

Bird Gossip

A SERIES OF BIRD-LIFE SKETCHES

-BY-

MARY B. MUNROE

Everglade Birds

ARE there any birds in the Everglades? is a question often asked, and the answer is, Yes and No.

In the Everglades proper—a vast, lonely, trackless expanse of saw-grass prairie—there are very few birds and no song-birds. But in the open flower-studded sloughs, that seem to lead to nowhere, on the edge of the 'Glades and along the banks of the canals are found Egrets, Heron, Cormorants, Man of War or Frigate-birds, Flamingos, Owls, Hawks, Falcons, Roseate Spoonbills and others, among them two well-known song-birds, the Meadow lark and the Red winged Blackbird.

But all travelers through the Everglades speak of the loneliness and absence of bird life, except for the native Limpkin, whose wailing notes may be heard all night, especially as the silver crescent of Halissee, the night time-piece of the 'Glades, sinks silently in the sky.

The Limpkin is often called the "crying bird" on account of his peculiar cry—whee-rie-ow—the last syllable being drawn out into a long wail, which after all is only a big bluff on the part of the bird, for he has little or nothing to complain of.

It is difficult for them to fly; if disturbed they fly but a short distance, taking to the grass again as quickly as possible. However, they are good runners and cover the ground very rapidly, with a peculiar loping gait that has given them their name.

These birds are never seen in flocks but always in pairs. Their nest is a loosely constructed affair of sticks and leaves built just above the ground in the tall grasses or underbrush. Building time comes in April and May. The eggs are buff white,

blotched with brown and number from four to seven.

The bird himself is a study in browns, striped with white, the stripes being narrower on the head and neck. He really resembles an English snipe, and when young is good eating. His food consists principally of land shell food and grass roots.

The Limpkin is called a native of South Florida, although he—or a species like him—has been reported from Texas. He is said to be the connecting link between the Whooping crane and the Rail.

This bird and the Everglade Kite are the two birds native to the Everglades of Florida. The latter bird is found only in the 'Glades of this state. He is sometimes called the "Snail Hawk," as they are said to feed exclusively upon a certain species of water snail found only in the 'Glades.

One of the peculiarities of this bird is that each bird has his own separate perch, to which he takes his snail to eat, and the right to this private table is stoutly maintained.

They are fine flyers and are so rare a bird that a single specimen or an egg, will bring as high a price as ten dollars each from collectors. The eggs are a pale greenish white, spotted with brown and two or three are laid in a firm but coarsely built nest in the underbrush.

The bird's plumage is a dull slate color, the outer tail feathers being tipped with white. He has a slender bill, hooked so as to assist in extracting from its shell the snail which is his food. He is a restless bird, and more often seen on the wing than at rest and his flight is wonderfully graceful.

Mr. Kirk Munroe, while on a trip to

the Okeechobee country in May, reported seeing an Everglade Kite at the edge of the great lake and he also had the rare good fortune to see what was thought to be Audobon Caracara, a very rare bird of the Falcon family. The bird when discovered was on the ground feeding and so intent that the travelers had a good look at him before he took to wing with such a strong, rapid, direct movement that he was soon out of sight.

This bird has the reputation of being very quarrelsome and is a solitary bird, feeding on the ground, its food consisting of small snakes, frogs and even carrion.

All the Everglades birds are interesting to study, but they are not as interesting as the land birds. There

is no music from them, only harsh cries, or wails or whoops; and their plumage is mostly dull grays or browns and they have big claws and cruel hooked beaks. Of course, all these are necessary on account of the character of their habitation and the food upon which they subsist.

But certainly the bird life of that wonderful land of mystery is not nearly as interesting or as beautiful as the plant life. The white and gold-dusted lilies, green and tinted grasses, the pale pink wind-flowers, the arrow head plants, the flame blossoms and the water-bonnet's yellow cups are far more worth while than the big harsh-voiced birds who wade in the tall saw-grass or majestically soar above it.

Bird Lore—the bird lovers' magazine—for May, has for its chief attraction, a most interesting paper on the Roseate Spoonbill. This paper is also published as an educational leaflet by the National Association of Audubon Societies, New York, and is known as Leaflet No. 74. It may be bought for 2 cents, if five or more copies are ordered; included is a beautiful colored plate of the Roseate Spoonbill in his native home.

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“MIAMI”

—BY—

Harold M. Swift

Summer nights on southern waters!
How I love to float and dream
On that placid, silver mirror
Where all things ideal seem!

In a lonely boat I'm floating,
Out across old Biscayne Bay.
Warm the night and soft the breezes,
Magic is the moonlight's play.

Lights are twinkling where the city,
Gloomy, rises from the shore.
Myriads of lovely flowers
On the night their incense pour.

Music and the sound of voices
Faintly float upon the breeze
Mingled with the water's lapping
And the whispering of the trees.

Oceanward I'm drifting slowly;
Indistinct grow sights and sounds;
All is water, moonlight, silence:
I have left the bay's close bounds.

Out in that vast silver silence
I can think the old thoughts o'er;
New dreams make, and o'er them ponder;
Woo again my lost Asthore.

I can live my childhood over,
See my Mother's tender face
As she chides or she commends me
With an equal loving grace.

But the wind and tide have shifted,
I am drifting back to shore;
And from one big, dim impression
Sights and sounds emerge once more.

Summer nights on southern waters!
How I love to float and dream
On that placid, silver mirror
Where all things ideal seem!



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