

ART. VII.—NOTES ON SOME OF THE CANADIAN SONG BIRDS.
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READ 16th FEBRUARY, 1833.

AN opinion has prevailed principally through the assertions of Buffon, that the American birds have little or no song, but what is harsh and unmusical. In order to prove this opinion incorrect, Professor Rennie has given in the Magazine of Natural History, a sketch of twenty-four American song birds; the details he says are chiefly taken from Wilson. His sketch is quite sufficient to prove that the American woods are by no means deficient in melody; yet in compliance with the request of a friend who must not be denied, a few additional examples of singing birds not mentioned, as such, by Wilson, will now be offered.

Although not favoured with the enchanting song of the mocking bird, which inhabits more southern parts of America, we are visited by most of the professor's twenty-four birds, and by some other songsters whose sweet notes are not well known south of Canada.

The fox coloured sparrow (*Fringilla rufa*) visits this place, on its way to the northern regions, early in spring, and for some time sends forth a truly melodious song. It returns south towards autumn, and I believe does not sing during winter, for Wilson terms it a silent bird; once only he heard a single one a little before the time of their departure, warble out a few sweet low notes. Here it has a loud clear and melodious song consisting of about

six syllables often repeated, with something the tone of a German flute. The notes are bold and full, yet rather plaintive, reminding one of a pleasing but melancholy tale. With this musical song we are seldom treated, as the bird remains a very short time in this part of Canada. It has however been heard so late as the middle of July, but that is a rare occurrence.

The white throated sparrow (*Fringilla albicollis*) sings sweetly here during summer. Numerous flocks arrive early in May, and remain until autumn. They are quarrelsome and very revengeful, yet while listening to those birds, one might suppose that they spent all their time in "ways of pleasantness and paths of peace." So calm and composing are their notes that a feeling of tranquility is imparted to the listener. The song although rather monotonous, is so pleasing that strangers on first hearing it, seldom fail to exclaim "how beautiful!" It consists of a loud clear whistle, each note very distinct and sweet; a few individuals give a kind of shake, which by some may be thought finer than the more simple strain. It is probable that they do not sing far south of this place, for Wilson states that they also only sing a few low or weak notes a short time before their departure. He likewise states that the colours of the female are less brilliant than those of the male, the throat not being of so pure a white; that, however, only denotes the young birds, and the full grown in their winter dress. Several pair have been seen so exactly alike that they could only be distinguished by the peculiar noise which the female often utters for some time previous to building. When angry they both have a sharp note with which they threaten those who approach too near their nest.

The Purple Finch, (*Fringilla purpurea*), another bird with whose song Wilson was unacquainted, may be heard here, both in summer and winter. During the months of December and January last we were almost daily visited by hundreds of those pretty creatures, some flitting close over the house, others hopping on the windows as if striving to gain admittance. The coldest weather does not prevent those pleasing visitors from paying us their morning call. After mid-day they disappear, seeking shelter in the thick pine forests, and we see them no more until the next clear cold morning. They have a most melodious chant, composed of a variety of soft notes: even when quarrelling their threat is not expressed by harsh or sharp sounds.—Wilson has compared the song of some birds to the tinkling of a small bell; the Purple Finch's note of displeasure might be mistaken for such. In their excursions they are often accompanied by the Pine Grosbeak, (*Pyrrhula enucleator*) and the lesser Red Pole, (*Fringilla linarea*.) The lively colour of all those birds, together with their sweet whistle and sprightly motions, add much to the exhilarating feelings caused by a bright winters morning. At such times a pleasing astonishment is felt that happiness so pure may be produced by merely observing a small portion of the beauties of creation, and that too in the depth of winter, when all is supposed to be dreary and uninteresting; those little creatures thus help to fill the mind with gratitude towards that Being "Who in his sovereign wisdom made them all." It is asserted that the Pine Grosbeak sings at night; it may rarely do so, but it certainly sings sweetly here at this season in the day time.

The two Cross Bills, (*Loxia curvirostra* and *Loxia leucoptera*) may be mentioned among our winter song birds.

Their notes are not so melodious as some of the foregoing, but they have a lively kind of chattering song which many find pleasing. These birds are so tame that a very few days after being captured they become quite familiar, and will eat out of the hand.

The Hermit Thrush, (*Turdus minor*. Gm.) although perhaps inferior to the Wood Thrush, is a cheerful and melodious songster, not uncommon here. He will sing through part of June, July and August, with much sweetness and some variety. Part of the song resembles the higher notes of a distant violin, at times only just audible, then a few notes may be distinctly heard more full and mellow, as if proceeding from some sweet wind instrument; his strains

"Now louder and yet louder rise,"

and are continued for twenty or thirty minutes.— Sometimes, though rarely, the delighted listener is disappointed by the provoking little creature suddenly changing his dulcet notes for sounds very like the mewling of a kitten. Few birds excel this in elegance of motion, when tamed they become quite fascinating by their graceful movements; they will at times alight gently in a theatrical posture, and examine what may be going on with a scrutinizing and most intelligent eye.

The Black Cap (*Parus atricapillus*) is a pretty active little bird, that may be seen here at all seasons, hopping about in search of food, he is an inferior songster, but in winter his twittering lay and plaintive mellow whistle is rather pleasing.

Some birds that arrive here in winter may occasionally be seen in summer. The Purple Finch, Siskin and Lesser Red Pole are often seen at that season, but the Purple Finch is not then met with in those large flocks with which we are visited in winter.