



THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE BIRD STUDY CLUB OF EL PASO, TEXAS

LENA MCBEE, CHAIRMAN

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TELL ME, DEPARTING SWALLOW

Tell me, departing Swallow, pray
How did you learn of the far flung fly-ways?
Who booked your passage the southward way,
When summer withdrew from our fields and by-ways?

Who plants the lore in a Swallow's head
Of parallel and of equinox,
Of winter coming and summer sped,
And the shrill delight of migrant flocks?

When spring returns, who routes you through,
Northward again to my pasture lot,
From Ecuador and far Peru,
To nest in the cliffs in the self-same spot?

Lena McBee

THE DECEMBER MEETING

The club and its friends met at the El Paso Centennial Museum on the evening of December 5, 1945. Several visited the ornithological room of the museum before the program. Dr. A. L. Hershey, of the New Mexico A. and M. lectured on "The Birds' World of Tomorrow" and presented his film on the nesting of the golden eagle. His collection of poisonous plants of the area was examined with much interest. Plans were outlined for the Audubon Christmas bird count.

THE JANUARY MEETING

The January meeting will be held at the Centennial Museum of El Paso on the third Tuesday of the month, January 15, 1946. El Paso Birds in January will be considered informally and Mrs. G. W. Young will discuss the topic, activities of a Bird Study Club. Nature films will be shown if they can be obtained in time.

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. Hannah Anderson became a member of the club.

NEWS OF FOLKS

Mr. Royal Jackman asks that his address be changed to Santa Monica, California.

Miss Mary Belle Keefer is with us again, after an extended visit in Kentucky.

Mrs. C. E. Bantin, expects to return to Omaha, Nebraska soon where Capt. Bantin will resume his civilian practice. The club is indeed sorry to lose Mrs. Bantin and wishes for her and Dr. Bantin all the joys of a real home-coming. We'll be looking forward to receiving Omaha's bulletin as well as Mrs. Bantin's notes on "birding".

Lieutenant Hamerstrom is now a civilian. After a trip to Mexico, Dr. and Mrs. Hamerstrom will return to the University of Michigan to resume their work as research and field workers. The club thanks them for their assistance on the

Tom Miller Kirksey Memorial. The club regrets the loss of Dr. and Mrs. Hamerstrom, but congratulates them on their return to a work in which they are so keenly interested.

WINTER BIRDS OF EL PASO

Mourning doves occur singly, in pairs, or in flocks, varying from seven to seventy. Incas are few, but we have a February record of four seen at the Country Club. A road-runner or two, or even three, may be seen on the average field trip. Barn, Western horned, and long-eared owls reside in bosques along the river; and the burrowing owls, in desert locations where there are burrows of the prairie dog. A belted kingfisher or two may feed at pool or river.

Commonly seen is the red-shafted flicker, in city park and garden and in outlying orchard or bosque; fifteen were rounded up for the 1943 Christmas count. Occasionally a cactus woodpecker or a red-naped sapsucker appears on our list, singly or in pairs. No flycatcher is listed for the winter months except Say's and the black phoebe.

Horned larks in considerable flocks winter on the desert. By mid-February, a thin stream of bank swallows have begun to arrive at their colony sites along the river.

Long-crested and Woodhouse's jays come down from higher altitudes to feed in pecan orchards. The last-named species sometimes winters in the city parks. Western crows visit us too, but they are practically lost in the large flocks of white-necked ravens that inhabit the river valley. Crows never soar, as do the ravens; and their call is brisk and sharp, not hoarse.

On Nov. 30, 1939, six mountain chickadees were seen in one of the city parks, and we have a few November records for the gray titmouse. Verdins are all-year residents in a mesquite-tornillo growth; and their odd thorny nests are, at all seasons, a matter of twittery concern to them. Both the white-breasted and the red-breasted nuthatch are to be found in city parks upon occasion, the latter species being more frequent. Rarely, a pair of brown creepers spends the winter here too.

Our four resident wrens - the cactus, rock, canyon, and western marsh wren - are now augmented by three visitors. These are Baird's (Bewick), which probably doesn't descend far from its nesting level in the foothills; and the house and the winter wren, which have come a good distance down from their summer home. Of all these, the rock wren has the widest distribution. Its cheery "teaky, teaky" strain resounds among the arroyos of our outer residential sections.

An occasional pair of mockingbirds remain for the winter. Curve-billed and crissal thrashers appear on our lists as often in winter as they do in summer. They are joined for the winter by sage thrashers, visitors from Taos and further north. Audubon's hermit thrush often winters in city parks and gardens and in river bosques. They come to us from the pine-spruce-balsam areas of the Sacramentos and the Sangre de Christos, like their cousins, the western robins. Some years (as in 1945) a considerable number of robins stay in El Paso, feeding on berries of pyrocanthus and other ornamental shrubs. Mountain and Chestnut-backed bluebirds winter in quiet but colorful harmony, feeding among the cotton stalks and in canyons, where hackberry or ash trees abound. Townsend's solitaire has been noted in winter in two of the city parks and at the Country Club.

We have a single December record each for the plumbeous and the western gnat-catcher. Ruby-crowned kinglets are common in winter, both in the city parks and in shrubbery along the river. Major George Burrows saw three golden-crowned kinglets near the Country Club, Jan. 21, 1945; and within the next few days other observers saw them there.

American pipits winter in flocks along the river levees, numbering as high as fifty.

In the last decade, cedar waxwings have come irregularly to El Paso in flocks of fifteen or more. They feed on berries of ornamental shrubs. For the Phainopepla, there is one winter record, made at the Country Club. White-rumped shrikes, all-year residents here, can be seen both within and outside of the city.

A flock of forty starlings appeared at the ranch east of El Paso in January, 1943; a week later, only one was to be seen there.

Our common winter warbler is Audubon's; in weedy tangles, however, a MacGillivray's and an orange-crowned are occasionally seen. On one of our Christmas counts, Miss Mary Belle Keefer recorded a western yellowthroat.

Songs of the western meadowlark ring out on sunny winter mornings, and, less commonly, the strain of our eastern subspecies, called Lillian's meadowlark by Dr. Sutton.

From irrigated farmland and from levees rise flocks of blackbirds, sometimes numbering into the hundreds. Red-wings, Yellow-headed and Brewer's blackbirds, they prove to be, with a few great-tailed grackles and perhaps a few cowbirds. Crows and white-necked ravens intermingle with them.

One December a flock of thirty evening grosbeaks visited one of our city parks and fed on the seeds of Chinese elm trees. A family (?) group of five red crossbills, probably Bendire's, visited briefly the same park.

Arizona Pyrrhuloxias remain here and brighten the season with their cardinal-like songs. Purple finches arrive in flocks to intermingle in the parks with our resident house finches and English sparrows. On rare occasions we have pipe siskins and pale goldfinches with us; the Arkansas goldfinches are here, of course, the whole year through.

Of our three towhees, the canyon is most numerous, possibly because his is a shorter and a vertical migration. Spurred and green-tailed towhees, from loftier nesting habitats, are found scratching beneath the shrubbery of parks and lawn and under desert weed shelters. Along with them, in considerable numbers, our juncos will be feeding--Pink-sided and Shufeldt's, red-backed, gray-headed and, probably, Montana juncos. Our sole record of the white-winged junco was made by Mrs. Clarence Bantin, who saw one recently at her feeding shelf in East El Paso.

Lark buntings winter in generous flocks on the desert; as do Brewer's and Clay-colored sparrows and Gamble's (our most abundant and ubiquitous sparrow visitor) and Baird's (this latter species occur oftener in cultivated fields and grassy borders). Sage sparrows are numerous desert-dwellers too. Western chipping sparrows are generally distributed; western lark, vesper, and Savannah are less common than the chippies, as are Lincoln's and song sparrows. Rare finds are the fox sparrow, Scott's, western grasshopper, black-chinned, and the white-crowned sparrow, but all are here. Common, but none the less valued for that, is the black-chinned desert sparrow, whose tinkling song is heard throughout the year.

(Edited from notes of the Bird Club)

BIRD ADVENTURES OVERSEAS

"Birds I Have Seen in North Africa and Europe" is a title to make your mouth water. But realization certainly fell short of my anticipation. Most of the time I had neither binoculars nor bird guide. Occasionally I could scrounge glasses for a day or two. A few months before I returned home the French book shops showed up with bird books. The shopkeepers had previously had none -- "looted by the Germans; no paper; France is so poor; the Americans have already bought the little we had left." Plenty of reasons, but no bird books.

From Casa Blanca to Oran I saw flocks of Rooks (Bare-faced Crow; Corbean), English sparrows, and a few dozen white storks (Cigogne Blanche) posing on roofs. These last were seen in my first week overseas and gave me high hopes of lush bird fields ahead of me. In two and a half months on the Mediterranean shore I saw a handful of gulls which I never did identify to my satisfaction, no shore birds, no ducks. Even off shore from fishing villages I never saw more than two or three gulls at a time, and often none.

A partial explanation occurred to me later on in Corsica where it was common to see natives with shotguns carrying dead woodpeckers, jays and gulls as the day's bag of game birds.

Mountainous, sparsely populated, wooded Corsica had more to offer. My first find there was a crow-sized bird that walked, cawed and in general conducted himself like a crow but was pale dirty gray (almost white) with a black iridescent head and neck, the Grey or Hooded Crow (Corneille Mantelle). A crow that isn't black. In the thickets opposite our headquarters flocks of what were obviously finches ate seeds, twittered and cheeped garrulously and rose up in groups to make an undulating flight to other seeding grounds. I was delighted to recognize them as the multi-colored European, or Continental, Goldfinch (Chardonneret Elegant).

Incidentally you too could glibly give the French names of the birds if you had the bird books which I have at my elbow. They give multilingual equivalents (French, English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and German) alongside the colored plates. The pictures, by the way, are only "fair to middlin'" on rather poor paper.

I saw a few ladder-back woodpeckers (so I judged them at least). Later, from cherished scribbled notes on their markings I identified them as the middle, and great spotted woodpeckers (*Dryobates pinetorum medius*, and major, in common parlance *Pic Mar* and *Grande Pic Mar*).

I also saw a Northern Flicker. I'm sure you are astonished and incredulous. So also, apparently, would the continental ornithologists be because nowhere in my books could I find any Flicker (let alone our Northern Flicker) listed as occurring in those regions. He "hollered" like a Flicker, had gold under-wings, white rump patch and was definitely woodpeckerish, so as far as I'm concerned, I saw a Flicker. I once saw quail (much like our Bob White) and several times saw single grouse both in Corsica and in France.

I saw one beautifully colored blue and brown jay (?) dangling dead from a hunter's shoulder. If I understood his Corsican French and he my stilted stunted school French, the bird was destined for the pot. I later learned that it was Cook's Azure Winged Magpie.

The only exciting fauna I saw in a couple of months in Italy (not counting the natives or their ectoparasites) was a large sting ray undulating along the dock at Naples.

In Southern France, had I had binoculars and bird guide, in early spring I could have swelled my list with many warblerish looking birds that tantalized me from the already budding chestnuts and buckeyes and plane trees (sycamores to me)

and cork oaks and olives and blossoming redbuds and almond trees. Sounds romantic, huh? Me, I prefer central heating. By the time I had myself equipped migration was over, and only the residents remained.

In walks through the countryside it was common to go a quarter of a mile or so without seeing or hearing a single bird. The only birds that were abundant were swallows. The only others that were common were magpies, crows (black ones) and of course English sparrows.

The swallows swarmed over the ditches, aqueducts and irrigation canals that crisscross the country. A country swallow (*hirondelle rustique*)--much like the barn swallow--raised four young in its mud nest on the top of a flat light reflector on the ceiling of our back porch in Marseilles. The full grown young returned to it nightly for weeks after their first flight. Though using our premises the family never approved of us.

The Rouge Gorge (Continental Red Breast, Robin), a 5-inch thrush, is a quite common roadside singer and a great favorite, appearing in their children's books, on China and regularly on Christmas cards.

My list also included a pair of red breasted mergansers--unwontedly welcome to me when I saw the familiar birds on the Rhone River. Quite a few small short-billed wrens just as repetitious and elusive as ours. I was especially expectant of the sight and sound of the larks (*Alouette*). Their several kinds resembled our horned larks. Several of them essayed a few clear notes on the wing but I was deeply disappointed that none of them winged into the blue with breath-taking music.

Of half a dozen kinds of chickadees I was right proud of my three identified. The common magpie (*Pie*) was all over the countryside, big, handsome, noisy, bold and much more interesting to me than to the peasants.

The "Cock of the Fields" (*Upupa epops epops*), somewhat like a Road Runner, has so prominent a crest above his bright chicken eye that he is called *Huppe* (The Crested). I saw one; and a shrike; and a jackdaw (*Choucas*) a 14-inch crow that nests by preference in towers of stone ruins which France provides so conveniently for him.

Their brown creeper varies but little from ours and judging from the Latin name is the same species. The French call him *Grimpereau*. I was amused at the compound polysyllabic German name for him: Grauer und langzahiger Baumlauffer.

Perhaps my Corsican Flicker was prophetic. The first land bird I saw coming back home was on ship still out of sight of land--a Northern Flicker. He joined us on full wing and planed up into the steel derrick rigging as though he expected to find a nesting site. But he really was a Northern Flicker.

I. M. Epstein

BIRD CENSUS

The El Paso Bird Study Club took their annual bird census on December 30th. This yearly event is sponsored by the National Audubon Society. A total of sixty-five species of birds were observed during the day. Those who assisted in taking the census were: Maj. Gen. G. Ralph Meyer, Maj. George Burrows, Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Wimberly, Dr. and Mrs. I. M. Epstein; Misses Mary Elizabeth Harper, Emily Barlow, Sarah Durkee; Mesdames Marguerite K. Wright, J. Owen Allen, J. C. Wilmarth and club guest, Mrs. Bee Binkley of Santa Fe, N. M.

The most exciting find of the day was made by Mrs. Marguerite Wright, past president of the club, who obtained the first El Paso record for the pine grosbeak. As a general rule this bird does not migrate south of northern New Mexico.

Observers were surprised to see the ash-throated flycatcher and a green heron which are well-known summer residents. The plain titmouse, an unusual winter visitant, was another delightful surprise.

Unusually abundant were baldpates, crows and robins. A late winter was probably the cause of the late and heavy migration of these birds. *Pyrocanthus* shrubs, heavily laden with bright berries, also contributed to an unusual "robin winter". Gambel's quail and Brewer's blackbird were present in generous numbers.

Two killdeer were seen in contrast to the flocks generally observed. Mallard duck and American coot were decidedly few in numbers.

The following species were reported in normal quantities: pied-billed grebe, great blue heron, New Mexican duck, gadwall, pintail, green-winged teal, shoveller, American merganser, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, sparrow hawk, scaled quail, ring-billed gull, road-runner, barn owl, horned owl; belted kingfisher, red-shafted flicker, ladder-backed woodpecker, black phoebe, Woodhouse's jay, white-necked raven, verdin, cactus wren, long-billed marsh wren, canyon wren, rock wren, crissal thrasher, hermit thrush, mountain bluebird, western gnatcatcher, ruby-crowned kinglet, loggerhead shrike, Audubon's warbler, western meadowlark; common red-wing, pyrrhuloxia, English sparrow, house finch, Arkansas goldfinch, spotted towhee, Canon towhee, Savannah sparrow, desert sparrow, Oregon junco, pink-sided junco, red-backed junco, gray-headed junco, chipping sparrow, Gambel's sparrow, song sparrow.

Unusual was the fact that the following common winter birds were not seen: snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, Swainson's hawk, ferruginous rough-leg, mourning dove, burrowing owl, Say's phoebe, horned lark, American pipit, green-tailed towhee, lark bunting, Brewer's sparrow.

(Compiled from club records by Mrs. J. Owen Allen)

THE JUNCO

"Oh, Mother, look! There's a Snowbird out here."

Mrs. Martin walked to the back door. Her little girl was pointing to a gray bird about the size of a sparrow. "Why, so it is, Anita. That little bird is often called the Western Snowbird. Is he the same as those we saw in New York?"

"No, Mother. Those back home had gray heads, and this one has a black head and neck and 'bib'. But he makes the same little soft clicking sound."

"The real name for this family of birds is Junco. The black-headed one is called the Oregon Junco," said Mrs. Martin.

"Will he stay in our yard if I give him some food?" asked Anita.

"He might. What did you feed the Juncos back East?"

"Bread crumbs," whispered Anita, as she slipped into the house for a piece of bread. This she broke into pieces and scattered the crumbs on the feeding shelf her father had made for Anita's little feathered friends.

Mrs. Martin and her daughter sat quietly by the cypress tree watching the Junco as it scratched busily beneath the hedge. Finally it spread its wings and flitted to the feeding shelf.

"Look, Mother. It shows the same white V in its tail that our Snowbirds had," the little girl whispered.

"Yes, Anita," answered her mother, "that is the Junco family mark, just as straight black hair and copper skins are the family mark of the American Indians. But the Pueblo Indians we saw in New Mexico were different from the Blackfeet tribe we saw in the North. The Junco family is divided into several 'tribes' too."

"Are there any other 'tribes' here besides the Oregon Junco?"

"Yes, I think so," answered Mrs. Martin. "There is a Red-backed Junco which has a gray head and a rusty-red patch on its back. And there is a Pink-sided Junco, which is gray with pinkish-brown chest and sides."

"Will the Juncos make a nest in our yard if I am kind to them?" Anita wanted to know.

"No, dear. The Junco is a winter visitor in El Paso and the Valley. The first ones come in November. In April they will start back to the mountains to build their nests and raise their babies."

"Did you ever see a Junco's nest, Mother?" Anita whispered. She did not want to frighten the little bird, which had flown to the bird bath for a drink.

"No, but the Bird Woman has found several in Cloudcroft, New Mexico. They are usually on the ground, under a bunch of weeds or grass. She found one built under a paper. This mother Junco did not choose a very good shelter, for in a storm the paper was blown away and all four babies were drowned. The nestlings were so young that they were covered only with a blue fuzz."

"Oh, the poor little things," sighed Anita.

"It was a sad accident, wasn't it? The Bird Woman also found one nest in an old tin can near a junk pile."

"What a funny place to choose for a home!" laughed the little girl. "Do you know what the Juncos feed their babies?"

"Juncos eat weed seeds and many harmful insects. The young birds pull at dandelion seeds and pine seeds as soon as they are out of the nest. They often pull up tiny seedling pines just to get the seeds they grow from. I must go into the house and start dinner. Why don't you get your colors and make a picture of the Junco for your teacher?"

Mrs. Martin and Anita tiptoed into the house together, still whispering happily.

Marguerite K. Wright

Notes to teachers:

Description: length, about 6 in.
 color, gray
 bill, flesh colored
 distinguishing mark, two white outer tail feathers on either side of tail, flashes in spread tail as bird darts away
 sound, soft kissing click while feeding

Colored plates: Book of Birds, Vol. II, page 282
 Bailey: Birds of New Mexico, page 739

Species: The Shufeldt is the local sub-species of the Oregon Junco which winters in El Paso. The Montana Junco winters in the Valley. There is also a Gray-headed Junco here, but so similar to the Red-backed as to be almost indistinguishable.

Exception to Junco mark - the very rare Vesper Sparrow also has white outer tail feathers.

Exercises

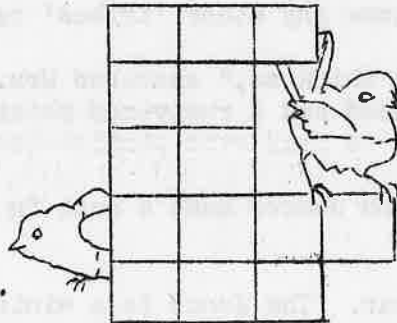
Complete these sentences:

- The family mark of the Junco is two white outer tail _____.
 bars tips feathers
- The Junco feeds upon weed seeds and harmful _____.
 insects seedlings berries
- Juncos spend the summer high in the _____.
 trees mountains valleys
- They build their nests near or on the _____.
 ground pines water
- Many of these pretty little birds come to El Paso for the _____.
 summer bread crumbs winter

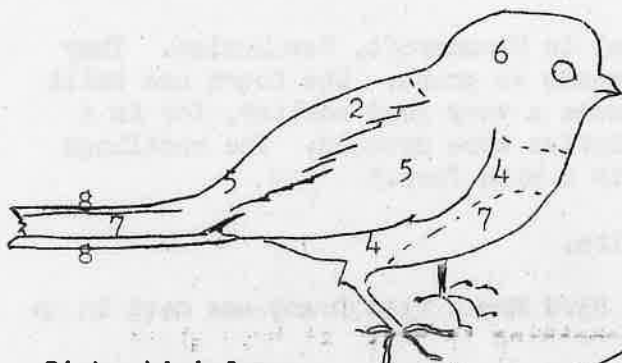
January Puzzle

Write the letters in the squares.

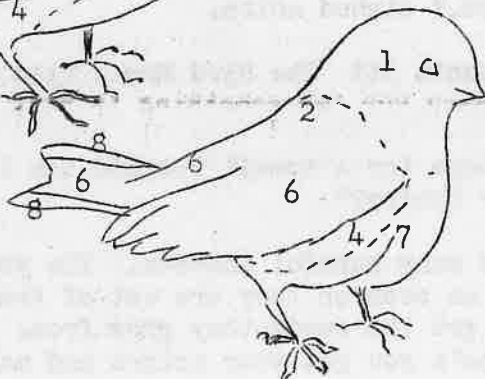
- Opposite of sorrow.
- Opposite of down.
- Opposite of yes.
- Opposite of go.
- Opposite of in.



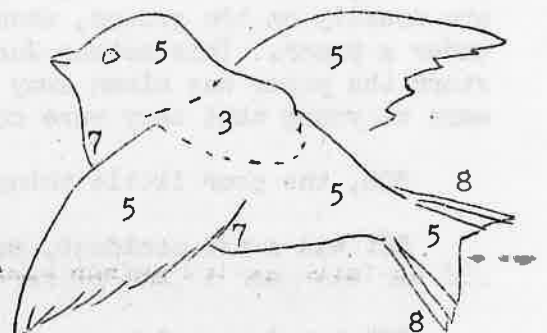
What do the first letters spell?



Pink-sided Junco



Oregon Junco



Red-backed Junco

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. blackish slate | 5. ash gray |
| 2. dull brown | 6. slate gray |
| 3. reddish brown | 7. light gray |
| 4. pinkish brown | 8. white |

THE ROBIN

"Mother," called Anita as she came in from school, "guess what we did at school this morning."

"Did you have a show?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Better than that. We took a walk to look for birds."

"What did you see?" inquired her mother.

"We saw many English sparrows, a few House Finches, three Juncos and a Robin."

"How nice! I have not seen a Robin in El Paso. What did you learn about the Robin?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Miss Smith says the Western Robin is a winter visitor in El Paso and the Valley. Some people complain because the Robins eat so many *Pyrocanthus* berries. But they are so pretty and so friendly that we are happy to have them visit us. And guess what else, Mother! I was the only one of the children who had seen a Robin's nest. Miss Smith asked me to tell about the Robin family I watched in Santa Fe last summer."

"How nice! Why don't you get your paper and pencil and write down what you are going to say?" suggested Mrs. Martin.

For the next hour Anita was very busy with pencil and paper. This is the paper she read to her mother:

My Friends, the Robins

One of the first signs of spring in Santa Fe is the coming of the Robins. One morning I heard, "Cheer-i-ly, Cheer-i-ly, Cheer-i-ly." I looked out and there was the big bird in his best red vest, singing in our big tree.

"Good morning, Mr. Robin Redbreast," I called. "Where have you been, and where is your wife?"

"Good morning, little girl," he answered. "I have been spending the winter down in El Paso. Mrs. Robin will be along in a day or two. I came to find a good place for our nest. Do you have a cat, little girl?"

"Oh, no," I answered. "We do not keep a cat, so you will be quite safe. Just look around and see what nice trees and shrubs we have. And I am sure there are lots of nice earth worms to be found on the lawn as soon as the snow melts."

Three days later Mrs. Robin came, and soon they began building in the locust tree with the pink blossoms. They used mud and grass and pieces of weeds. Mrs. Robin turned round and round in the nest, shaping it with her breast. Then she lined it with soft grass.

Soon four beautiful blue eggs were in the nest. Then Mrs. Robin sat on the eggs to keep them warm, while Mr. Robin sang or hunted insects. When the babies came from the shells, how busy the parents were getting enough food for them! Even after the young birds leave the nest they expect to be fed. It is very funny to watch a young bird as large as its mother begging her for something to eat. It hops about on the grass with a loud "Cheep! Cheep! Cheep! Cheep! Cheep!" It does not hush until she pulls an earthworm from the ground and gives it to him.

When the young robins finally began to hunt their own food, Mrs. Robin cleaned house and laid four more beautiful blue eggs. I was sorry to have to leave before the second family was out of the shells.

"Good-by, Mrs. Robin Redbreast," I called to her as she sat on the nest. "I hope I shall see you and your nice husband again some time." But she did not answer me. I guess she was afraid some enemy would hear her if she did. Just then Mr. Robin flew back into the yard. "Cheer-i-ly! Cheer-i-ly!" he called as we got in the car.

"I think that is a very nice story," said Mrs. Martin. "Did you tell the children that young robins have speckled breasts?"

"Oh, no, I forgot that. Mother, do you suppose they have those speckles for the same reason that fawns have spots on their backs?" Anita wanted to know.

"Why don't you ask Miss Smith about that when you read your story to the class?" her mother said. "Better run out and play while I start dinner."

"Cheer-i-ly! Cheer-i-ly!" sang Anita as she ran out into the fresh air and sunshine.

Marguerite K. Wright

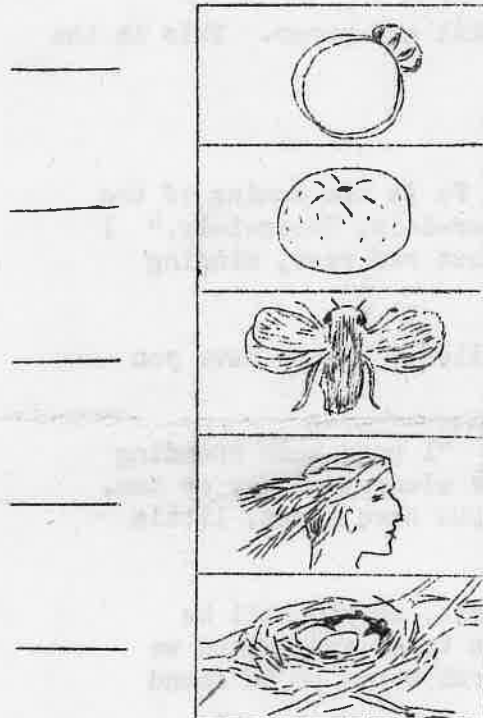
Notes to teacher:

Description: length, 10-11 in.
 color, head, wings and tail blackish brown
 white spots around eye (almost a white eye ring)
 throat black, streaked with white
 underparts, cinnamon-rufus, fading to white

Exercises

Write the first letter of the names of each of these pictures, and see what it spells.

Can you unscramble these letters, to make words which tell you the food of the robin? The first letter is the beginning.



E R A H T O R S M W

I S E N C T S

B E E E S T L

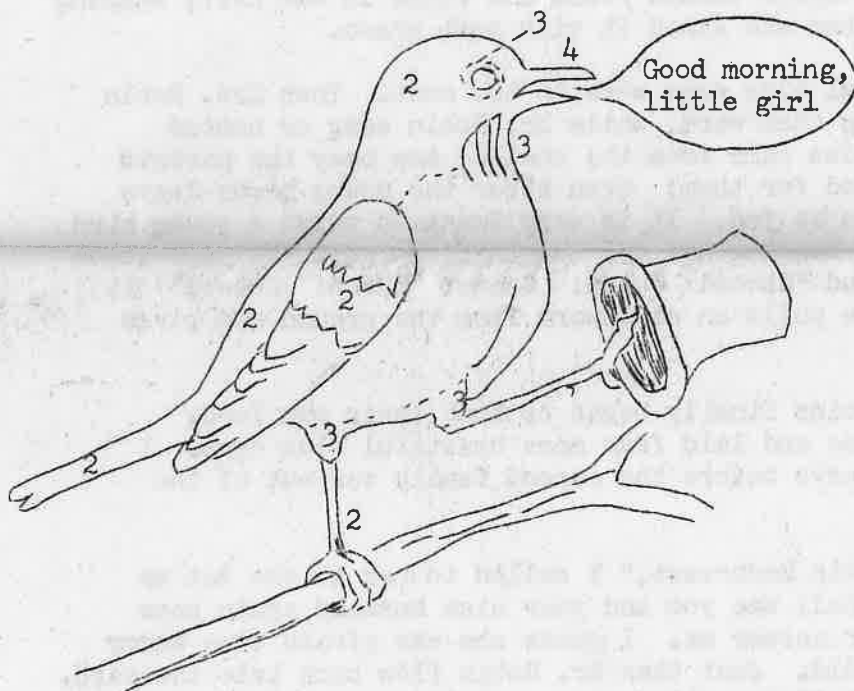
G S P P R R S A H O E S

C E R R I E S H

B E R R S I E

berries
 cherries
 grasshoppers
 beetles
 insects
 earth worm

N
 I
 B
 O
 R - Key



- 1. red
- 2. brownish black
- 3. white
- 4. yellow