

# Pretty Is That Pretty Sings

By CAROL C. CRAIN

"BACK home" is a woods which in spring and summer serves as a vast hotel for a thousand or more birds that apparently return to the same spot year after year as old chums are wont to do. They haunt the wild rose shrubbery, the blackberry tangles, the thorny haw trees, the ash, the beech and all the rest. Rabbits bound out of tufts of grass and squirrels bark from many branches, but the sound that most pleases the stroller in this happy grove is the orchestration of its flying inhabitants.

Dozens of brown thrashers reside in this special patch of favored woodland and dispense life-giving strains of supreme melody. Long, rusty fellows they are, almost twelve inches from the tip of the tail to the point of the bill. They hover close to the ground and rustle along beneath the bushes in an alarming manner. When disturbed, they scold rapidly with a sharp but monotonous "sit" and flirt the tail so vigorously that the action cannot be termed less than thrashing; this habit and the hue of his plumage have earned for him the somewhat plebeian name of brown thrasher.

However, this feathered fellow has two outstanding characteristics that endear him to bird lovers. He wears a sporty vest of creamy white, thickly strewn with arrowheads of brown. This part of his costume is striking; unfortunately his beauty ends there. The other characteristic, the dominant one, is his superb song which needs only to be heard to be appreciated. He arranges his notes in pairs, triplets, and fours and makes many charming repetitions

"Lest you should think he never could recapture

The first fine careless rapture."

The most wonderful chorus that I ever heard was given one spring day by these dusky residents of the grove "back home." Between four and five o'clock of an afternoon the sun, which had remained hidden during the preceding hours, emerged in all its enthralling splendor like a rainbow long restrained but at last released. From tree stubs, boughs and low bushes the brown thrashers joyfully greeted the luminary and made the air vibrant with their gladness. The whole woods was transformed, lifted up, and freshened by that flood of liquid notes and the exquisite melody of that grand chorus.

"The thrasher's song entrances every listener," says Neltje Blanchan, the naturalist. "He seems rather proud of it, for although at other times he may keep himself well concealed among the shrubbery, when about to sing he chooses a conspicuous perch as if to attract attention to his truly brilliant performance."

Every morning and evening the bird bursts forth with his marvelous melody, but I am inclined to dis-

agree with Miss Blanchan on the score of his forwardness. My experience has taught me that the thrasher likes to get into some thick little tree or bit of shrubbery before beginning his repertory; thus he can see any intruder while he himself remains in the confusing mass of foliage. Sometimes I wonder if the bird knows that, aside from his streaked vest, he has few fine feathers and that his song is much more winning than his rusty raiment. However that may be, the person that has the good fortune to hear him in the evening or early morning can truthfully testify:

"'Twas a song that rippled  
And revelled and ran  
Ever back to the note  
From whence it began;  
Rising and falling  
It never did stay,  
Like a fountain that feeds  
On itself all the day."

Not infrequently, indeed, the song of the thrasher is mistaken for that of its famous cousin, the mocking bird. Though more retiring than either the mocker or



The lanky old bird is here seen feeding the baby, which has a capacious throat almost large enough to swallow the head of its father or mother.

the catbird, the brown haunter of the underbrush seems to me superior in the richness of his notes. The mocker, as the name implies, is an imitator; the catbird, of the same pattern, makes a good start but becomes disgusted with himself and fizzles; the thrasher starts well, continues ably, and ends well.

In this woods "back home" are new nests of the brown birds beside their old ones. They vary in dis-



Mr. (or Mrs.) Brown Thrasher has spied the camera. In the meantime the baby waits for the morsel.

tance from the ground, some reaching as high as a grown man and others no higher than a toddling baby. Where the wild roses flourish appears to be a favorite location for the crude conglomeration of twigs which upon examination discloses a lining of dried grass, feathers, or hair.

The female of this species is a brave little lady. As she will not readily leave her nest the stroller can approach within three or four feet of her, but the moment he attempts to pass a hand through the maze of thorny shrubbery she flutters aside with an attention-attracting show of helplessness. Until she is actually flushed she depends upon her brown dress and tawny nest for concealment. Man, however, is a sharp-eyed creature.

What does the thrasher eat? The farmers of bygone days dubbed him "the planting bird" because they believed the canny fellow hung around while they planted corn and made merry as he contemplated the coming feast. The tillers of the crops interpreted his song as follows:

"Hurry up, hurry up! Plough it, plough it! Harrow it, harrow it! Hoe it, hoe it! Scatter it, scatter it! Seed it, seed it! Cover it over! Rake it, rake it! Push it in, push it in! Weed it, weed it! Pull 'em up, pull 'em up! Oh, leave it alone!"

The thrasher was guilty but not a criminal, for during the planting period only about three per cent of his food consists of corn. Though occasionally indulging in fruit, he evinces a decided preference for animal food such as grasshoppers and caterpillars. From the United States Government he has earned a citation that he "much more than compensates for that portion of his diet derived from the cultivated crops."

This homely fellow, Mr. Brown Thrasher, is like human beings that have not been blessed with beauty of face and figure; if they can't be beautiful, they must be charming somehow. When he sings, the beauty of his melody obliterates all else; gone are the gawkiness of his form and the rusty red of his shabby suit when he gives a concert—a concert that is as free as the air itself.

## Birds Serve the Earth

The earth could get along without Man, but not without Birds. Man is not essential to the earth; birds are.

Birds are the flying squadrons of Nature, doing police duty, now north, now south. They follow the seasons, not for comfort, but on duty. As summer comes, danger comes from pests, and so the birds come. As summer goes, danger recedes, and the birds go back to their southern duty.

Wherever there is an abnormal outbreak of insect life, the birds mobilize there to check it. Flying over a country they can tell by the foliage of the trees if they are needed there; withered forests tell them that the enemy has appeared in force.

Birds are the great planters of the earth; they seeded vast spaces of wilderness, and crowned the crests of rocky hills with trees. They are the guardians of our orchards and grain fields. Carnivorous birds, like Eagles, Vultures, Crows, Hawks and Herons, keep the earth clean of decaying flesh that would otherwise pollute soil and water.

Whenever you look at a bird you see a most wonderful creation. It is a greater traveler and a stronger creature comparatively than you will ever be. To kill it is to affront Nature. The bird has beauty, music, fleetness, wonderful domestic skill and devotion, and these have always appealed to refined natures. To lower natures the economic appeal must also be made. Don't kill birds. If the birds were entirely to disappear tomorrow, human life would not endure long thereafter.



The American or Bald Eagle.

Photo Courtesy Amer. Museum of Nat. History.

## An Appeal in Behalf of the American Eagle

By AUDREY BENNETT

game or domestic animals, which are, for the most part, pure fiction, for the rest, usually gross exaggerations. Furthermore, it is the demonstrated policy of the United States Department of Agriculture to look unfavorably upon bounty laws for the extermination of birds of prey. A great deal is spent every year in the control of rodents which do a great deal of damage, and whose increase is favored by the destruction of such birds.

It is a migratory bird, and the right to destroy it cannot be claimed by any state or territory. Like most of our migratory birds it should be protected by the Federal Government, especially as the effect of the laws for its preservation is void in the majority of our states by the action of a single territory.

The indifference of the public to the fate of this magnificent bird of American tradition is undoubtedly due to the lack of information concerning its threatened extinction. This situation calls for publicity, and bird lovers, students, our patriotic and scientific societies should band together, and make a strong appeal, with the aid of the public press, for the protection and preservation of this noble bird—the famous American, or bald eagle.

The eagle's appearance gives us so strong a feeling of its self-sufficiency that we have never thought of it as needing protection. Its piercing eye, its stout wings, its expression which is very impressive in its apparent resoluteness, make us think of it as a bird that is able to insure its own self-preservation. But no bird can permanently escape the deliberate attack of man. Either we must admit that the eagle is not a fit emblem for our nation, or we must move to protect it against calumny and destruction.

UNLESS something is done—as, say, the prompt passage of a Federal law—the American, or bald eagle, emblem of American liberty and ideals, will be exterminated. The Territorial legislature of Alaska, April 30, 1917, passed a bounty law providing for the payment of fifty cents for each eagle destroyed. By April 10, 1919, this law had resulted in the killing of 5,600 eagles. Not content with confining their operations to Alaskan territory, the bounty seekers extended them into the British provinces adjoining Alaska. By this time, it is stated on good authority, certainly one-half, perhaps more than three-quarters of the entire species has already been sacrificed. Shall this destruction go on? For patriotic reasons, if for no other, this vandalism should be checked, and at once. The species has never been what one would call plentiful, and estimates of its number have been greatly exaggerated.

Any naturalist will tell you that the hostility to this inoffensive bird is based rather on misinformation and ignorant prejudice than on any real harm done by it. One hears tales of its ferocity and destructiveness to