

**MIGRATORY BIRDS, OR SUCH AS
VISIT BRITAIN AT DIFFERENT
SEASONS OF THE YEAR, A GUIDE
TO THEIR FAVOURITE PLACES OF
RESORT**

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Migratory birds, or such as visit Britain at different seasons of the year, a guide to their favourite places of resort by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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MIGRATORY BIRDS;

OR,

SUCH AS VISIT BRITAIN AT DIFFERENT SEASONS
OF THE YEAR.

A GUIDE

TO THEIR FAVOURITE PLACES OF RESORT,

WITH THEIR

NATURAL HISTORY, SONGS,

AND THE BENEFITS WHICH THEIR MIGRATIONS
CONFER ON MANKIND.



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MIGRATORY BIRDS.

SPRING AND SUMMER BIRDS OF PASSAGE.

“And you, ye free and fearless birds of air,
Are charged each year, on missionary wing,
The same bright lesson o'er the seas to bear.
Heaven-guided wanderers, with the winds of spring
Sing on, before the storm and after, sing!
And call us to your echoing woods away
From worldly cares; and bid our spirits bring
Faith to imbibe deep wisdom from your lay.”—HEMANS.

Why is it that many persons pass through life, observing little, and knowing less, concerning the natural objects by which they are surrounded, of such birds especially as come and go at fixed periods, and make glad the fields of Britain? Even among those who live in the country, few can distinguish the song of the Wood-lark from that of the Goldfinch, and with each of those dissimilar songsters no pleasant thoughts are associated. I would fain, therefore, send forth this little volume, written plainly, and yet, I trust, not without considerable interest, small in size and inexpensive, that those who live among green fields, or quit occasionally the hum and stir of the great city to scent the new-mown hay or the fragrance of flowers, may be able to distinguish the joyous little minstrels, whose sweet songs both soothe and elevate the mind. We will take them in their order, beginning with those that arrive in the month of

MARCH.

WRYNECK—*Fyns Torquilla* of Linnæus.

Strange it seems that when winds are piping loud, and storms of sleet are abroad, small birds should find their way to the shores of Britain; yet so it is. The Wryneck, earliest daughter of the year, arrives about the middle of March. Her artless nest is constructed with dry grass, in the hollow of some aged tree, time-worn or excavated by a woodpecker, having within it an accumulation of decayed wood, and of which the entrance barely admits of going in and out. Here, then, she deposits eight or ten small eggs, and sits securely on them, looking forth to the waving branches of the tree, safe from the beating storm or sleet which often rages without, and causes the old oak to creak and groan beneath its fury. Though similar in many points to her stationary neighbour, the untravelling Woodpecker, as regards the formation of her feet and bill, she belongs to a separate genus, and never associates with them. Those who are much abroad in the early season of the year, when as yet the primrose has scarcely begun to peep from amid the moss, or the hazel to hang forth her light brown tassels, may see perchance the Wryneck on the branch of some tree in the lone forest, or beside the streamlet's dash, where birches and trembling aspens grow wild and high, and obscure the sunbeams. There he sits erect on the branch, with his body almost bent backwards, and writhing his neck and head with a slow and apparently involuntary motion. His mate, meanwhile, is sitting in some near tree, his sole companion; for the Wryneck is a solitary bird, and does not associate with his kind. Their food consists of ants, or such insects as harbour in the rough bark of trees, which they extract by means of a long and cylindrical tongue, tipped with a horny substance, and capable of being pushed forward or drawn readily into the bill. Their feet, too, are curiously constructed with an obvious reference to their mode of life: the toes are placed two before and two behind; the claws sharp, much hooked, and formed for climbing the branches of trees, on which they can run in all directions with great facility.

Wearing the livery of the family or tribe to which

poetic fancy has assigned her, that of the sober-vested Cuckoo, whose handmaid the country people call the female Wryneck, coming over as if to prepare the woodlands for the reception of that welcome bird, and uttering her soft voice in the depth of many a lonely wood, her plumage, like that of the male, consists of different shades of brown, but so elegantly arranged as to form an investment of exquisite neatness. An irregular line of dark brown, inclining to black, descends from the head to the middle of the back, which is otherwise ash-coloured, streaked, and powdered with brown; the throat and under side of the neck being of a reddish brown, crossed with fine bars of black, while the under surface is of a pale ash, varied with irregular triangular spots. The larger quill feathers are beautifully chequered on the outer webs with alternate spots of dark brown and rust colour; the tail feathers are ornamented with black bars, the intervening spaces freckled with dark brown.

Such is the singularly chaste and elegant investment of the Wryneck, which is described the more minutely because little known, and that the lovers of forest scenery and aged trees may, when they see this small bird hopping from branch to branch, rejoice in the certainty that the voice of the Cuckoo will soon be heard, and all pleasant flowers spring up wherever she appears. And very appropriate to this small bird, thus haunting among leafless branches, are those beautiful lines in which the poet of "The Seasons" bids the sorrowful and desponding to learn a lesson of confidence from the birds of the air:—

" Look up and smile away your low despair—
See the light tenant of the barren air;
To him nor stores nor granaries belong,
Nought but the woodland and the pleasing song;
Yet your kind heavenly Father bends his eye
To the least wing that flits along the sky.
To Him they sing when Spring renews the plain,
To Him they cry in Winter's pinching reign;
Nor is their music nor their plaint in vain:
He hears the gay and the distressful call,
And with unsparring bounty fills them all."