

# **BIRDS THROUGH AN OPERA GLASS**

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Birds Through an Opera Glass by Florence A. Merriam

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**FLORENCE A. MERRIAM**

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AN OPERA GLASS**



BIRDS  
THROUGH AN OPERA GLASS

BY

MRS. FLORENCE A. MERRIAM *Smiley*



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## PREFACE.

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LIKE Snug the joiner, in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, I would explain to the ladies at the outset that this little book is no real lion, and that they have nothing to fear. It is not an ornithological treatise. It has not even the lion's roar of technical terms and descriptions to warn them of raging dulness, but is "a very gentle beast, and of a good conscience."

It was my good fortune when in college to be able to study the perplexities of nearly forty young observers, and this book is virtually the result of what I learned of their wants and the best ways to supply them. Equipped with opera-glasses, we worked together in the woods and fields, and books were rarely consulted; but when I was asked "How are we to know the birds at home, where we have no one to help us?" I saw their need of books. But what could they use? Few of those who want to know the birds have time or inclination to become ornithologists, or

even to master the vocabulary of ornithology which would enable them to use the expensive Keys and Manuals for identifying birds. This, then, is what I have tried to do: To furnish hints that will enable not only young observers but also laymen to know the common birds they see about them.

Hints, I offer; nothing more. Many birds I leave unmentioned, because they have never chanced to come before my opera-glass; and often my own local experiences<sup>1</sup> are given instead of generalizations, because habits vary greatly in different sections, as in the case of the catbird, who shuns all habitations in Louisiana while he is a familiar village gossip in the north and east, and I would hold to my boast of a "good conscience." I tell the truth about what I have seen through my own *Voigtlander und Sohn*, — a most excellent make of glass, by the way, — and leave earnest observers to see and learn more for themselves.

Nevertheless, it is not merely those who can go

<sup>1</sup> My notes were made either at Northampton, Massachusetts, or Locust Grove, New York. The latter place is in the Black River Valley, on the western border of the Adirondacks, and may always be understood, not only when the word "here" is used, but in all cases where no locality is specified.



to see for themselves I would tell of my walks; it is above all the careworn indoor workers to whom I would bring a breath of the woods, pictures of sunlit fields, and a hint of the simple, childlike gladness, the peace and comfort that is offered us every day by these blessed winged messengers of nature.

Many of the articles herein contained were published in the *Audubon Magazine* in 1886. These have been revised and largely rewritten. The others now appear for the first time. The illustrations are from Baird, Brewer and Ridgway's *History of North American Birds*. For permission to use them I am indebted to Mr. Ridgway.

LOCUST GROVE, NEW YORK, *January*, 1888.

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## HINTS TO OBSERVERS.

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WHEN you begin to study the birds in the fields and woods, to guard against scaring the wary, you should make yourself as much as possible a part of the landscape. Most birds are not afraid of man as a figure, but as an aggressive object.

The observance of a few simple rules will help you to be unobtrusive.

*First.* Avoid light or bright-colored clothing. A dull-colored jacket and an old leaf-colored hat that you can pull over the eyes or push back from the face as the light requires, will do excellent service if you do not wish a complete suit.

*Second.* Walk slowly and noiselessly. Among the crisp rattling leaves of the woods, a bit of moss or an old log will often deaden your step at the critical moment.

*Third.* Avoid all quick, jerky motions. How many birds I have scared away by raising my glass too suddenly!

*Fourth.* Avoid all talking, or speak only in an undertone — a most obnoxious but important rule to young observers.

*Fifth.* If the bird was singing, but stops on your approach, stand still a moment and encourage him by answering his call. If he gets interested he will often let you creep up within opera-glass distance. Some of the most charming snatches of friendly talk will come at such times.

*Sixth.* Make a practice of stopping often and standing perfectly still. In that way you hear voices that would be lost if you were walking, and the birds come to the spot