

Birds of the Air



Arabella Buckley

BIRDS OF THE AIR

BY ARABELLA B. BUCKLEY

(Mrs Fisher)

EDITED

BY RACHEL E. NORTH

With Eight Full Page Coloured
Plates and other Illustrations



CHARLOTTE MASON BEEHIVE

MELTON MOWBRAY

Birds of the Air,

by Arabella Buckley

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This edition of 'Birds of the Air' is a brand new transcription, prepared and edited by Rachel North, for the exclusive use of Charlotte Mason Beehive. It is based off original scans of the twentieth century publication, which has now entered the public domain.

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Charlotte Mason Beehive

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INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EDITION

MS. ARABELLA BUCKLEY'S *Eyes and No Eyes* Series is well-known in Charlotte Mason circles due to their wide usage by the P.N.E.U. (Parents' National Educational Union). Miss Charlotte Mason, founder of the P.N.E.U., assigned one of Ms. Buckley's delightful nature readers every term for students in Form I. Written for children they describe the wonders of nature—the wildlife; flora and fauna—in simple language, essentially awakening the child's interest in the subject matter and guiding them towards what to look for when out and about on their walks each day.

As Ms. Buckley explains in the preface to her nature readers:

“These books are intended to interest children in country life. They are written in the simplest language, so as to be fit for each class to read aloud. But the information given in them requires explanation and illustration by the teacher. I have, in fact, tried to make each lesson the groundwork for oral teaching, in the course of which the children should be encouraged to observe, to bring in specimens, and to ask questions. Then when the chapter is read and re-read (EDITOR'S NOTE—Miss Mason did not permit the re-reading of lesson books within the parameters of a school lesson. Children who are particularly enchanted by the subject matter may re-read at their leisure once narration is out of the way), as is the case with most school books, it will become part of the child's own knowledge.”

Birds of the Air is the fourth in the original series, although by no means do the books require reading in any particular sequence.

Containing lessons on a variety of subjects such as birds of prey, nests and eggs, where they sleep and what they eat, sea birds, and more, this book provides an enjoyable introduction to natural history for the young child.

The short chapters lend well to an authentic Charlotte Mason education, with just ten minutes a week required in order to read the book over one term.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THIS EDITION?

1. Updated for Twenty-First Century students:-

Treating the text with great respect, we have occasionally made careful edits where deemed necessary, such as to correct factual errors, or to clarify information. Occasionally additional information and original content has been added, but despite this, the edits in this book are extremely minor and do not mar the original content or intentions of this book as set out by the author in the late nineteenth century.

2. Footnotes:-

We highly recommend the picture-book companion Natural History Pictures for a Living Education: *Birds of the Air* as a complement to your students' natural history studies. Designed to be used alongside the reading of this book, the versatile resource is made up entirely of pictures and photographs, as they relate directly to the topics read about in the natural history lessons for this unit.

To maximise its efficiency and to avoid any extra prep work by parents and teachers, footnotes are littered throughout *Birds of the Air*, indicating when a picture is available to supplement the text.

All the pictures are numbered and they are referenced in the lesson text as follows:

Natural History Pictures: Birds of the Air, p. 08, no. 06

We sincerely hope you find these additional edits and resources helpful, and that you will have a pleasant and engaging school year learning natural history with your students. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us through our website at charlottesmasonbeehive.co.uk.

RACHEL E. NORTH,
May 2022

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LESSON I.

BIRDS WE KNOW

I WONDER how many birds you know by sight, and what you could tell about their nests and their lives?

There are around six hundred different British birds, and very few people know them all. But in any one place there are not more common birds than you could learn in a year. You can look for the rare ones afterwards.

The best way to begin is to write down those you are sure about, and say how you recognize them. You cannot mistake a Robin¹, with his red breast, his plump little body, and his brown wings. The mother robin's breast is not quite so red, and the young have no red at all². But when you have seen them with the robin redbreast, you will soon know them by their shape.

But a Chaffinch³ has a red breast. How can you tell him from a robin? His breast is much browner than the robin's, and even at a distance you may know him by the white bands on his dark wings, and the yellow tips to some of his feathers. Then his body is longer, and he moves more gracefully than the robin, while his loud "*pink, pink,*" if you go near his nest, will tell you at once what he is.

The Skylark⁴ you know by his slender brown body and white speckled throat, and by the way he soars, as he sings his sweet song. The common green Woodpecker⁵ is easily known by his bright colours, his curious feet, and his stiff tail, which he uses to jerk himself up a tree. And though a Nuthatch⁶ also goes up a tree by jumps, you would never take him for a woodpecker, for he is no

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3 Natural History Pictures: Birds of the Air, p. 07, no. 03

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6 Natural History Pictures: Birds of the Air, p. 08, no. 06

bigger than a sparrow, and he has a short tail and blue-grey wings with a dingy red breast.

Then you know the cooing Wood Pigeon⁷, the chattering Magpie⁸, the soaring Hawk⁹ with his hooked beak, and the downy Owl¹⁰. And I daresay you could tell me of many more.

The birds you know best will most of them be with us all the year round. But not all. The Swifts¹¹ fly away to the south in August, and the Swallows and the Martins follow in October. When they are gone the Fieldfares¹² come from the north, and feed in flocks on the worms in the damp fields, and on the holly berries when the ground is hard with frost.

The Swallow¹³ and the House Martin¹⁴ are so alike that, as they come and go together, you might not know them apart, unless you remember that a Swallow has a blue-black collar across his breast, and that the fork of his tail is longer than that of the Martin¹⁵. You may be busy all the year round watching the birds, seeing when they come and go, what food they eat, how they fly, whether they sing in the morning or evening, and where they build their nests.

Many farmers and gardeners shoot little birds because they eat their corn and peas and fruit. But a large number of birds feed chiefly on insects. You ought to know which these are, for they are very useful in clearing away earwigs and caterpillars, as well as slugs and snails. If you look out early some morning and see a Thrush¹⁶ tapping

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a snail-shell against a stone to get at the snail, you will say he is a good gardener. You will not grudge him a little fruit in the summer.

Then there are the nests and the young birds to watch. You need not take the nests, nor rob the birds of their eggs. You will learn much more by pulling back the leaves and the twigs, and peeping gently into the nest. For then you can come another day and watch when the eggs hatch, and how the young birds grow. If you are careful not to disturb the bush nor touch the eggs, the mother will not desert them. Last year a pair of Thrushes built their nest in a hedge by the side of a path where people were always passing. But though I went often to look at it, the mother brought up all her four little ones. She would even sit still on the nest when I peeped in, while her mate sang on a tree close by.

Point out and describe six birds common in the neighbourhood.

LESSON II.

THE SONG OF BIRDS

BIRDS sing when they are happy, and cry out when they are frightened, just as children do. Only they have songs and cries of their own. You can always tell when the little song-birds are happy, for each one trills out his joyous notes as he sits on a branch of a tree, or the top of a hedge.

In the early mornings of the spring, you will hear singing in the garden almost before it is light. First there is a little chirping and twittering, as if the birds were saying “good morning,” and preparing their throats. Then, as the sun rises, there comes a burst of song.

Robins, Thrushes, Blackbirds, Chaffinches, and Wrens whistle away merrily, and many other little birds join in. While they are all singing together, it is not easy to tell one song from another, though the Thrush sings loudest and clearest of all.

Then they fly away to their breakfast and, as the day goes on, you hear one or two at a time. So you can listen to the notes of each song, and if you go near very quietly, you can see the throat of the bird swelling and quivering as he works the little voice-chords inside, which make the notes.

It is not easy to write down what a bird sings, for it is like whistling—there are no words in it. But people often try to imitate their songs in words. Listen to the Song thrush¹⁷. You can fancy he says “cherry-tree, cherry-tree, cherry-tree” three times. Then, after some other notes, he sings “hurry-up, hurry-up,” and “go-it, go-it.” For the thrush has a great many notes.

The pretty Yellowhammer¹⁸, with its bright yellow head, sings “a little bit of bread, and no che-e-s-e.”

The Chiffchaff¹⁹ calls “chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff” quite distinctly. Any child can imitate the cuckoo²⁰, or the coo-oo-oo of the wood pigeon²¹.

As the days grow hotter, the birds sing less. They sit on the branches of the trees, or on the hedges under the shade of the leaves, or hop about in the wood.

Then when evening comes, and long shadows creep over the grass, each bird looks out for his supper. When he is satisfied he sings his evening song of content, before he goes to sleep.

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THRUSHES AND NEST

(See page 18)

What a concert it is! Finches, blue tits, sparrows, wrens, robins, and chaffinches all singing at once. And above them all, come the song of the song thrushes and blackbirds, the cooing of the wood pigeon and the caw-caw of the rooks as they fly home from the fields. As the song thrushes were the first to begin in the morning, except the skylark, so they are the last to leave off at night, and often one song thrush will go on long after all the others are quiet.

Then at last all seem to have settled down for the night. But no! If you live in Kent, or any part of the south or east of England, you may hear in May or June a sweet sound, like a flute, coming softly from many parts of the wood. This comes from the Nightingales²², who, in the warm summer, will sing nearly all night.

They sing in the day as well, but their note is so soft that often you cannot hear it when the more noisy birds are singing. In the still night you can hear the sweet song rising up six notes and then bubbling like a flute played in water. When you have once heard a nightingale sing you will never forget it. In Yorkshire or Devonshire you will not hear him, for he does not go so far to the North or to the West.

Birds sing most in the spring, for then they are making their nests, and the father bird sings to the mother while she is building, and when she is sitting on the eggs. You may often find out where a Robin's nest is hidden by seeing robin redbreast sitting on a branch singing to his mate²³. Most people, too, have seen the Wood pigeon puffing out his throat and cooing and bowing to the mother bird on her nest. For pigeons make love all the year round.

When the mother bird is sitting, the father sings for joy, and when the young birds are hatched he teaches them his song. Song birds have very delicate throats. They have muscles, which quiver like the

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