

MONTREAL NATURE NOTES; II.

By M. GLADDING (H.O.E.).

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*May 16th.* A really hot afternoon in the woods and fields beyond Cartierville, on the north side of Montreal island. The woods were carpeted with trilliums and large-flowered bellworts, with an undergrowth of both Canada and big blue violets. We found many new flowers—cut-leaved toothwort, foamflower, purple twisted-stalk (a kind of smilax with a beautiful crimson-stained little bell-flower), false spikenard, dwarf ginseng, etc.

Along the roadside we were suddenly arrested by a melodious contralto whistle, and were thrilled to see a Baltimore oriole in the tree top above us—such glorious colouring, black head; flaming orange tail, breast and rump; black back and black and white wings. Below him in a swamp was a small, shy thrush that we have identified as the veery (or Wilson's thrush), and a little further on we looked up into some fir trees at the sound of a tinkling chorus, and saw a whole flock of male and female American goldfinches. He is a much larger bird than the English one, and all gold but for black in the wings and tail. She looks more like a greenfinch, but their behaviour and song is just that of their English cousin.

Later we came across open fields and had the joy of hearing and seeing bobolinks for the first time. It is such a happy inconsequent bubbling song, which the bobolink throws up at the sky for sheer joy (with a preliminary duck of the head for the opening notes) from the top of some high tree, and his black head, yellow nape, and black and white wings and back are most attractive in the sunshine.

A pair of long-legged birds flew overhead, rather sandpiperish; they landed in a ploughed field whither we tracked them down, and were delighted to find a pair of killdeer plover. The female seemed distressed at first, and we hoped to find her nest, but were not successful. The babies may of course be hatched by now, as killdeer do nest early. The male has two

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black collars on a pure white breast, otherwise he is like a larger edition of the dainty English ringed plover. When the birds flew off, there was a wonderful flash of ochraceous colouring on the rump and back, and beautiful barred markings under the wings.

On the way back to the road, we startled a song-sparrow from her nest—five lovely speckled blue-grey eggs in a grass and horse-hair nest under a stone, and as we had found a bluebird's nest earlier in the day, in an old tree stump in the wood, we had a very good bag.

The only trouble was—mosquitoes! It is *quite* evident that they and the small black flies are out, but they were worst right in the woods.

*May 18th.* Saw a yellow warbler near the road on the way to school.

*May 19th.* A yellow warbler has been singing his short jolly song on the pine-tree outside the school all the morning. He is so lovely—bright canary yellow, with slightly

darker back and wings, and wee reddish speckles in lines down his breast. He eats insects busily, standing on tip-toe and stretching up his sharp black beak, or hanging upside down like a tom-tit.

*May 21st.* To-day Mrs. Yellow Warbler is with her mate on the pine-tree. She is very much darker, almost pale olive colour, and with no spots on the breast.

The plum and cherry trees are just wonderful on the mountain now. We found three varieties this evening. The Canada plum has quite a large flower, with a reddish calyx. The blossoms cover every twig. The Juneberry has narrow petals, and few flowers at the ends of the twigs; while the wild red cherry has clusters of small flowers very like the hawthorn at the ends of the twigs and its leaves well out at the same time.

*May 23rd.* A rich week-end at the island cottage, Lac Echo. We walked from the station and saw the loveliest sight—about a dozen or more swallows, circling about over the road near a farm, and settling on the wire fences. They were so tame, in fact quite inquisitive as we stood motionless in the road to watch them. They would come nearer and nearer along the wire, and then one would sweep close over our heads, and back to the end of the line to discuss us busily. There were three kinds there; tree swallows, with pure silvery white breast and cheek, iridescent steely-blue head and back, shaded to buff on the tail—and the loveliest rippling song; barn-

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swallows, with apricot-coloured breast, red throat, deep blue-black head and back, long forked tail with a waving white band across it near the end; and cliff or eaves swallows, distinguished from the barn swallows by a short square tail, cinnamon-red rump, red throat, and an almost lemon-buff mark on the forehead immediately above the beak and on the nape.

The dear little island is—“full of strange sounds that give delight and hurt not.” There are evidently redwings nesting on the waterside, though we cannot find their nests. We have found the homes of two song-sparrows (one just outside the back door), and there are quantities of warblers, so tame they almost can be touched, as they flit busily about the coniferous trees (small trees, luckily, so that we can see the birds well). We must be right in the line of migration, there are so many varieties. We have easily identified the following:—

- (1) Chestnut-sided warbler; he has a yellowish-olive head, speckled brown back, and white breast with an irregular chestnut line down each side, from the cheek.
- (2) Black-throated green warbler; rather like the myrtle warbler we saw here a fortnight ago, but with olive-green head and back, yellow throat and cheeks, and a black collar and spots on the breast.
- (3) Blackburnian warbler; he is the most exquisite of all—black above with an orange cap, two white lines down his back and each side of the tail, white spots on the wings, black lines from the beak through the eyes and lores,—and above that—flaming orange, as is also his throat and breast, speckled with black on the sides and belly.
- (4) Northern Parula blue warbler; he has a lovely slatey-blue head and back, with an olive patch in the middle of his back, a yellow throat and breast with a low orange collar, white wing bars and white spots at each side of the end of the tail.

(5) Magnolia warbler; he is rather like the myrtle and the black-throated green warblers, but he has a *slate*-coloured head, a thick black line through the eye, yellow cheeks and throat, and a black collar and spots on the yellow breast.

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In the woods and on the island, we have seen redstarts—the most vivid tangerine-red on the sides, wings (under and upper surface) and outer tail feathers; the end and centre of the tail shining blue-black, as is also the back, head and breast. The female is greyish-brown, with lemon-yellow markings where the male is tangerine. There are several veeries on the island, very tame, and we saw and heard what must be a wood-thrush on the mainland. He is larger than the veery, with a much speckled breast, and his song is clear and flute-like, rather like the best notes of our English blackbird.

*May 24th.* I slept last night on the verandah, to the sound of “lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore.” The stars were brilliant and the dawn exquisite—a low line of light on the edge of the wooded hills, Venus hanging above, and then the first sleepy song-sparrows, and the sun leaping up over the brow of the hill and shining full on my face.

The song-sparrow outside the back door has hatched her babies to-day—poor anxious mother, her wonted island peace so suddenly invaded by constant slamming of the screen door as we go to the well for water, or to the woodstack for more fuel. I saw the kingfisher again near the outlet stream on the mainland, such a big bird compared to ours, and rather dull in colouring by comparison. There was a pair of sandpipers there too. We are lucky in having it clear and brilliantly sunny, but with a cold nip in the air which keeps down the mosquitoes . . . . .

I have just seen a black-and-white warbler at close quarters (that makes warbler No. 6). He acts almost like the treecreeper, or might be mistaken for a kind of nuthatch. He is all over black-and-white wavy longitudinal stripes, and very handsome.

*May 25th.* Rather a windy night on the verandah. Early this morning a pair of large gulls passed overhead, and then a red-breasted nuthatch searched one of the verandah supports near me for insects. Its mate came flying quickly round the corner, and dashed itself against the wire mesh screen, but did not seem hurt at all.

We went out to examine a large nest reported from a neighbouring island, and approaching as silently as possible we saw a black duck leave the nest—a beautiful home completely lined with speckled down from her breast, and containing

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nine large pale-buff eggs, the whole structure hidden under some spruce scrub just a few feet up from the water's edge.

This afternoon, on our island we saw still more warblers! No. 7 was another black-and-yellow one, the Canadian warbler, with yellow throat and breast and a wonderful hanging *necklace* of black spots. Then we saw No. 8, the lovely little Wilson's warbler; he has a bright yellow throat, breast and forehead with a wee black cap slipping off the back of his head. On the mainland I saw and heard the chebec (or least fly-catcher) and watched him earning his name. He is very like the phoebe, but smaller,

and with a white eye ring which makes him look rather fierce at close quarters. We still could not track the author of that slow, plaintive, high whistle we have heard so often, but just as we had tracked a jolly little song to a chestnut-sided warbler, we heard another near by. And there, perched on the top of a low shrub near the water was the loveliest little warbler (No. 9)—greenish-buff back, yellow throat and breast, and the oddest little black mask over his eyes and forehead (edged with white). He stretched up his little throat and threw his head back further and further till I feared he would fall over backwards, asking a perpetual question—"Which-is-it, which-is-it, *which-is-it?*" in perfect threefold rhythm. Luckily we soon knew, as we had an excellently illustrated little handbook. He was the northern yellow-throat.

Reluctant to go back to civilization, I was watching a crowd of warblers in the swamp bushes on the roadside by Rainville's farm, when I saw No. 10—the bay-breasted warbler. He had the most vivid reddish-brown forehead, throat and sides, with a buff nape and cheeks. There were two of them there for a minute or so, and then they disappeared.

A fitting finish to our truly record week-end was the sudden sight of a scarlet tanager on the roadside, half-way to the station. He was a flash of glory in the lovely soft spring green all around him; the most vivid scarlet head, back and breast, with black wings and tail, and a yellowish beak. Quite a big bird, he sat fearlessly on the fence till we were very close, then flew casually across the road and a little ahead, catching a large fly en route. He preceded us down to a stream, where, after an extra large catch of flies, he went down beside the splashing water and drank his fill. Then he flashed up into an elm tree, and we reluctantly left him sitting there, his brilliant black and red so well set off by the bright young green of the fresh leaves.

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Later there was a sudden "hum-m-m" past my face—a humming bird, but I scarcely saw it, so swiftly did it pass by.

*May 27th.* Went up the mountain this evening. On the way we saw a scarlet tanager on Cedar Avenue by the busy roadside, looking brilliant in the evening sunshine against the fresh young green of the trees. There were veeries in the thicket, and alas! many mosquitoes. We heard "Teacher! teacher! TEACHER!" the ovenbird's shrill call, and had great difficulty in tracking him down in the dim woods, as he kept to the low bushes. At last we saw him—only a back view, but we could plainly see the yellow line along his head. Otherwise he is very thrush-like. (His name refers to the shape of his nest, a dome with an entrance at the side, and placed on the ground.)

We saw a pair of warblers which appeared to be "bay-breasted," but the light was not good enough in the thicket to be sure of them. Higher up, we watched a nuthatch, and one or two warbler-like birds, one of which we thought might be a vireo; and there was a large greenish finch-like bird slowly moving about in the branches of a tree. It may have been a Mrs. Tanager, as she is dull green. We also saw a chipmunk, who sat up and stared us out, and then disappeared down a hole—such a small hole, too.

We came home by the bluebirds' nest near the swamp. There was no one about, so we climbed up to examine the nest, and after feeling something warm inside, we saw

Mrs. Bluebird come out and sit unconcernedly on a branch, and proceed to tidy up! Even if it were her feathers we touched, we knew the babies were hatched, because the male bird came at once with a fat worm in his beak, and disappeared into the hole.

*May 29th.* Took some children for a Nature Walk on the mountain. We watched the bluebirds going “back and forth” with worms, and then went round by the edge of a coppice and through the swampy wood. We heard the slurring downward whistle that I have thought was the veery’s, and we tracked down *some* kind of a thrush. We caught sight of several warblers (or vireos?), but the leaves are all out now, and birds are so difficult to see. Then we met a man watching birds in the wood, and he told us we were right about the veery; he whistled, and one answered him, and came quite close, so that we even saw his tawny tail, much to the children’s delight. We also saw a Mrs. Redstart there. I have also,

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I think, nailed down that slow flute-like whistle (Bliss Carman’s “Silver flute of Spring”) that we have heard so much lately. The children say he is the Canada bird, and says:— “I—love—Canada, Canada, Canada!” I was looking up the whitethroat (which did not seem to be anything like our British one), as I wondered why we had neither seen nor heard one, when I found out that it is the “white-throated sparrow,” and the American book I have translates his song as: “Old—Sam—Peabody, Peabody, Peabody.” We *have* caught a glimpse of a white-throated sparrow in that particular thicket, so it only remains now to *see* him singing his love of Canada (I prefer that translation, of course!).

*May 30th.* Saw a catbird on the mountain—very grey with a black head, and light red-brown under his long tail, but I did not hear him “mee-aow!”

*June 2nd.* Up on the mountain this evening we were surrounded with bird songs, just when we were not free to track them! But one, the most beautiful curling song, we were surprised to find came from a veery, perched high on a tree. It is by far the loveliest song I have heard here. Chapman says: “If you can imagine the syllables “bee-r-r-hu,” repeated eight or nine times around a series of intertwining circles, the description may enable you to recognize the veery’s song” . . . . . “His notes touch chords which no other bird’s song reaches—all the wondrous mysteries of the woods find a voice in his song.”

We found blue-eyed grass (*Iridaceæ*), a lovely little starry blue flower coming from a sheath at the end of a flat grass-like stem. There are great clouds of blossoming bushes, cherries and plums and haws, and we found dogwood and mountain-ash out, and a cut-leaved oak with slender chains of staminate flowers and small pistillate ones in the leaf-axils.

The false lily-of-the-valley (*Maianthemum Canadense*), is out at last—a fluffy white spike of flowers above two green leaves, almost like a collection of wee blown popcorns.

*June 3rd.* Up on the mountain after tea. A hot evening, and at first we did not see many birds. The white-throated sparrow (if it is he), was again only an ethereal voice, and we heard, but could not get near, a savannah sparrow. We heard quite a number of veeries singing their lovely vesper song, and found carpets of *Maianthemum Canadense*.

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On the way back we heard a confused song, something like a robin trying to sing everyone else's song besides his own, and were amazed to see that it was a catbird, perched on a dead branch, so that we saw him well. Mathews says:—"He is an imitator, and possibly does not know himself exactly what he is talking about" . . . . "He intersperses his melodic phrases with quotations from the highest authorities, thrush, song-sparrow, wren, oriole, and whip-poor-will! The yowl of a cat is thrown in anywhere; the guttural remarks of the frog are repeated without the slightest deference to good taste or appropriateness" . . . . "His song is no ordinary one; it is like some long rigmarole, the drift of which is humourously incomprehensible, though the bird apparently considers his remarkable strophes both serious and important."

Coming down Cote des Neiges hill in the dusk, and hearing a loud "Peent!" repeated, I looked up and saw a small hawk, turning and hovering and twisting with a swift bat-like flight, and then suddenly hurtling downwards in the most alarming manner, recovering his balance by some miracle when nearing the flat roof of a large apartment block, only to turn and swoop up again. He proves to be a night hawk, his short forked tail and white wing-bars identifying him clearly. We were thrilled to read in Chapman that they nest, in cities, on the flat gravel roofs of houses, so now we want to get on to that apartment roof to investigate!

We have had such a hot week, that it has hardly been possible to go [sic] Nature Walks. I took four children on the mountain this evening and we found many new flowers. The swamp patch near the toboggan run has changed tremendously in a week—the grass is very long now (mostly cocksfoot), and there is a patch here and there of the beautiful Canadian anemone, almost as big as the Japanese anemones we grow in our gardens at home. (Why do the Canadians not have gardens? I could make a beautiful one just out of their spring wild flowers). Blue-eyed grass is everywhere and quite tall now. The plum and cherry blossoms are over, but the haws and dogwoods are all in full bloom, and their scent is intoxicating. We listened to the catbird's song for quite a time in the same spot, and saw the tawny patch under his tail very clearly. We also tracked a new song to a neutral-coloured little bird with a line over his red eye, so I think I may safely call him a red-eyed vireo. His movements were warbler-like, [p 402]

but slower and heavier. The bluebirds were nowhere to be seen. I climbed the post to examine the nest and found it quite empty, so I expect the young birds have flown some time ago.

The children have brought in a great deal of robin's plantain this week—such a pretty lilac-pink compositæ flower that grows by roadsides. We are watching one each morning, coming out on the path on Sherbrooke St. In the little quarry on Cote des Neiges, I found the white campion, gromwell, and marguerite daisy out last night.

*June 13th.* On the mountain this evening I found nine new flowers, the biggest surprise being bittersweet. We already know the beautiful orange and red berries, having found them last autumn, but the insignificant small green flowers do not look as if they could produce such beautiful fruits. The stem is weak and trailing, climbing high up trees sometimes. The leaves are alternate, long and slightly toothed.

Among the trees on the Westmount side, I was watching a crowd of young bluebirds (but slatey-blue and with *speckled* breasts!), when I noticed a largish bird of fly-catcher outline, grey throat and yellow belly. It was very active, and though I did not see it actually catching flies, I am sure it must be a crested fly-catcher. In the same tree, but higher, I suddenly saw a small bird that was deep Prussian blue all over, darker on the wings and tail. This was proved to be the indigo bunting. It had such a jolly song.

*June 15th.* On the mountain this afternoon it was raining and the birds were just loving it. There was a perfect chorus of song, with the lovely rippling undercurrent of the veery. We saw one on the top of a bare shrub, and he did not change his song to the sliding whistle alarm note until we were very close. There were a great many blue irises out to-day in the swampy patch, and I found sundrops (a dear little evening primrose), silverweed, and penny cress, and on one side of the path quite a lot of goatsbeard. "John-go-to-bed-at-noon" is a name evidently not known over here.

*June 20th.* Sailed for England. Total Flower List, 131; total Bird List, 84 (between March 17th and June 20th).