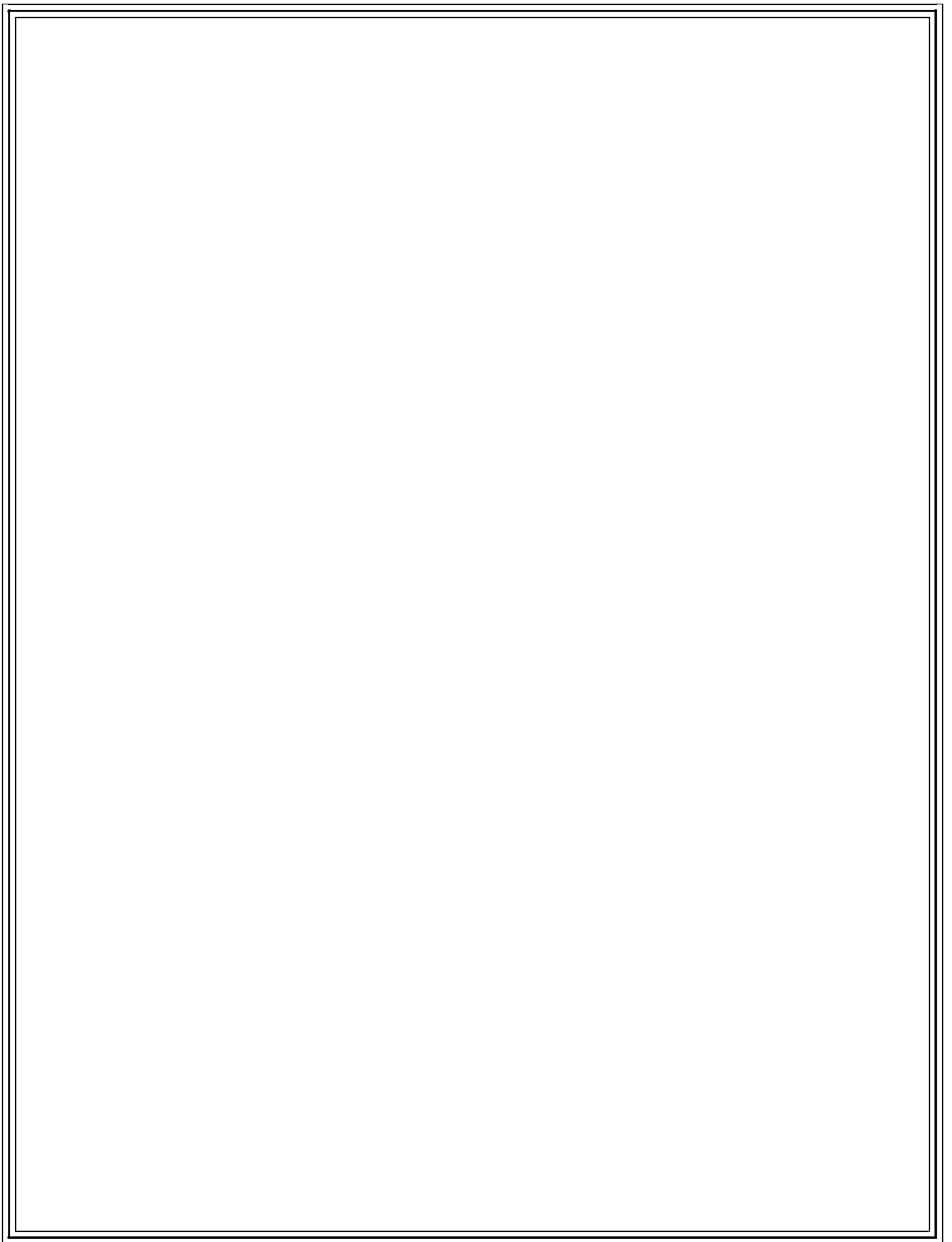


The Children's Book of Birds



A Book by Olive Thorne Miller

Reformatted and Edited by Lisa Kelly



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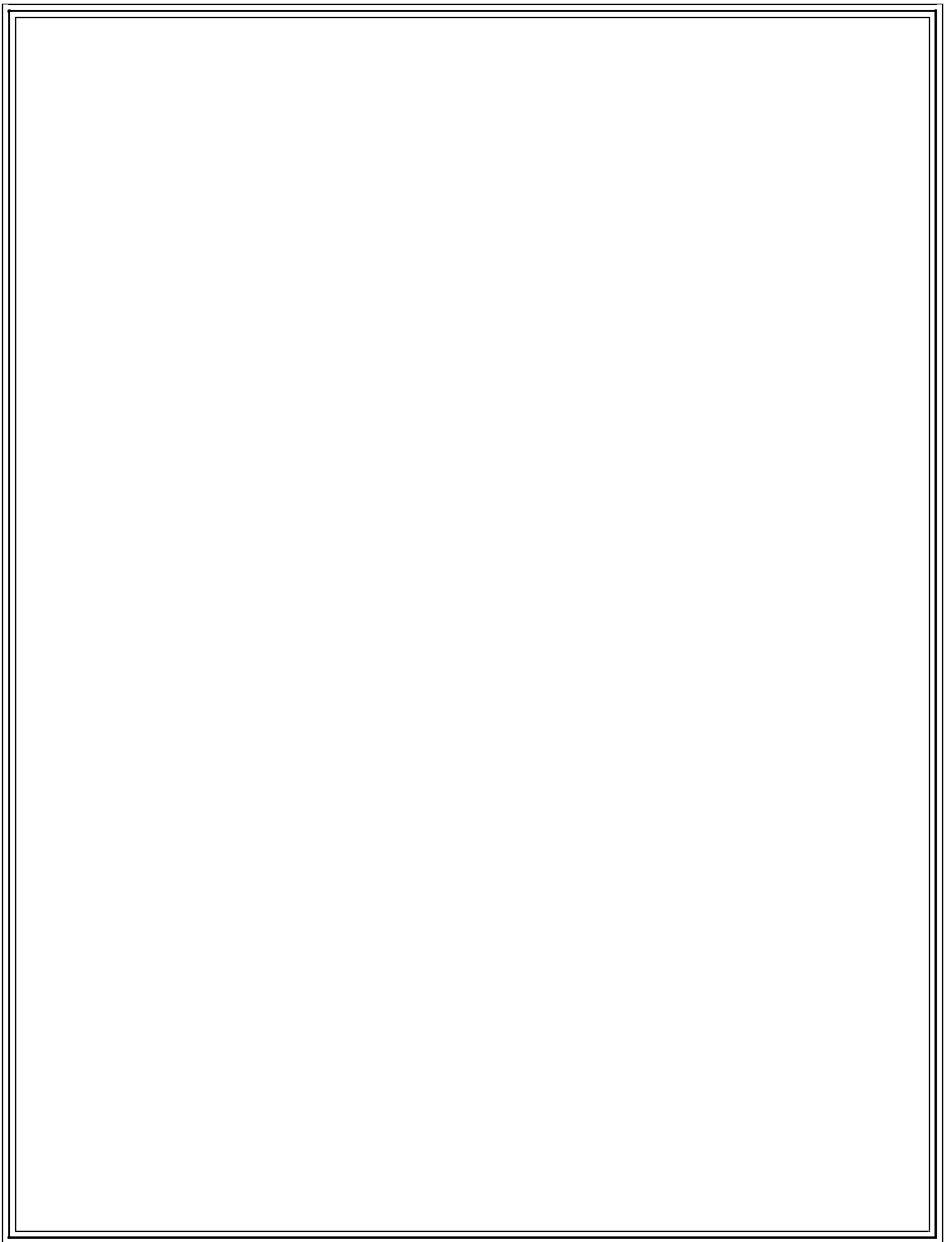
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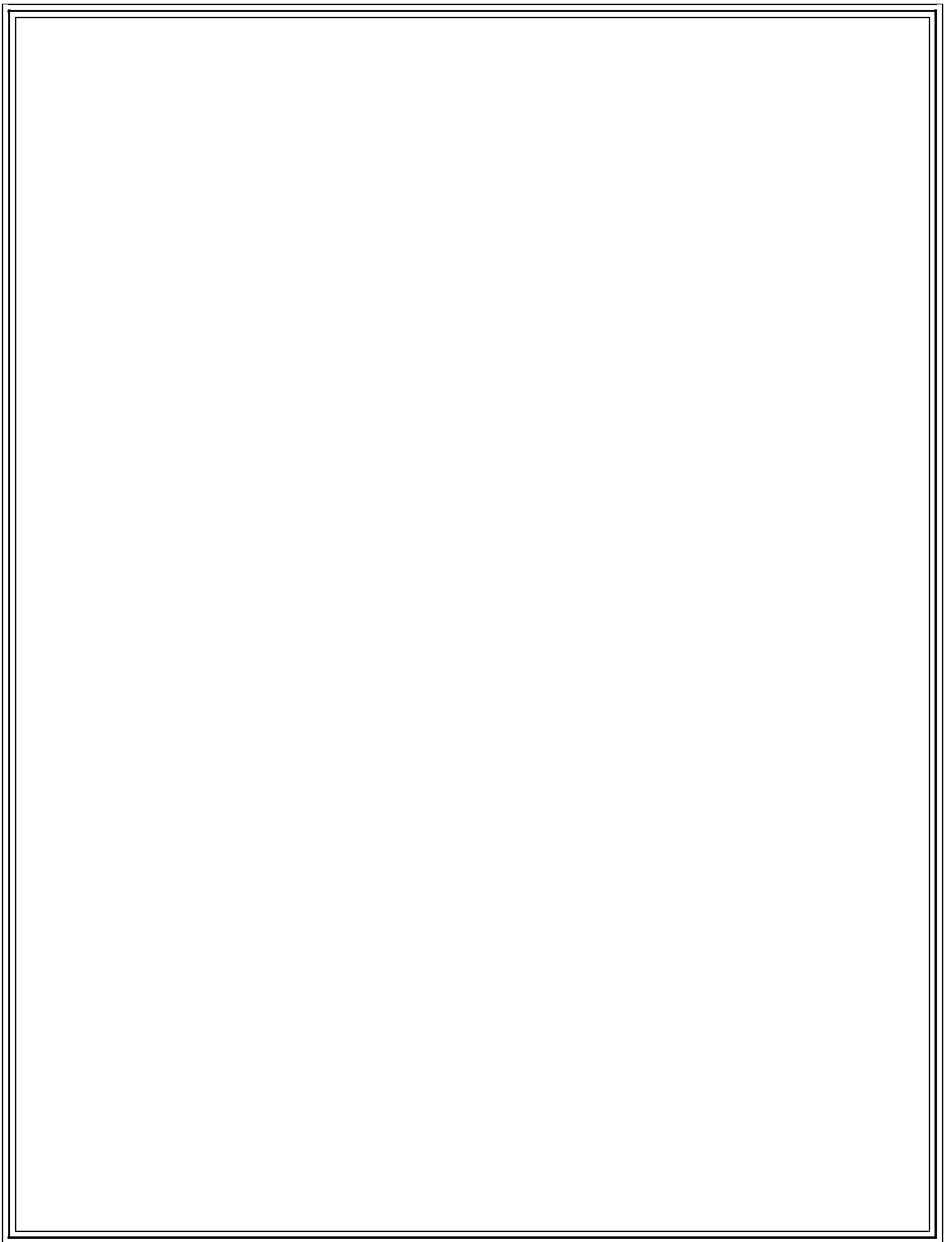


Author's Note

The Children's Book of Birds is divided into two parts: First Book and Second Book. Book 1 introduces children to how birds eat, nest, care for their young and how their bodies are built, while Book 2 includes lovely accounts of different types of birds and how they live.

The Children's Book of Birds by Olive T. Miller can be purchased as a **print book through Lulu [6 x 9]** or as a **digital version through the website's Digital Shop [8.5 x 11]**.

Send an email through the contact section for a free PDF file of Bird Cards. There are 55 cards; sized to be 5 x 8.



FIRST BOOK

I -WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW

Birds seem to be the happiest creatures on earth, yet they have none of what we call the comforts of life.

They have no houses to live in, no beds to sleep on, and no breakfast and dinner provided for them.

This book is to tell something about them; where they live and what they eat, where they sleep, how they get their beautiful dress, and many other things. But no one can tell all about their lives and habits, for no one knows all their ways.

Ornithologists, those who study birds, can tell how they are made, how their bones are put together, and how many feathers there are in the wings and tail. Of course it is well to know these things, but to see how birds live is also interesting. One who goes into the field to watch and study their ways will be surprised to find how much like people they act.

It is pleasant to see how mother birds build their nests, and how they take care of their nestlings. It is charming to see the young ones when they begin to fly, and to know how they are taught to find their food, and to keep out of danger, and to sing, and everything young birds need to know.

Then when they are grown up, it is interesting to find out where they go in winter, and why they do not stay with us all the year round.

II -WHEN THEY COME IN THE SPRING

In the long, cold winter of the New England and Middle States, not many birds are usually seen. In the cities there is always the English sparrow, and in the country, now and then a chickadee, or a woodpecker, or a small flock of goldfinches.

But very early in the spring, long before grass is green, even while snow is on the ground, the birds begin to come.

Some morning a robin will appear, standing up very straight on a fence or tree, showing his bright red breast and black cap, flirting his tail, and looking as if he were glad to be back in his old home.

Then perhaps the same day will come the hoarse cack of a blackbird, and two or three will fly over and alight in a big bare tree, looking, it may be, for a good place to build a bird city.

Soon will be heard the sweet little song of the song sparrow or the bluebird, and then we shall know that summer is coming, for these are the first birds of spring.

Day after day, as the snow melts away and the sunshine grows hotter, more birds will come. One day a catbird or two arrives, another day an oriole in black and gold, and another day a pert little wren. So it will go on, till by the time June comes in, all our birds will be back with us, very busy, hopping around in our bushes and trees, making their nests all about, and singing the whole day long.

Almost the first thing every bird thinks of, when he comes to us, is making the nest. For summer is the only time in his life that a bird has a home.

He does not need a house to live in. He cares nothing for a roof to cover him, because when the sun is hot, he has the broad green leaves on the trees to shade him. And when it rains his neat feather coat is like a waterproof that lets the drops run off, leaving him warm and dry under it.

He does not need a dining room, because he eats wherever he finds his food, and he wants no kitchen, because he prefers his food raw.

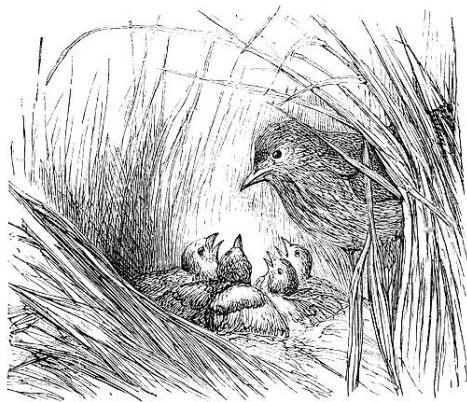
He has no use for a bedroom, because he can sleep on any twig; the whole world is his bedroom.

He cares nothing for closets and bureaus, because he has only one suit of clothes at a time, and he washes and dries that without taking it off.

He wants no fire to keep him warm, for when it is too cold he spreads his wings and flies to a warmer place. A bird has really no need of a house, — excepting when he is a baby, before his eyes are open, or his feathers have come, or his wings have grown. While he is blind, naked, and hungry, he must have a warm, snug cradle.

So when the bird fathers and mothers come in the spring the first thing they do is to find good places and build nice cradles, for they are very fond of their little ones. They spend the spring and summer in working for them, keeping them warm, feeding them till they are grown up, and then teaching them to fly and to take care of themselves, so that when summer is gone they will be ready to go with the other birds to their winter home.

III –THE BIRD’S HOME



Each bird mother has her own way of making the nest, but there is one thing almost all of them try to do, and that is to hide it.

They cannot put their little homes out in plain sight, as we do our houses, because so many creatures want to rob them. Squirrels and snakes and rats, and some big birds, and cats and many others, like to eat eggs and young birds.

So most birds try, first of all, to find good hiding places. Some tiny warblers go to the tops of the tallest trees, and hide the nest among the leaves. Orioles hang the swinging cradle at the end of a branch, where cats and snakes and humans cannot come. Song sparrows tuck the little home in a tuft of weeds, on the ground, and bobolinks hide it in the deep grass.

After a safe place is found, they have to get something to build with. They hunt all about and gather small twigs, or grass stems, or fine rootlets, and pull narrow strips of bark off the grapevines and the birch trees, or they pick up strings and horsehairs, and many other things. Robins and swallows use mud.

As they go on building, the mother bird gets inside and turns around and around to make it fit her form, and makes it smooth and comfortable for her to sit in.

When a nest is made, it must be lined. Then some birds go to the chicken yard, and pick up feathers, and others find horsehairs. Some of them pull off the soft down that grows on plants, or get bits of wool from the sheep pasture, or old leaves from the woods, and make it soft and warm inside.

Some bird homes are only platforms, where it seems as if the eggs must roll off, and others are deep burrows, or holes in the ground, where no one can get in. Some are dainty baskets hung between two twigs, and others are tiny cups of felt with lichens outside.

Each species of bird builds in its own way. There are as many different ways to make nests as there are kinds of birds to make them.

Then after all the trouble birds have taken to build a nest, they seldom use it a second time. If a pair of birds have two broods in a season, they almost always build a new one for each family.

A few birds, such as eagles, owls, and sometimes orioles, and others, repair the home and use it again, and woodpeckers sometimes nest in the old holes. But generally, after the young birds have flown, we may be sure the nest will not be wanted again.

When the nest is finished, the eggs are laid in it, one by one. We all know how pretty birds' eggs are. Some are snowy white, some are delicate pink, and some blue. Many have tiny dots and specks on them, and a few are covered with queer-looking streaks and lines. But pretty as they are, I think no one would be so cruel as to take them away from the poor little mother, if he remembered that her young ones are inside them, and that she loves them as his own mother loves him.

I have heard people say that birds do not care for their eggs. Let me tell you what a little chickadee mother did when a man tried to steal the eggs out of her nest.

The nest was in a hole in an old stump, and the man could not get his hand in, so he had to take them out one at a time with a little scoop.

At first the mother flew at him and tried to drive him away. Then chickadees and other birds that lived near came to help her. All flew about his face with cries, so that he had to use one hand to keep them away from his eyes. But still he went on taking out the eggs.

At last the little mother was so wild with grief that she dashed into the hole and sat there in the doorway, right before his face. He could not get another egg without hurting her, and he was ashamed to do that. This was as brave in the tiny creature as it would be for a human mother to throw herself before a fierce, hungry tiger. Do you think she did not care for her eggs?

IV –THE BABY BIRD

A baby bird, as you know, always comes out of an egg. And beautiful as these eggs are, they are most interesting when you think that each one holds a tiny bird.

Eggs are not all alike, of course. One the size of a bean is large enough to hold a hummingbird baby, till it is old enough to come out. But the young ostrich needs a shell nearly as big as your head. So there are all sizes of eggs to fit the different sizes of birds.

If you should break a fresh egg you would not see a bird, for it would not be formed at that time. After the egg is laid in its soft bed, it has to be kept warm for many days, and that is why the mother bird sits on her nest so quietly. She is keeping the eggs warm, so that the little ones will form and grow, till they are as big as the shells can hold.



While the mother is sitting her mate does all he can to help, though each species has its own way. The blue jay brings food to his mate, so that she need not leave the nest at all, and many others do so. But the kingbird father simply watches the nest to protect it while the mother goes for food. A redstart gets into the nest himself, to keep the eggs warm while his mate is gone, and a goldfinch coaxes his mate to go off with him for a lunch, leaving nest and eggs to take care of themselves.

Another thing the father birds do is to sing. This is the time when we hear so much bird song. The singers have little to do but to wait, and so they please themselves, and their mates, and us too, by singing a great deal.

When the little birds begin to be cramped, and find their cradle too tight, they peck at the shell with a sort of tooth that grows on the end of the beak, and is called the **egg tooth**. This soon breaks the shell, and they come out. Then the mother or father carefully picks up the pieces of shell, carries them off, and throws them away, leaving only the little ones in the nest. Perhaps you have found these broken shells on the ground sometimes, and could not guess how they came there. When the birdlings break out of their prison they do not all look the same. Ducks and geese and chickens and quails, and other birds that live on the ground, as well as hawks and owls, are dressed in pretty suits of down. They have their eyes open, and the ground birds are ready to run about at once.

A bird naturalist once saw a young duck get its first suit of down. He picked up the egg just as the little bird inside was trying to get out. In a few minutes the shell fell apart, and out stepped the duckling on his hand. It seemed to be covered with coarse black hairs, which in a moment began to burst open, one by one, and out of each came a soft fluff of down. So in a few minutes, while the man stood there and held him, the little duck was all covered with his pretty dress.

But most birds hatched in nests in trees and bushes, like robins and bluebirds, are very different. When they come out of their shells they are naked, have their eyes shut, and look as if they were nearly all mouth. A young hummingbird looks about as big as a honey bee, and a robin baby not much bigger than the eggshell he came out of.

They lie flat down in the nest, seeming to be asleep most of the time. All they want is to be warm and to be fed.

To keep them warm, the mother sits on them a great part of the time, and for the first few days of their lives, the father often brings most of the food. Sometimes he gives it to the mother, and she feeds the little ones. But sometimes she gets off the nest, and flies away to rest, and get something to eat for herself, while he feeds the nestlings.

There is one bird father who — it is thought — never comes to the nest, either to watch the eggs or to help feed the nestlings. That is our hummingbird, the ruby throat.

We do not know the reason for this, and it is not fair to say hard things about him until we do. It may be that he thinks his shining ruby would show the hiding place of the nest, or it may be that the little mother is not willing to have any help. I think this

last is the real reason, for she has a great deal of spirit, and always drives away others from her feeding places.

Young birds grow very fast, and soon feathers begin to come out all over them.

V –HOW HE IS FED

Soon after the young bird comes out of the egg, he begins to be hungry. All day long, whenever the father or mother comes near, he opens his great mouth as wide as he can, to have it filled, and the moment he gets his voice he cries for food.

Then the old birds have to work hard. Three or four hungry nestlings can keep both father and mother busy from morning till night, hunting for caterpillars and beetles and grubs and other things to feed them. It seems as if the little fellows never could get enough to eat. Each swallow baby wants seven or eight hundred small flies every day, and a baby robin needs more earthworms in a day than you can hold in your hand at once.

At this time you will see robins hunting over the lawn, and carrying great beakfuls of worms up to the nest. Bluebirds you will find looking in the grass, and sparrows hopping about on the ground, all seeking soft worms and grubs and insects for the nestlings; and they are so busy they do not get much time for singing.

At this time the orioles go all over the orchard trees looking for tiny worms, and little warblers seek them under every leaf.

Woodpeckers find the insects hidden behind the bark of trees, by cutting holes through it. Chickadees and nuthatches pick the tiniest insect eggs out of the crevices, and flickers hunt everywhere for ants.

As soon as one of the old birds has his mouth full, he flies to the nest to feed the young.

But not all birds feed in the same way. A robin just drops a big earthworm, or a part of one, into the gaping baby mouth. Many other birds do so also. Sometimes, when an insect is too big or too hard, they beat it till it is soft, or break it up, before giving it to a little one.

But hummingbird mothers and flicker mothers have a different way. When they collect the food they swallow it, as if they wanted it for themselves. Then they go to the nest, and jerk it up again in mouthfuls, and feed the nestlings. This is called feeding by **regurgitation**.

The way they give the food is very curious. They push their long beaks into the nestling's throat, and poke the food far down; so the young one does not even have the trouble of swallowing.

This looks as if it must hurt, but the nestling seems to like it, and is always ready for more. The pigeon mother lets the young one poke his beak down her throat, and get the food for himself.

If the food is hard, like corn, birds who feed in this way let it stay in the crop till it is soft and better fitted for tender throats, before they give it out.

It is comical to see a nest full of little birds when the father or mother comes with food. All stretch up and open their big mouths as wide as they can, and if they are old enough, they cry as if they were starving.

Some birds bring food enough for all in the nest, every time they come. A cedar-bird, feeding wild cherries, brought five of them every time, one for each of the five nestlings. One cherry was held in his mouth, but the other four were down his throat, and had to be jerked up one by one.

Other birds bring only one mouthful at a time, and when there are five or six in the nest, they have to make as many journeys before all are fed.

Some persons who have studied birds think that each nestling is fed in its turn; but they look so much alike, and are so close together, that it is hard to tell, and I am not sure that it is so.

I will tell you a story I have heard about feeding little birds. A child picked up a young goldfinch that had fallen out of the nest. He took him home and put him into the canary's cage, which was hanging on the front porch.

Soon the family heard a great noise among the birds, and went out to see what the matter was. The baby goldfinch had hopped on to a perch in the cage, and seemed to

be afraid to come down, though the old birds had brought food for him, and were calling him to take it.

The canary looked on a while, and then all at once he flew to the wires and took the food from the birds outside; then he went back to the perch beside the little one and gave it to him. This he did many times.

The next day another young goldfinch was picked up and put in the cage, and the canary took food from the parents and fed both.

After a few days the old birds came with a third little one, and as all were now old enough to fly, the cage door was opened, and they all flew away.

This is a sample only.

SECOND BOOK

I –WHAT IS A BIRD FAMILY?

In the “First Book of Birds” I told you about the common life of a bird; what sort of a home he has, and how he is taken care of when little; then how he lives when grown up; what he eats; where he sleeps; and something about how he is made.

In this book, I want to help you a step further on in your study of birds. I shall tell you something about particular birds, about the families they belong to, and the different ways in which they live.

To begin with: What is a bird family? In life, a bird family is exactly like a human family. It consists of father, mother, and children. But in natural history, a family means quite another thing.

Ornithologists have placed the birds in groups which they call families, to make it easier to find out about them, and write about them. This way of arranging them in books is called **classification**—or forming them into classes.

Birds are classified, not by the way they look, but by the way they are made, or their structure, and this is found out by the study of Scientific Ornithology. Birds may look a good deal alike, and act alike, and yet be differently made.

There is first the grand class **Aves**, which includes all creatures who wear feathers. This class is divided into orders.

Orders are made by putting together a large number of birds who are alike in one thing. For instance, all birds who have feet made to clasp a perch, and so are perchers, are put in an order together.

But many birds have feet for perching that are very different in other ways. So orders are divided into families, which I shall tell you about in this book.

In each family I shall tell you about one or more of the best known, or the ones you are most likely to see, and that will help you to know the rest of the family when you begin to study birds out of doors, and use a field guide to learn the names.

I want this little book to help the bird lovers in the South and West of our big country, as well as in the East; and so, in each Family, I shall try to tell about a bird that may be seen in each part. A good many of our birds are found both East and West, with slight differences, but some that are in one part are not in the other.

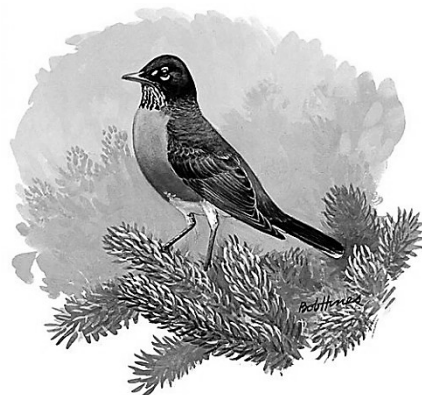
II -THE THRUSH FAMILY

~Turdid~

This family is named after the thrushes, but our familiar robin belongs to it, and also the sweet-voiced bluebird. The birds of this family are all rather good sized, and excepting the bluebird show no bright colors. Nearly all of them have spotted breasts when young, and many of them keep the spots all their lives. Young robins and bluebirds have spots on breasts and shoulders, but when they get their grown-up plumage there are none to be seen.

The thrush family get around by hopping, and do not walk, though some of them run, as you have seen the robin do on the lawn. Most of them live in the woods, and feed on the ground, and all of them eat insects. Because their feeding grounds freeze up in winter, most of these birds go to a warmer climate, or migrate. They are all good singers, and some of them among the best in America.

The best known of this family is the robin, **American Robin**, to give him his whole name. He is found all over the United States. In the summer he lives in the Eastern and Middle States, in the winter he lives in the Southern States, and he lives all the year round in California.



American Robin

The California robin is called the Western Robin, and is a little lighter in color than his Eastern brother; but he is the same jolly fellow under his feathers, and robin song is about the same from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

I'm sure you all know how he looks, with black head, slate-colored back and wings, streaked throat, and dull red or chestnut breast. His mate is not quite so dark in color.

Robins start for their nesting place, which is their real home, very early, almost the first of the birds. They make a nest, not very high, in a tree or about our houses, with a good deal of mud in it. Not all nests are alike. Sometimes a bird will show a fancy for a pretty-looking nest. I have seen one made of the white flowers of life-everlasting. The stems were woven together for the framework, and the little clusters of blossoms left outside for ornament.

The young robin just out of the nest is a pretty fellow, with spots all over his breast and shoulders. He spends most of his time calling for food, for he is always hungry. He is rather clumsy in getting about, and often falls to the ground. But if you pick him up and put him on a low branch out of the reach of cats, he will fly as soon as your hand leaves him, and generally come to the ground again. So it is of no use to try to help him that way. The only thing you can do is to keep cats and other predators away from him, until he flies up into a tree.

The robin gets his food on the ground, or just under the surface. He eats many caterpillars and grubs that are harmful to us. One that he especially likes is the cutworm, which has a bad way of biting off young plants. In the East he eats many earthworms, which we see him pull out of the ground on the lawn, but in the West, where there are not so many earthworms, he picks up insects of various kinds.

All through spring, when insects are hard at work destroying our fruit and vegetables and young grains, the robin spends almost his whole time catching them; first for his own eating, but many more when his little ones get out of the shell, for young birds eat a great amount of food. Then, when he has spent months in our service eating insects, so that our fruit and vegetables can grow, do you not think he has earned part of the cherries he has saved?

Robins are very easily made tame, and, when well treated and not shut up in a cage, they become fond of people and like to live in our houses. I know of a robin that was picked up from the ground by a lady. He could not fly, and she took him into a house

and brought him up. He was never wild or afraid of people. His mistress would sometimes put him on her hat, without fastening him in any way, and go out to walk with him there. He liked his ride, and never thought of leaving her. She often took him with her into a piece of woods where she went. He would play around on the ground and in the trees, but the moment she started for home he flew down, ready to go.

She thought perhaps he would like to be free, and she tried once or twice to leave him in this pleasant grove, but he always flew to her and refused to be left. He was so fond of his mistress that when she went away for a day or two he was very unhappy, hid himself in a closet, and would not eat till she came back.

This robin, too, liked the food of the family, and did not care for earthworms. In fact, he could hardly be coaxed to eat one of them, though he liked some kinds of grubs which he found on the ground. But he ate them in a different way from his wild brothers. He did not swallow them whole, but beat them to a jelly before trying to eat.

This pet had a sweet, low song of his own. He never sang like his wild brothers until his second year, when he had been out and heard them sing.

A pair of robins that were blown from a nest in a high wind were reared and kept in a large cage by Mrs. Grinnell in California. The first year the singer did not sing, but in the second year a wild mockingbird came to teach him. He would alight on the cage, which hung out of doors, and sing softly a long time, till the robin began to do the same. When he could sing, it was more like a mockingbird than like a robin. The mocker was very fond of his pupil, and used to bring him berries and other wild dainties.

These robins made a nest of things the mistress gave them, and eggs began to appear in it. But as soon as one was laid, one of the birds would jump into the nest and kick and scratch till it was thrown out and broken. They seemed to think the pretty blue eggs were playthings. When the weather grew hot, Bobby, the singer, showed his sense by spending most of his time lying in his bathing dish, covered with water up to his ears. He would lie there an hour at a time, too comfortable to get out even to eat.

Birds that are not brought into the house often become tame when well treated. One family in Michigan had a pair of robins who nested close to the house for fourteen years. It was plain that the birds were the same pair, for they became so friendly that

they let any of the family pick up a nestling, and showed no fear. But with other people they were as wild as any robins.

One day a man passing by picked up one of the young birds, who was scrambling about on the ground. At once the parents began loud cries of distress, and all the robins in the neighborhood came to help. They scolded and cried, and flew at the thief who wanted to carry off the baby. One of the family heard the row, and went out and claimed the robin, and the man gave it up. The moment the little one was in the hands of a person they knew, the cries ceased. Not only the parents but the neighbors seemed to understand that the nestling was safe.

The way birds act when brought up by us and not by their parents shows that young birds are taught many things before they are grown up. When living in a house, they are not afraid of cats or people, as wild ones are. They do not usually sing the robin song, nor care for the robin food, and they do not seem to know how to manage a nest.



Another charming member of the Thrush Family is the **Hermit Thrush**. He is a beautiful bird, smaller than the robin. He is reddish brown on the back, with a white breast spotted with dark brown or black. He has large, full, dark eyes, which look straight at you.

The hermit thrush spends his winters in the Southern States, and his summers in the Northern. But in the far West, where are no cold winters, the hermit does not have to move back and forth. In that part of the country the bird is the Western Hermit Thrush.

This bird is one of our finest singers, and a very shy bird. His home is in the woods, and from there we hear his loud, clear song, morning and evening. Many people think his song is the finest birdsong we have. His ordinary call as he goes about is a kind of “chuck.” The Western hermit differs hardly at all. He may be a little smaller, but he is the same delightful singer and lovely character.

The mother hermit makes her nest on the ground, and hides it so well that it is hard to find,—though I’m afraid snakes, and squirrels, and other woods creatures who like eggs to eat find it more often than we do.

Shy as the hermit is, he is an intelligent bird. A mother hermit a few years ago strayed into the grounds of a gentleman in Massachusetts and built a nest under a pine tree. When she was found, she was at first very much frightened. But the owner of the place was a bird lover, and gentle and quiet in his ways, and she got so used to him that she let him photograph her many times.

A gentleman, Mr. Owen, once captured a young hermit thrush so lately out of the nest that he could not fly much. He kept him in the house several weeks, and found out many interesting things about young thrushes. One thing he discovered was that the bird has his own notions about food. He ate raw meat and earthworms. But when worms were fed to him that came from a dirty place, he threw them out of his mouth, wiped his beak, and showed great disgust. The worms brought from clean garden earth he ate greedily.

The little captive had his own way of eating a worm. He began by worrying it awhile, and then swallowed it tail first.

He showed his instinct for sleeping high by being very restless at night, till let out of his cage. Then he flew to the highest perch he could find in the room, and roosted for the night.

The bird showed himself friendly and not at all afraid of people. Mr. Owen got so attached to him that when he let him go in the woods he felt as if he had parted with a dear friend.

This is a sample only.