he may kill.

The Kestrel builds no nest, but lays her eggs in a hole in a tower or cliff or, sometimes, in the old nest of some other bird. About the end of April, 4 to 6 eggs are laid and one brood a year is reared. Kestrels utter a shrill cry of "Kee-kee-kee!" The males are rather smaller than their mates, and the hen birds are reddish-brown all over and without the cock's blue-grey on head and tail.

You may sometimes see a Sparrow-Hawk flitting along a hedge or skirting a wood, and his swerving twists from one side to the other are amazingly swift. His wings are rounded and short and look as if they were made of flexible steel as he flies with short strokes. A Sparrow-Hawk never hovers. His food consists mainly of small birds, so that there is no reason to regret his being shot.

In some parts of the country, such as Devon or Wales, you may see a big broad-winged Buzzard sailing round and round at a great height and uttering an almost cat-like "Pee-yeou!" Buzzards should never be shot, because

rats, mice, young rabbits, and beetles are their chief prey. There are five kinds of Owls in this country. Two are fairly common, though you may never see either because they rarely come out by day. Owls have wonderfully soft and downy feathers. Round their eyes, which look forwards instead of sideways (as those of most birds do) are a couple of large feathery disks, which make them look as if they were wearing a huge pair of spectacles, and were very wise. The soft plumage gives them an absolutely silent flight which is surprising in such big birds, and helps them greatly in the chase. All day the Tawny Owl, or Wood Owl, stands, upright and motionless, in a hollow tree or up against a tree trunk, blinking his big eyes to keep out the daylight if he is in the open. You will not notice him unless the little birds of the neighbourhood happen to have found him, when you will hear a great chattering and squeaking as they hustle and mob him, in an effort to drive him away. At night as you lie in bed you may hear his wild hunting cry "Too-whit, Toowhoo!" ringing out in the woods. The Tawny Owl does this to scare the rats, mice and voles which are feeding then. At the sudden sound of his voice they scamper for shelter and that is his chance. With his wonderful hearing and night-sight he can pounce upon any moving object in the dark. His claws close on it like a trap, and another enemy of mankind goes to fill his larder in the hollow tree where the Owls build their nest. Both male and female hoot.

The almost white Barn Owl is also fairly common. He lives in our barns, or other buildings, and rarely eats anything but mice. He is better than any cat at killing them.

The Little Owl, who is not much bigger than a bigheaded Sparrow, feeds both by day and night, but is more local than the others. People differ about what he eats. But both the Tawny and the Barn Owls deserve our full protection, though they too seldom get it.

THE CRAKES, THE MOORHEN AND COOT

These birds belong to a family known as the Crakes or Rails, but as none of the others are at all common, we will not talk about them here. The Moorhen and the Coot are among the most widespread and common of all our inland water birds. Hardly any water throughout the land is without one or both of them. Among the rushes bordering any pond or stream, or on any larger stretch of water—lake or river—you will see and hear the Moorhen. When the water is only a small pond or ditch, Moorhens will be alone, but on every larger piece of water there will be Coots also.

The first thing you have to do is to learn to tell them apart. Both look black and although, as you will see from their pictures, there is a little colour on the Moorhen, this is not enough to help you. Both birds swim on the surface of the water, bobbing their heads backwards and forwards as they go, and both have a very visible white patch. But here comes the difference. The white on the Moorhen is at the tail end: on the bald-headed Coot it is on the head. The difference in size between them is only easy to see when the birds are together, although the Coot is as big as a barnyard hen (18 inches long) while the Moorhen is only 12 inches, but the white patches can always be seen.

Do not be misled by the name Moorhen. It does not mean a bird of the moors, but of the meres or ponds, and really should be Merehen. They are not by any means always on the water and, particularly at and after the harvest, will be seen at quite a distance from water, eating grain, of which they consume great quantities. Their food is mostly vegetable—corn, seeds, and water weeds—though they will eat almost anything and enjoy insects, newts and tadpoles.

In April the pair of Moorhens build their nest close to



the water, either in thick rushes, or at the base of a hedge, or in bushes or trees. It is built at night, a flattish, untidy structure of sticks or rushes, which forms a platform. Sometimes it is based on some other bird's nest, and usually extra nests are built for brooding the young birds, of which there may be any number from 6 to 10 in a brood. Two or three broods a year are brought up, the elder ones helping their parents to feed the later broods. Moorhens swim and dive below the surface, swimming with both feet and wings when under water. When they are frightened they stay below water, keeping only their beaks above the surface among the vegetation. Ashore they run very swiftly, bobbing their heads and jerking their tails as they go. They do not often fly unless hard pressed, and then their flight is slow and feebly fluttering, with legs dangling, and they settle as soon as possible on getting to cover. Nevertheless they move southwards for the winter. They are quarrelsome fellows and fight among themselves, jumping up to strike at their enemies with the hind claws.

The Moorhen's voice is harsh and startling—a sudden, explosive "Prruk!"—and is often heard at night. They are also heard to call "Kik-kik-kik" when they are migrating.

Both the Moorhen and the Coot have very large feet which are specially made to enable them to swim, and also to walk over the surface of weed-covered ponds. While not truly web-footed, each of the three front toes has its own web of skin which spreads out between the joints towards the next toe, and folds backwards as the foot moves forward through the water in swimming.

Coots live a very similar life to that of Moorhens but are found only on larger waters. They rarely fly unless to chase another bird or to escape, rising very gradually from the water, so that you see them flapping along the surface for some time before getting clear. When clear of the water, they fly straight and fast, with their legs stretched out back-

The Crakes-Moorhen and Coot

wards under their tails. When settling on the water, they do so with the feet forwards, sliding to rest with a noisy splash. They dive a great deal, turning a sort of somersault as they go down to get the water-weeds which form a large part of their food. They may be seen thumping the weeds with their feet to dislodge insects and small water snails, which they also eat. Their cry is a clear, loud "Honk!"

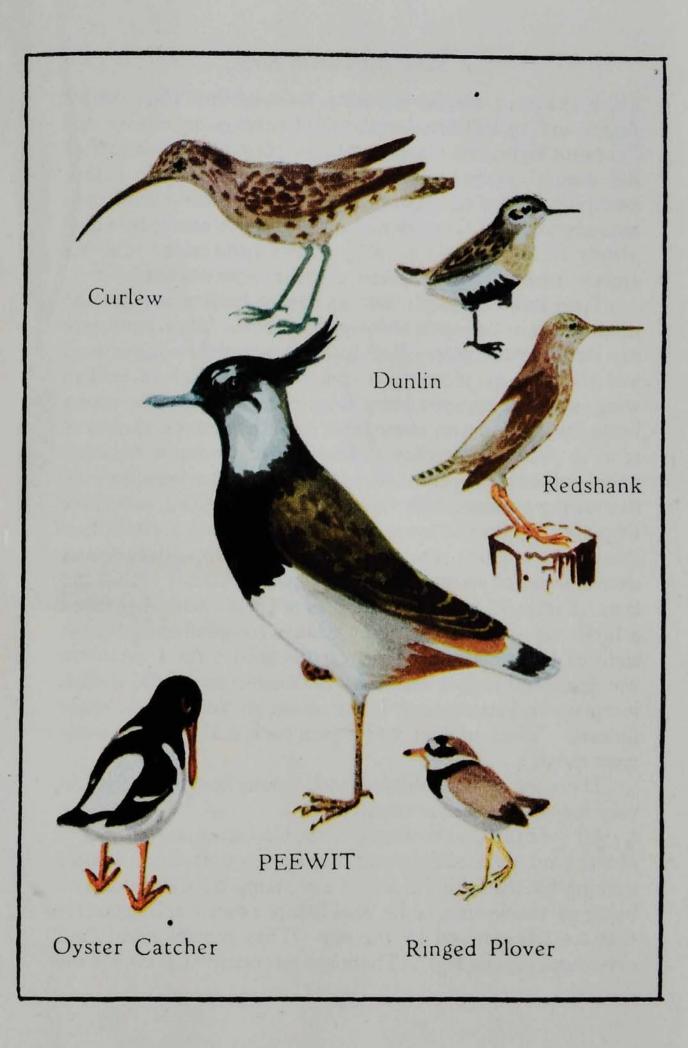
They build a platform of rushes for a nest among the other rushes rising from the water. When damp vegetation rots, it gives out heat (which is why some damp haystacks catch fire) and the damp, decaying nests of the Coots have enough of this warmth to help in hatching their eggs. They walk and run easily and swiftly, and bob their heads in the same way as the Moorhens, both in swimming and walking. Under water they do not use the wings to swim, but work both legs at the same time.

They pack together in the winter and usually move southwards from cold districts, making for the sea coast in hard frosts. Like the Moorhen, the Coots are very quarrel-some, and they fight to protect the ground round their nests which supplies food for their families.

They are rarely away from the water, though they roost on trees or bushes except during the breeding season, when they sleep close to the nest.

THE WADERS

ALL the year, and almost all over the country, wherever there are grass lands, and on many ploughed fields, you will see flocks of dark green birds, standing, running, or slowly walking. All will be facing the same way, and each will have a crest of black feathers on its head. As they move, they will bend down to pick up an insect or an earthworm, and when they come to rest one leg will usually be held up under the feathers of their breasts. If you go into the field they will all rise at once and fly off with a heavy, flapping flight which lifts them swiftly to a considerable height, and they will soon be out of your sight. In the air they are no longer green birds, but black and white ones, and you notice at once the broad rounded ends of their wings. The wings of the males are rounder, and their crests are longer, then those of their mates. In summer they have a broad band of black across the breast, but this is white in the winter. They are called Lapwings, Peewits or Green Plover. these names are almost equally used. When they are travelling on definite business from one place to another (migrating, making for a favourite field, or, in winter, going to the sea shore to see what the waters of the falling tide have left upon the sand or mud-flats of a river mouth), their flight is regular and straight. The long wings, with their black, rounded tips, stretch down until they almost seem to meet under their bodies in a slow and unbroken rhythm. show you first the dark upper, and then the black and white under sides of the wings, they flash from black to pied at each But when they are at play (and no bird is more playful) they look quite different. In the spring, when nesting, they show off before their mates, and fly up to drive off Crows, or other birds, which seem to be threatening the nest. At such times their flight is one swirling, stooping, zigzagging, and twisting exhibition of aerobatics. Up they



go, in pairs or singly, shouting their cry of "Pee-wit!" Again and again, round and round they go in circles and figures of eight, side-slipping and dashing to within a foot of the ground, only to soar again high into the air before swooping to the earth with raised wings, which they then sedately fold and, in so doing, often seem to disappear completely from our sight as if by a conjurer's trick. On the

greeny-brown earth the greeny-brown birds are lost.

They build no nest, but merely scratch a cup in the ground out in the open and lay four eggs. They have only one brood in the year. Both parents sit on the eggs in turn and they are great actors in pretending to have a broken wing, so as to lead you away from their nests. The young birds are able to run about and feed themselves almost as soon as they are hatched. They have one most valuable habit-obedience. At a signal from their parents they lie flat on the ground, with their noses outstretched, wherever they are, and do not move an eyelid until they are told that the danger is past. Once on Salisbury Plain, I drove a car over a brood of young Lapwings whom I did not see till too late. I feared I must have killed some and, when I stopped a little way beyond them, my fears were confirmed by the sight of two tiny bodies lying on the road. As I sat there watching, and feeling sorry, I was cheered to see the victims jump up and hastily run to the grass at the roadside quite unhurt. Their mother had flown back and given the allclear signal!

There are 25 other birds which belong to this family, but very few of them are common birds.

All over the coasts, wherever the sea leaves large stretches of wet sand, or mud flats, you may see great flocks of Waders walking by the falling tide. They stamp on the ground to bring up the worms, crabs, shellfish or other small creatures that are left exposed by the sea. They mostly stand (and even hop) on one leg. There are too many of these for me

The Waders

to tell you the differences between them in this little book. The commonest, here all the year, are the Dunlin (or Purre, so called from his flight call) and the Ringed Plover, but Knots, Sanderlings, Little Stints, Sandpipers, Turnstones and Godwits may be with them at certain seasons. These birds wheel and turn in clouds as they fly, all together, as if directed by a word of command.

Feeding among them you will find the Curlew, a great browny-white bird with a long bill which curves downward, and long dark green legs which stick out behind him as he flies. He will be the first to see you and off he will go, calling his own name "Curlew!" as he rises and circles away. In the spring he goes to the high lonely moors to breed, and there his bubbling cry may be heard, one of the wildest and most beautiful songs in all nature.

Another wild and wonderful bubbling whistler is the Redshank, who is with us all the year, feeding on the shore and breeding on tussocks of grass in meadows by river banks.

He sings as he perches or hovers near his nest.

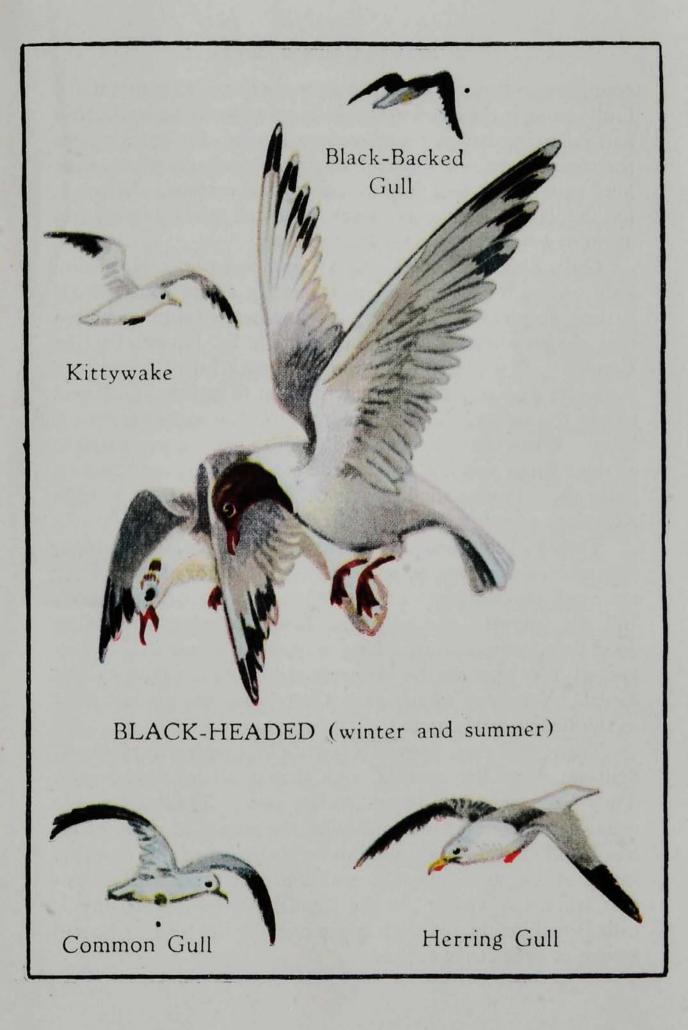
On the rocky shores of the north or west of Britain, or in Ireland, you will see the Oyster Catcher, or Sea Pie as he is often called. He is a truly pied bird, black and white in about equal quantities, and with bright orange beak, legs, and eyes. He is about as big as a Rook. His bowings and pipings to a listening mate are delightful, and often two or three males perform at once.

THE GULLS

No birds of one family look more alike than the Gulls. When once your attention has been drawn to one, you will never fail to know that the others are its relations. You will always be able to say, "That is a gull!" But here let me tell you at the start that you will probably never get any further, as four of the kinds of Gull most seen on our coasts are very much alike. They are white birds with delicate grey backs and upper sides to their wings, and a few black feathers at the wing tips. The chief difficulty in telling them apart is that most of them take a year or two to put on their grown-up clothes. All their youth they are slowly changing the brown and white feathers, which cover them when they first fly, into their final colouring, and all that time only a very experienced bird-lover would venture to guess which is which. Again, when they are fully clothed, they change their plumage twice a year and in this change they sometimes lose the distinguishing mark by which you had learned to know them. You cannot tell the males from the females of any Gull.

Before trying to say anything about the differences between them, let us see how we recognise them all as Gulls. First they are the only large white birds we have, except the Swan and domestic poultry. The grey in those which are grey and white is so delicate that the bird looks white at a distance. The undersides of both bodies and wings are of a dazzling white, as pure as newly fallen snow. They look white whether you see them standing in close rows among the black Rooks behind a moving plough, floating buoyantly on the waves of the sea, standing on one leg on a seaside cottage chimney, pig-tubbing at a garbage heap, or sailing; with long outspread wings, in the wake of a steamer.

Few other birds are so skilful in making use of every passing puff of wind. Men have only just learned to use the air currents with their gliders: the Gulls have done it for



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countless centuries. From the deck of a liner you may watch a Gull resting in the air on the back draught thrown up by the ship and following her, without moving a wing, for miles unless the cook throws out a pailful of potato peelings, when, with loud squawks, it will dive to the surface to feed. When it has fed, it will easily overtake the ship and take up its station again to watch for the next feast offered.

Gulls have webbed feet and can swim perfectly, sitting high out of the water and riding every storm, but the air is their dominion. You may see this best in a place where they are very tame, such as the bridge in St. James's Park in London. If you stand there and throw a bit of bread into the water near to a Duck, she will swim to it, but a Gull will rise in the air and fly to it if it is only a few inches from his beak. When they are overhead you can see the great length of their wings and the angle at the corner of the wrist, which helps them to give slight twists to the flight feathers to take advantage of every change in the direction of the wind.

They will eat almost everything: fish, flesh, fowl, insect, vegetable, and, above all, good herring, dead or alive. They are mostly noisily gluttonous when they fall upon their food, and the yelpings of Gulls who have hit upon something good bring others from a long way off to share it. gorged, they spit up the bones or shells which they cannot digest. You may often see a Gull bring up his last meal

as an offering to his mate.

They build their nests of a few sticks, grasses, or pieces of drift-wood on the ground, and almost all lay three eggs. They have only one brood in the year. These nests are usually in large colonies, either on the ledges of cliffs, or on islands where the Gulls hope to be undisturbed, or, in some cases, on remote moorlands, or the marshy borders of mountain lakes. A visitor to the "gullery" (as the colony is called) will be greeted with angry cries by the birds, who will swoop or even strike at him.

The Gulls

Almost all our Gulls move down the coasts southwards in winter, and return northwards in spring to their breeding grounds. Some kinds breed on the rocky coasts and some on the flat eastern shores or in river mouths. Some are wholly sea-gulls, others often come on land, and one kind may be seen all over the country—the Black-Headed (or Laughing) Gull.

There are six kinds of Gull and they are, roughly, of three sizes. The smallest are the Black-Headed Gull; the so-called Common Gull; and the Kittiwake, all about the size of a Pigeon. Then come two large Gulls, the Herring Gull (orange beak and pink legs) and the Lesser Black-Back, which are both much bigger than a Rook, and, lastly, a giant, the Great Black-Backed Gull, who is as large as a Turkey.

The Great Black-Back is a rare resident in the north and west. He and the Lesser Black-Back are the exceptions to the rule that the Gulls are white birds. They are white and black, having a black mark which covers the whole of their backs and wings on the upper side, so they are unmistakable. The Black-Headed Gull is far the commonest of all. He is here all the year, has a crimson beak and legs, and comes much inland. In summer only he has a dark chocolate head, which in winter becomes white, leaving only a grey spot behind the eye. The Common Gull is seen in England only in winter and rarely far from the sea. In summer it keeps to Scotland and west Ireland, where it nests. Its legs and beak are green. The Kittiwake is found in a few places only on cliffs in the north and west. It has black legs and no hind toe. Instead of squawking, it repeats its own name:—"Kittiwaake."

THE HEDGE SPARROW AND THE CUCKOO

ALL the year, and all over the country, you will see a small bird much the size and colour of a hen Sparrow, very busily attending to his own business, and rarely leaving the ground. He is pecking at tiny insects or seeds and, if you watch him carefully, you will see a peck every two or three hops, and every two or three seconds, all the day. He has to take many thousand meals a day or perhaps we should say that his meal lasts all the daylight hours. This little bird is the Hedge Sparrow and in almost every hedge, or clump of thick bushes, he works without resting, or going more than a few yards away from one spot. He moves in short hops with one leg in front of the other. His beak, which is pointed, delicate and sharp (the true beak of the insect eater), will show you at once that he is not a Sparrow, nor even a near relation. He builds his nest, low down, in the hedges, or in stick heaps, or evergreens, and 5 to 6 eggs are laid twice or three times a year. We have more Hedge Sparrows in the winter, for a number of them, which nested in northern Europe, then come to us as migrants.

In the middle of April something happens which is an event in our lives and still more so in the lives of the Hedge Sparrows. This is the first loud and clear call of "Cuckoo!" The male Cuckoos have come and are calling their names to proclaim that they have taken up their positions in their old grounds. The females look just like the males, but their call is quite different, an odd bubbling sound. They also take up a favourite position and begin to study the Hedge Sparrows, and other small insect-eating birds near them,

their habits, and the places where they are nesting.

Unlike any of our other birds, the Cuckoo does not build a nest, and does not hatch her own eggs, or feed her own



young. All that she does is to leave one of her eggs in the nest of some other kind of bird, and then one or two days later, do the same thing in the nest of another bird. When she lays her own egg, she often takes out an egg of the real owner of the nest, and doubtless eats it, though her usual food is insects and especially hairy caterpillars. In all she may lay as many as 20 eggs, but a dozen is probably a more usual number. By June the males' voices crack and they only call "Cuck!" and early in that month all the old birds go away to Central Africa until the following year, when they

return to announce the coming of another spring.

But the most interesting part of the Cuckoo's story concerns the young. The Cuckoo is twice as long, and weighs about four times as much, as the Hedge Sparrow, but its egg is very small for so big a bird. It is hardly larger than the egg of the Hedge Sparrow on whom it is planted. The Cuckoo's is a speckled brown egg and the Hedge Sparrow's egg is blue, but the Hedge Sparrow never seems to notice the difference in colour between this one strange egg and her own blue ones. Some other birds will throw out the egg, or desert the nest, if they find an egg of the wrong colour in it. But the Hedge Sparrow sits on it contentedly with her own until the young Cuckoo is hatched. A few hours after it is hatched, it wriggles down in the nest till it has got one of the Hedge Sparrow's eggs (or young birds if they are hatched) on to its back, in which there is a deep hollow. It then hoists the egg or chick to the edge of the nest and heaves it out. It goes on doing this until it is quite alone and comfortable in the nest, and then settles down to squawk for food. The Hedge Sparrows work hard feeding it with all the food which should have gone to keep-ing their whole family alive, and never pay any attention to their own broken eggs, or dead chicks, lying on the ground under the nest. They proudly slave over the big intruder until it can feed itself, probably some time in late August

The Hedge Sparrow and Cuckoo

or September. "What a wonderful youngster we have got!" they seem to say. Thus one Cuckoo will keep two dozen Hedge Sparrows working for her, and all their own eggs will be destroyed.

Early in September, the young Cuckoos fly away to the south to the very same places where their parents have gone. Now you will notice that the Hedge Sparrows, who brought them up, do not make this same journey: that the young Cuckoos have never seen their parents: and that, even if they had, their parents left here two months earlier, so that their young could not have learned from them where to go, or how to get there. This is the most wonderful case known of the instinct to migrate.

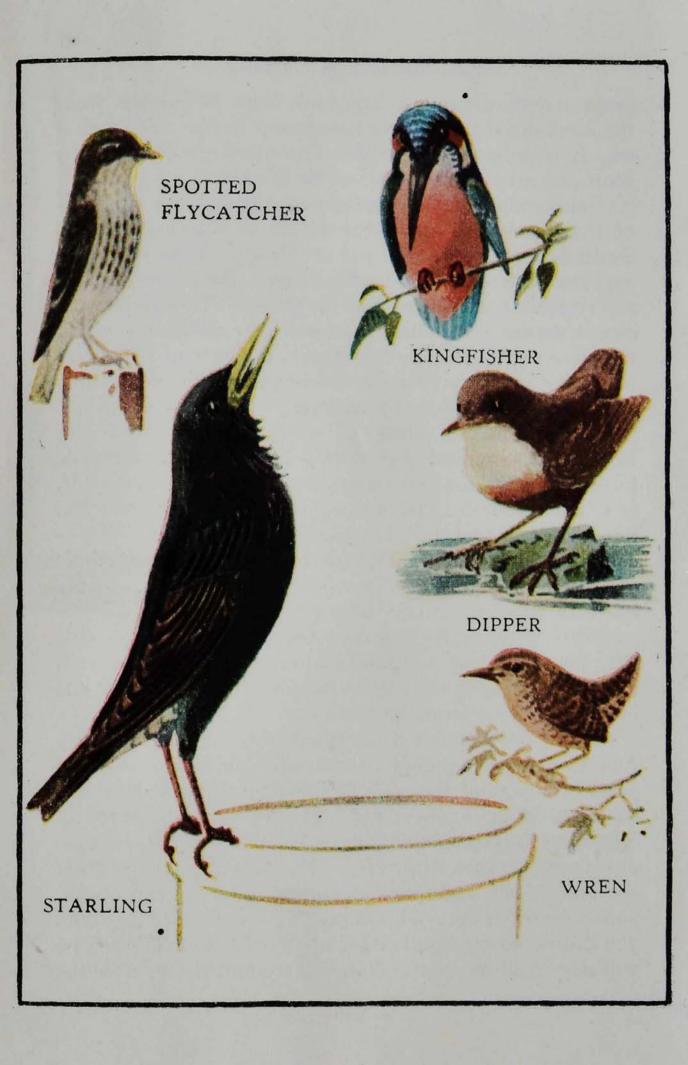
The birds most often victimized by Cuckoos in this country are the Hedge Sparrow, the Meadow and Tree Pipits, and the Water Wagtail, and we believe that Cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of the same kind of bird as that which fostered them.

THE STARLING, WREN, KINGFISHER, DIPPER AND FLYCATCHER

THESE birds are not related, but each is a lonely member of a family of which there are no others in this country.

The Starling is one of the commonest of our birds and there is no bird of which you will see so many at a time together. All through the winter months they flock together, feeding in the fields all day and flying to roost about sunset in enormous numbers. They roost in the woods, or in trees in the towns, or on the ledges of our Cathedrals and other tall buildings. In addition to those Starlings which are with us all the year, vast numbers from the northern countries come here for the winter and join them. The number of birds seen in these winter roosts is so great that only a wild guess can be made as to how many thousands there are. For half an hour after dawn great clouds of birds, some fifty or more abreast, will fly in columns which seem to be endless, branching out from the roost in all directions, to scatter over the fields. At sunset they begin to gather again, each column joining on to others, as the great company gets nearer and nearer to the roost. Their noisy chattering makes a deafening chorus as they circle round before settling down for the night, and when they have used the same wood for two or three years, their droppings make it so filthy that not even a fox will enter it, and all the trees die. The only chance of moving them is to light bonfires, or flash torches at them while roosting. Shooting has no effect on them.

The Starling gets his new coat in the autumn, when each feather is edged with yellow, so that then he is a spotty brown bird, but his handsomest coat comes in the spring, when the yellow edges have worn off every feather and he is glossy black on body and head, burnished with metallic



green and purple tints. You must learn to tell him from the Blackbird then, for both have yellow beaks. The easiest way is to look at their tails. The Starling's is comically short and utterly unlike that of the Blackbird.

Starlings nest in holes of almost any kind in buildings or trees, and they are a real danger to Woodpeckers and Swifts because they steal their nest holes. They lay 5 to 7 eggs and have one or two broods a year. Both parents build and sit upon the eggs and feed the young. Though they eat almost anything, including fruit and some corn, they are on the whole very useful to the farmer, for most of their food (and all that of the young birds) consists of insects, grubs, and worms. They fly by alternate spells of quick wingbeats and skimming glides. The autumn flocks feed with Rooks, Peewits, and Jackdaws. The song of the male birds is heard all the year except in August during the moult. It is cheerful and contains many beautiful notes and trills, but it is spoiled by the odd noises which he mixes with it—coughs, wheezes, and clicks. A Starling is a great mimic of other birds and of any strange sounds he may hear. He has been heard to imitate the popping of corks!

When they are feeding on a lawn, you will notice that they hop, run, and walk with a bandy-legged rolling gait, and that they open their beaks before putting them into the

ground to take a worm or grub.

The Wren is about the smallest of our birds, with tiny round wings and a minute cocked tail. He is with us all the year. No part of the country is without him and he will be found in almost every patch of very thick undergrowth. The most surprising thing about the Wren is the loudness of his song for such a tiny bird. He sings in every month of the year a loud, high pitched, trilling song of great energy and explosive force. He seems to be saying "How dare you disturb so great and powerful a bird as I am!" and he will sing in all weathers. You will see him dash across the

The Wren, Kingfisher and Dipper

short space from bush to bush and hear him shout out his defiant and beautiful melody as soon as he perches.

At the end of April each pair of Wrens builds a soft covered nest made of moss in a hole in a bank or tree. Six eggs are laid (sometimes many more) and two broods a year are brought up. Their food consists almost wholly of the smallest insects.

Another of these birds without relations here is the Kingfisher. Only in the flatter parts of England and Wales will you be likely to see him, a bright streak of shining blue, as he flies along a calm stream or lake. The Kingfisher is shy and keeps away from us as much as he can. When undisturbed, he sits on a bough overlooking the water and peers into it. Whenever a minnow or other small fish passes, he plunges in, grabs it in his bill, brings it back to his perch, beats it against the branch, turns its head down his throat, and swallows it. The Kingfishers lay 6 to 8 eggs in a deep burrow, dug with their bills in the earth of the bank bordering the water. They often have two broods a year. The same nest will be used again next year and they take no pains to keep it clean. They do not migrate, but in severe winters work down stream to the sea to get away from frozen waters. Their cry is a shrill, but musical, "Tit-tit-tit." Though hard to see except in flight, they are the most brilliant birds we have, in their dress of red, white, and blue. This is true of the living Kingfisher, but what shall we say of the stuffed specimens, dingy, stiff, unnatural and bedraggled, which we too often see under glass cases? They do nothing but show how stupid it is to destroy a beautiful thing.

Among the small perching birds there is only one other which gets its dinner from under water and that is the Dipper. If you are anywhere by a mountain stream you will soon notice a plump little bird of a dark chocolate colour with a brilliantly white breast, standing on some stone which sticks out of the water. The Dipper, for this is he, will not

A Book of Common Birds

stay still for a moment. The constant movement, which we call "dipping", is a bobbing up and down of his whole body by bending and then straightening the legs, so that his body seems to bounce upon the stone like a small indiarubber ball. This dipping is curious and unlike the motion of any other bird. But if you watch him for a few minutes, something much more curious will happen. He will hop down from the stone into the shallow water and begin to walk into deeper water, and he will go on wading until he is lost to view, wholly covered by the stream. If you get up so close as to be able to see the bird under the water, you will see that he is working along the bottom, with his head up stream and his wings open and slightly raised. This keeps him down on the bottom so that he can get at the insect grubs or water snails under the pebbles. Sometimes you may see a Dipper swimming on the surface of deep pools and diving.

Another strange thing about the Dippers is their choice of a site for their nests. Their favourite position is just under the lip of a little waterfall. They are so used to the water that they do not mind splashing through the thin curtain of falling water every time they come to or leave the nest, and they know that their nests are safer there than anywhere else. There, or under a bridge, or in the banks of the stream, the hen Dipper, who looks just like her mate, lays her 5 eggs in a nest of moss which both parents build. The nest is covered over and has a side entrance and is lined with dead leaves. Although they are most commonly found by mountain streams, Dippers are sometimes to be seen by quiet waters in the low lands.

The cock Dipper has a sweet rippling song rather like that of a Wren, but without its fierce energy, and he sings all through the year except for about a month, beginning early in July, when he is moulting his feathers. He is one of the few singers whom you may hear in mid-winter.

The Flycatcher

I have already spoken of the Kingfisher's habit of sitting on a favourite perch from which he dives to catch his dinner and to which he returns with his catch. There is another common little bird which does the same thing, with the difference that his flights do not end in a dive into water, but with a sharp snap in the air (you can hear it) as he takes a flying insect. This bird—the Spotted Flycatcher—is a summer visitor only and is common all over the country. Although they have no very noticeable colouring you cannot mistake them for any other bird. The Flycatcher and his wife are just alike, small brown birds with pale, darkflecked breasts. A favourite perch is chosen, often the top of a post or gate, or a low bough, and quite near to our houses, and on it the Flycatcher will sit all day, darting out to pursue and catch his flies and then coming straight back to his perch, or to the nest where his mate is hatching her eggs or brooding her four or five little ones. The nest is most often in a creeper, or on the bough of a fruit tree on a wall, and is lined with hair. Two broods are sometimes brought up in a year, though the Spotted Flycatchers are with us for only a short time, coming here late and leaving early.

BIRD WATCHING

BIRDS live more closely with us than any of the other wild creatures. They are nearly all out and about in the day-time (which the wild animals are not) and some of them are always around our houses and in our gardens, so that we can see them. In many ways they are so like ourselves that we think of them as we do of people. Also they are so graceful and pretty that it is delightful to watch them. Many birds are very shy and all have great powers of sight and hearing. If, therefore, you wish to look closely at them and to see them behaving naturally and at their ease, you must use much of the Scout's cunning. You must see them without their seeing you.

Once you know that this is your object, you have learned half the art of the bird-watcher. The next thing to learn is that any movement attracts the attention of a wild creature more quickly than anything else. If you remain quite still, you may be unseen. If you move a finger, the bird will see you at once. I remember a lesson I once had in this. I was standing in a lane at the edge of a wood where beaters were driving game. My teacher was not a bird but a Fox, whose sight, hearing, and skill in avoiding men, are equal to that of the shyest bird. I was standing up against the hedge, looking across the lane straight into the wood, when suddenly, right in front of me, I saw the Fox and he was not five yards away. He was creeping steathily out of the wood, frightened by the noise of the beaters behind him, and he stopped to look back and listen. I stood rigidly still. looked up and down the lane and seemed to look right through me, but he did not see me and stayed there listening and deciding what was his best chance of getting away. We both remained like that for at least a minute (it seemed ten!) and then I moved one hand. In an instant he was off, back into the wood and away. He had not seen me till I moved.

If you must move, do so as slowly as you can.

You should watch how the birds feed, how they behave to their mates and to other birds, whether they are alone or in company, whether they sing (if so it will almost always be the cock bird), and how they fly. Notice whether they hop, walk, or run, whether they perch or stand on the ground, how they bathe in water, or, if they cannot get at water, whether they bathe in sand or dust. Indeed everything you see for yourself about any bird will be of interest. If you are lucky, you may see the building of a nest from the placing of the first twigs until the inner lining is finally rounded off by the bird sitting in the nest and turning round and round.

Birds' eggs are very beautiful, but do not collect them. If you once begin, you will want to have the rarer eggs and every egg that you take from a rare bird makes the bird rarer still. Even repeated visits to a nest, to see how the young birds are getting on, are dangerous, and you should never touch a nest, as many birds will desert them if troubled by visitors. You will be told that, when you take the eggs from a nest, the mother bird will always lay again. Even if this were true (which it is not) you will have reduced the total number of eggs she can lay in her life. Collect something else.

The first general rule to remember when you see a bird that is new to you is that it is not likely to be a very rare bird. I knew of a small boy who came back from school singing "There was an old Dowl sat up in a tree." His aunt corrected him, telling him he should say "an old Owl." His reply was "Aunt Mary, do you know all the birds there is?" and when she confessed that she did not, "Well," said he, "this was a Dowl!" To his credit be it said that when he came home next day he admitted his mistake and said "It was a Owl!" Now the point of that tale here is that when you see a new bird it is not likely to be a "Dowl." Unless

you are already familiar with all the common birds, you may take it for granted that the new bird you have seen is one of the 70 birds in this book.

The first thing you will notice about a bird is its size. We usually think of the Blackbird as the largest of the little birds and of anything distinctly larger, such as a Rook or a Pigeon, as big. In this sense of the word, most of the birds in this book are small. The Crows, Hawks, Owls, Gulls, Pigeons and Crakes, and the Cuckoo are large birds. Of all the families mentioned here, the Waders and the Woodpeckers alone are made up of both big and little birds.

The big birds are much easier to recognise than the small. The chief difficulty is to know the little perching birds apart, and it is to help you in this that I have made up the table on the page opposite. When you get to know them better, you will find that you recognise a bird more by its flight, shape, and attitude, than by its colours. Sometimes however, if you can see the colour clearly, it may help you to detect the bird if you look it up in this table. Read the table through first and you will see how it is made up. It contains only the 40 small birds mentioned in this book.

There are many birds not in this book, which aims only at telling you of the commonest birds. The Game Birds, the Ducks and Geese, many of the sea birds, and a few of the small perching birds, are all left out. Some of them are fairly common, but when you know the birds mentioned here, it will be time for you to begin to learn to know the others. For these you must look in a larger book than this.

THE SMALL BIRD

ALL BLACK

Blackbird (cock) long tail Starling (cock) short tail

BLACK HEAD

Bullfinch Tits, Great, Coal and Marsh

PIED (BLACK AND WHITE)
Swallow
Martin
Water Wagtail

WHITE PATCHES

Chaffinch (2 wing bars)
Bullfinch (rump and wing bar)
Tits (on cheeks)
Lark, Pipits, and Wagtails (sides of tail)

RED PATCHES

Robin Redbreast Chaffinch, cock (breast) Bullfinch, cock (breast) Woodpeckers (head)

Bright Yellow Patches Greenfinch (wing) Yellow Hammer (head) Yellow Wagtail (breast) Grey Wagtail (breast) Green Woodpecker (rump)

ALL BROWN

Blackbird hen (long tail) Starling hen (short tail) Wren. Very small Swift. Never perches

Brown with Pale Breast Greenfinch, hen Nightingale Sparrow (hard bill) Hedge Sparrow (tender bill) Tree Creeper

Brown with Spotted Breast

Thrush
Redwing
Fieldfare
Mistle Thrush
Skylark
Pipits
Flycatcher

Mainly Green Birds Green Woodpecker Greenfinch, cock

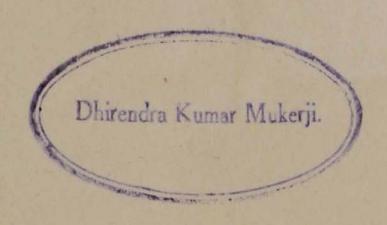
Greenfinch, cock Yellow Wagtail

BLUE FEATHERS Kingfisher (brilliant) Nuthatch (greyish) Blue Tit

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