

The lady was kind, the gun is good and here are the inscriptions on it: *Ne refuse pas ce don d'une amie qui t'est reconnaissante puisse t'il t'égalier en bonté.* [Do not refuse this gift from a friend who is in your debt; may its goodness equal yours.]

And under the ramming rod: *Property of LaForest Audubon, February 22nd 1821.*

Her name I engraved on it where I do not believe it will ever be found.

The Swallow-tailed Hawk

The flight of this elegant species of Hawk is singularly beautiful and protracted. It moves through the air with such ease and grace that it is impossible for any individual who takes the least pleasure in observing the manners of birds not to be delighted by the sight of it whilst on wing. Gliding along in easy flappings it rises in wide circles to an immense height, inclining in various ways its deeply forked tail to assist the direction of its course, dives with the rapidity of lightning and suddenly checking itself reascends, soars away and is soon out of sight. At other times a flock of these birds amounting to fifteen or twenty individuals is seen hovering around the trees. They dive in rapid succession amongst the branches, glancing along the trunks and seizing in their course the insects and small lizards of which they are in quest. Their motions are astonishingly rapid and the deep curves which they describe, their sudden doublings and crossings and the extreme ease with which they seem to cleave the air, excite the admiration of him who views them while thus employed in searching for food.

A solitary individual of this species has once or twice been seen in Pennsylvania. Farther to the eastward the Swallow-tailed Hawk has never, I believe, been observed. Traveling southward along the Atlantic coast we find it in Virginia, although in very small numbers. Beyond that state it becomes more abundant. Near the Falls of the Ohio a pair had a nest and reared four young ones in 1820. In the lower parts of Kentucky it begins to become numerous; but in the states farther to the south and particularly in parts near the sea it is abundant. In the large prairies of the Attacapas and Opelousas it is extremely common.

In the states of Louisiana and Mississippi, where these birds are abundant, they arrive in large companies in the beginning of April and are heard uttering a sharp plaintive note. At this period I generally remarked that they came from the westward and have counted upwards of a hundred in the space of an hour passing over me in a direct easterly course. At that season and in the beginning of September, when they all retire from the United States, they are easily approached when they have alighted, being then apparently fatigued and busily engaged in preparing themselves for continuing

their journey by dressing and oiling their feathers. At all other times, however, it is extremely difficult to get near them, as they are generally on wing through the day and at night rest on the highest pines and cypresses bordering the river bluffs, the lakes or the swamps of that district of country.

They always feed on the wing. In calm and warm weather they soar to an immense height, pursuing the large insects called *Mosquito Hawks* [dragonflies] and performing the most singular evolutions that can be conceived, using their tail with an elegance of motion peculiar to themselves. Their principal food, however, is large grasshoppers, grass caterpillars, small snakes, lizards and frogs. They sweep close over the fields, sometimes seeming to alight for a moment to secure a snake, and holding it fast by the neck, carry it off and devour it in the air. When searching for grasshoppers and caterpillars it is not difficult to approach them under cover of a fence or tree. When one is then killed and falls to the ground the whole flock comes over the dead bird as if intent upon carrying it off. An excellent opportunity is thus afforded of shooting as many as may be wanted, and I have killed several of these Hawks in this manner, firing as fast as I could load my gun.

The Forked-tailed Hawks are also very fond of frequenting the creeks, which in that country are much encumbered with drifted logs and accumulations of sand, in order to pick up some of the numerous water snakes which lie basking in the sun. At other times they dash along the trunks of trees and snap off the pupae of the locust or that insect itself. Although when on wing they move with a grace and ease which it is impossible to describe, yet on the ground they are scarcely able to walk.

I kept for several days one which had been slightly wounded in the wing. It refused to eat, kept the feathers of the head and rump constantly erect and vomited several times part of the contents of its stomach. It never threw itself on its back nor attempted to strike with its talons unless when taken up by the tip of the wing. It died from inanition, as it constantly refused the food placed before it in profusion and instantly vomited what had been thrust down its throat.

The Swallow-tailed Hawk pairs immediately after its arrival in the southern states, and as its courtships take place on the wing its

motions are then more beautiful than ever. The nest is usually placed on the top branches of the tallest oak or pine tree, situated on the margin of a stream or pond. It resembles that of the Common Crow externally, being formed of dry sticks intermixed with Spanish moss, and is lined with coarse grasses and a few feathers. The eggs are from four to six, of a greenish-white color with a few irregular blotches of dark brown at the larger end. The male and the female sit alternately, the one feeding the other. The young are at first covered with buff-colored down. Their next covering exhibits the pure white and black of the old birds but without any of the glossy purplish tints of the latter. The tail, which at first is but slightly forked, becomes more so in a few weeks, and at the approach of autumn exhibits little difference from that of the adult birds. The plumage is completed the first spring. Only one brood is raised in the season. The species leaves the United States in the beginning of September, moving off in flocks which are formed immediately after the breeding-season is over.

Hardly any difference as to external appearance exists between the sexes. They never attack birds or quadrupeds of any species with the view of preying upon them. I never saw one alight on the ground. They secure their prey as they pass closely over it and in so doing sometimes seem to alight, particularly when securing a snake...

[The Swallow-tailed Hawk (Swallow-tailed Kite), *Elanoides forficatus*, appears in Plate 72 of *The Birds of America*.]

The White-throated Sparrow

This pretty little bird is a visitor of Louisiana and all the southern districts, where it remains only a very short time. Its arrival in Louisiana may be stated to take place in the beginning of November and its departure in the first days of March. In all the middle states it remains longer. How it comes and how it departs are to me quite unknown. I can only say that, all of a sudden, the hedges of the fields bordering on creeks or swampy places and overgrown with different species of vines, sumac bushes, briars and the taller kinds of grasses appear covered with these birds. They form groups sometimes containing from thirty to fifty individuals and live together in harmony. They are constantly moving up and down among these recesses with frequent jerkings of the tail and uttering a note common to the tribe. From the hedges and thickets they issue one by one in quick succession and ramble to the distance of eight or ten yards, hopping and scratching, in quest of small seeds, and preserving the utmost silence. When the least noise is heard or alarm given and frequently, as I thought, without any alarm at all, they all fly back to their covert, pushing directly into the very thickest part of it. A moment elapses when they become reassured, and ascending to the highest branches and twigs, open a little concert which, although of short duration, is extremely sweet. There is much plaintive softness in their note which I wish, kind reader, I could describe to you; but this is impossible although it is yet ringing in my ear, as if I were in those very fields where I have so often listened to it with delight. No sooner is their music over than they return to the field and thus continue alternately sallying forth and retreating during the greater part of the day. At the approach of night they utter a sharper and shriller note consisting of a single *twit* repeated in smart succession by the whole group and continuing until the first hooting of some owl frightens them into silence. Yet often during fine nights I have heard the little creatures emit here and there a *twit*, as if to assure each other that "all's well."

During the warmer days they remove partially to the woods but never out of reach of their favorite briar thickets, ascend the tops of hollies or such other trees as are covered with tangled vines and

pick either a berry or a winter grape. Their principal enemies in the daytime are the little Sparrow Hawk, the Slate-colored or Sharp-shinned Hawk and above all the Hen-harrier or Marsh Hawk. The latter passes over their little coteries with such light wings and so unlooked for that he seldom fails in securing one of them.

No sooner does spring return, when our woods are covered with white blossoms in gay mimicry of the now melted snows and the delighted eye is attracted by the beautiful flowers of the dogwood tree, than the White-throated Sparrow bids farewell to these parts, not to return till winter. Where it spends the summer I know not, but I should think not within the States.

It is a plump bird, fattening almost to excess whilst in Louisiana, and affords delicious eating, for which purpose many are killed with *blow-guns*. These instruments—should you not have seen them—are prepared by the Indians, who cut the straightest canes, perforating them by forcing a hickory rod through the internal partitions which intersect this species of bamboo, and render them quite smooth within by passing the rod repeatedly through. The cane is then kept perfectly straight and is well dried, after which it is ready for use. Splints of wood, or more frequently of cane, are then worked into tiny arrows, quite sharp at one end, and at the other, instead of being feathered, covered with squirrel hair or other soft substances in the manner of a bottle brush, so as to fill the tube and receive the impulse imparted by a smart puff of breath, which is sufficient to propel such an arrow with force enough to kill a small bird at the distance of eight or ten paces. With these blow-guns or pipes several species of birds are killed in large quantities; and the Indians sometimes procure even squirrels by means of them.

The dogwood, of which I have represented a twig in early spring [in the plate], is a small tree found nearly throughout the Union but generally preferring such lands as with us are called of second quality, although it occasionally makes its appearance in the richest alluvial deposits. Its height seldom exceeds twenty feet or its diameter ten inches. It is scarcely ever straight to any extent, but the wood, being extremely hard and compact, is useful for turning when well dried and free of wind shakes, to which it is rather

liable. Its berries are eaten by various species of birds and especially by our different kinds of squirrels, all of which shew great partiality to them. Its flowers, although so interesting in early spring, are destitute of odor and of short duration. The bark is used by the inhabitants in decoction as a remedy for intermittent fevers and the berries are employed by the housewife for dyeing black.

[The White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*, appears in Plate 8 of *The Birds of America*.]

The Purple Martin

The Purple Martin makes its appearance in the city of New Orleans from the 1st to the 9th of February, occasionally a few days earlier than the first of these dates, and is then to be seen gamboling through the air over the city and the river feeding on many sorts of insects which are there found in abundance at that period.

It frequently rears three broods whilst with us. I have had several opportunities at the period of their arrival of seeing prodigious flocks moving over that city or its vicinity at a considerable height, each bird performing circular sweeps as it proceeded for the purpose of procuring food. These flocks were loose and moved either eastward or towards the northwest at a rate not exceeding four miles in the hour, as I walked under one of them with ease for upwards of two miles at that rate on the 4th of February 1821 on the bank of the river below the city, constantly looking up at the birds, to the great astonishment of many passengers who were bent on far different pursuits. My Fahrenheit's thermometer stood at 68°, the weather being calm and drizzly. This flock extended about a mile and a half in length by a quarter of a mile in breadth. On the 9th of the same month not far above the *Battleground* [of the Battle of New Orleans] I enjoyed another sight of the same kind, although I did not think the flock so numerous.

At the Falls of the Ohio I have seen Martins as early as the 15th of March arriving in small detached parties of only five or six individuals when the thermometer was as low as 28°, the next day at 45° and again in the same week so low as to cause the death of all the Martins or to render them so incapable of flying as to suffer children to catch them. By the 25th of the same month they are generally plentiful about that neighborhood.

At St. Genevieve in the State of Missouri they seldom arrive before the 10th or 15th of April and sometimes suffer from unexpected returns of frost. At Philadelphia they are first seen about the 10th of April. They reach Boston about the 25th and continue their migration much farther north as the spring continues to open.

On their return to the Southern states they do not require to wait for warmer days, as in spring, to enable them to proceed and they all leave the above-mentioned districts and places about the

20th of August. They assemble in parties of from fifty to a hundred and fifty about the spires of churches in the cities or on the branches of some large dead tree about the farms for several days before their final departure. From these places they are seen making occasional sorties, uttering a general cry and inclining their course towards the west, flying swiftly for several hundred yards, when suddenly checking themselves in their career they return in easy sailings to the same tree or steeple. They seem to act thus for the purpose of exercising themselves as well as to ascertain the course they are to take and to form the necessary arrangements for enabling the party to encounter the fatigues of their long journey. Whilst alighted during these days of preparation they spend the greater part of the time in dressing and oiling their feathers, cleaning their skins and clearing, as it were, every part of their dress and body from the numerous insects which infest them. They remain on their roosts exposed to the night air, a few only resorting to the boxes where they have been reared, and do not leave them until the sun has traveled an hour or two from the horizon, but continue during the fore part of the morning to plume themselves with great assiduity. At length on the dawn of a calm morning they start with one accord and are seen moving due west or southwest, joining other parties as they proceed until there is formed a flock similar to that which I have described above. Their progress is now much more rapid than in spring and they keep closer together.

It is during these migrations, reader, that the power of flight possessed by these birds can be best ascertained, and more especially when they encounter a violent storm of wind. They meet the gust and appear to slide along the edges of it as if determined not to lose one inch of what they have gained. The foremost front the storm with pertinacity, ascending or plunging along the skirts of the opposing currents and entering their undulating recesses as if determined to force their way through, while the rest follow close behind, all huddled together into such compact masses as to appear like a black spot. Not a twitter is then to be heard from them by the spectator below; but the instant the farther edge of the current is doubled, they relax their efforts, to refresh themselves, and twitter in united accord as if congratulating each other on the successful issue of the contest.

The usual flight of this bird more resembles that of the *Hirundo urbica* of Linneus or that of the *Hirundo fulva* of Vieillot than the flight of any other species of Swallow; and although graceful and easy, cannot be compared in swiftness with that of the Barn Swallow. Yet the Martin is fully able to distance any bird not of its own genus. They are very expert at bathing and drinking while on the wing when over a large lake or river, giving a sudden motion to the hind part of the body as it comes into contact with the water, thus dipping themselves in it and then rising and shaking their body like a water spaniel to throw off the water. When intending to drink they sail close over the water with both wings greatly raised and forming a very acute angle with each other. In this position they lower the head, dipping their bill several times in quick succession and swallowing at each time a little water.

They alight with comparative ease on different trees, particularly willows, making frequent movements of the wings and tail as they shift their place in looking for leaves to convey to their nests. They also frequently alight on the ground where notwithstanding the shortness of their legs they move with some ease, pick up a goldsmith or other insect and walk to the edges of puddles to drink, opening their wings, which they also do when on trees, feeling as if not perfectly comfortable.

These birds are extremely courageous, persevering and tenacious of what they consider their right. They exhibit strong antipathies against cats, dogs and such other quadrupeds as are likely to prove dangerous to them. They attack and chase indiscriminately every species of Hawk, Crow or Vulture and on this account are much patronized by the husbandman. They frequently follow and tease an Eaglet until he is out of sight of the Martin's box; and to give you an idea of their tenacity when they have made choice of a place in which to rear their young I shall relate to you the following occurrences.

I had a large and commodious house built and fixed on a pole for the reception of Martins in an enclosure near my house, where for some years several pairs had reared their young. One winter I also put up several small boxes with a view to invite Bluebirds to build nests in them. The Martins arrived in the spring and imagining these smaller apartments more agreeable than their own

mansion took possession of them after forcing the lovely Bluebirds from their abode. I witnessed the different conflicts and observed that one of the Bluebirds was possessed of as much courage as his antagonist, for it was only in consequence of the more powerful blows of the Martin that he gave up his house in which a nest was nearly finished, and he continued on all occasions to annoy the usurper as much as lay in his power. The Martin shewed his head at the entrance and merely retorted with accents of exultation and insult. I thought fit to interfere, mounted the tree on the trunk of which the Bluebird's box was fastened, caught the Martin and clipped his tail with scissors in the hope that such mortifying punishment might prove effectual in inducing him to remove to his own tenement. No such thing; for no sooner had I launched him into the air than he at once rushed back to the box. I again caught him and clipped the tip of each wing in such a manner that he still could fly sufficiently well to procure food and once more set him at liberty. The desired effect, however, was not produced and as I saw the pertinacious Martin keep the box in spite of all my wishes that he should give it up, I seized him in anger and disposed of him in such a way that he never returned to the neighborhood.

At the house of a friend of mine in Louisiana some Martins took possession of sundry holes in the cornices and there reared their young for several years, until the insects which they introduced to the house induced the owner to think of a reform. Carpenters were employed to clean the place and close up the apertures by which the birds entered the cornice. This was soon done. The Martins seemed in despair; they brought twigs and other materials and began to form nests wherever a hole could be found in any part of the building; but were so chased off that after repeated attempts, the season being in the meantime advanced, they were forced away and betook themselves to some Woodpeckers' holes on the dead trees about the plantation. The next spring a house was built for them. The erection of such houses is a general practice, the Purple Martin being considered as a privileged pilgrim and the harbinger of spring.

The note of the Martin is not melodious but is nevertheless very pleasing. The twitterings of the male while courting the female are

more interesting. Its notes are among the first that are heard in the morning and are welcome to the sense of everybody. The industrious farmer rises from his bed as he hears them. They are soon after mingled with those of many other birds and the husbandman, certain of a fine day, renews his peaceful labors with an elated heart. The still more independent Indian is also fond of the Martin's company. He frequently hangs up a calabash on some twig near his camp, and in this cradle the bird keeps watch and sallies forth to drive off the vulture that might otherwise commit depredations on the deerskins or pieces of venison exposed to the air to be dried. The humbled slave of the Southern states takes more pains to accommodate this favorite bird. The calabash is neatly scooped out and attached to the flexible top of a cane brought from the swamp, where that plant usually grows, and placed close to his hut. It is, alas! to him a mere memento of the freedom which he once enjoyed; and at the sound of the horn which calls him to his labor, as he bids farewell to the Martin, he cannot help thinking how happy he should be were he permitted to gambol and enjoy himself day after day with as much liberty as that bird. Almost every country tavern has a Martin box on the upper part of its signboard; and I have observed that the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be.

All our cities are furnished with houses for the reception of these birds; and it is seldom that even lads bent upon mischief disturb the favored Martin. He sweeps along the streets, here and there seizing a fly, hangs to the eaves of the houses or peeps into them as he poises himself in the air in front of the windows or mounts high above the city soaring into the clear sky, plays with the string of the child's kite, snapping at it as he swiftly passes with unerring precision or suddenly sweeps along the roofs, chasing off grimalkin, who is probably prowling in quest of his young.

In the Middle states the nest of the Martin is built or that of the preceding year repaired and augmented eight or ten days after its arrival on about the 20th of April. It is composed of dry sticks, willow twigs, grasses, leaves, green and dry, feathers and whatever rags he meets with. The eggs, which are pure white, are from four to six. Many pairs resort to the same box to breed and the little fraternity appear to live in perfect harmony. They rear two broods

in a season. The first comes forth in the end of May, the second about the middle of July. In Louisiana they sometimes have three broods. The male takes part of the labor of incubation and is extremely attentive to his mate. He is seen twittering on the box and frequently flying past the hole. His notes are at this time emphatical and prolonged, low and less musical than even his common *pews*. Their food consists entirely of insects, among which are large beetles. They seldom seize the honeybee.

The circumstance of their leaving the United States so early in autumn, has inclined me to think that they must go farther from them than any of our migratory land birds . . .

[The Purple Martin, *Progne subis*, appears in Plate 22 of *The Birds of America*.]

The Barred Owl

Should you, kind reader, find it convenient or agreeable to visit the noble forests existing in the lower parts of the State of Louisiana about the middle of October, when nature, on the eve of preparing for approaching night, permits useful dews to fall and rest on every plant with the view of reviving its leaves, its fruits or its lingering blossoms ere the return of morn; when every night insect rises on buzzing wings from the ground and the firefly, amidst thousands of other species, appears as if purposely to guide their motions through the somber atmosphere; at the moment when numerous reptiles and quadrupeds commence their nocturnal prowlings and the fair moon, empress of the night, rises peacefully on the distant horizon, shooting her silvery rays over the heavens and the earth and, like a watchful guardian, moving slowly and majestically along; when the husbandman, just returned to his home after the labors of the day, is receiving the cheering gratulations of his family and the wholesome repast is about to be spread out for master and servants alike—it is at this moment, kind reader, that were you as I have said to visit that happy country, your ear would suddenly be struck by the discordant screams of the Barred Owl. Its *whah, whah, whah*, *whah-aa* is uttered loudly and in so strange and ludicrous a manner that I should not be surprised were you, kind reader, when you and I meet, to compare these sounds to the affected bursts of laughter which you may have heard from some of the fashionable members of our own species.

How often, when snugly settled under the boughs of my temporary encampment and preparing to roast a venison steak or the body of a squirrel on a wooden spit, have I been saluted with the exulting bursts of this nightly disturber of the peace that, had it not been for him, would have prevailed around me as well as in my lonely retreat! How often have I seen this nocturnal marauder alight within a few yards of me, exposing his whole body to the glare of my fire, and eye me in such a curious manner that had it been reasonable to do so, I would gladly have invited him to walk in and join me in my repast that I might have enjoyed the pleasure of forming a better acquaintance with him. The liveliness of his motions joined to their oddness have often made me think that

his society would be at least as agreeable as that of many of the buffoons we meet with in the world. But as such opportunities of forming acquaintance have not existed, be content, kind reader, with the imperfect information which I can give you of the habits of this Sancho Panza of our woods.

Such persons as conclude when looking upon owls in the glare of day that they are as they then appear, extremely dull, are greatly mistaken. Were they to state, like Buffon, that Woodpeckers are miserable beings, they would be talking as incorrectly; and to one who might have lived long in the woods they would seem to have lived only in their libraries.

The Barred Owl is found in all those parts of the United States which I have visited and is a constant resident. In Louisiana it seems to be more abundant than in any other state. It is almost impossible to travel eight or ten miles in any of the retired woods there without seeing several of them even in broad day; and at the approach of night their cries are heard proceeding from every part of the forest around the plantations. Should the weather be lowering and indicative of the approach of rain, their cries are so multiplied during the day and especially in the evening, and they respond to each other in tones so strange, that one might imagine some extraordinary fate about to take place among them. On approaching one of them, its gesticulations are seen to be of a very extraordinary nature. The position of the bird, which is generally erect, is immediately changed. It lowers its head and inclines its body to watch the motions of the person beneath, throws forward the lateral feathers of its head, which thus has the appearance of being surrounded by a broad ruff, looks towards him as if half blind and moves its head to and fro in so extraordinary a manner as almost to induce a person to fancy that part dislocated from the body. It follows all the motions of the intruder with its eyes; and should it suspect any treacherous intentions flies off to a short distance, alighting with its back to the person and immediately turning about with a single jump to recommence its scrutiny. In this manner the Barred Owl may be followed to a considerable distance if not shot at, for to halloo after it does not seem to frighten it much. But if shot at and missed, it removes to a considerable distance, after which its *whab-whab-whab* is uttered with

considerable pomposity. This owl will answer the imitation of its own sounds and is frequently decoyed by this means.

The flight of the Barred Owl is smooth, light, noiseless and capable of being greatly protracted. I have seen them take their departure from a detached grove in a prairie and pursue a direct course towards the skirts of the main forest, distant more than two miles, in broad daylight. I have thus followed them with the eye until they were lost in the distance and have reason to suppose that they continued their flight until they reached the woods. Once, whilst descending the Ohio not far from the well-known *Cave-in-Rock*, about two hours before sunset in the month of November, I saw a Barred Owl teased by several crows and chased from the tree in which it was. On leaving the tree it gradually rose in the air in the manner of a Hawk and at length attained so great a height that our party lost sight of it. It acted, I thought, as if it had lost itself, now and then describing small circles and flapping its wings quickly, then flying in zigzag lines. This being so uncommon an occurrence, I noted it down at the time. I felt anxious to see the bird return towards the earth, but it did not make its appearance again. So very lightly do they fly that I have frequently discovered one passing over me and only a few yards distant by first seeing its shadow on the ground during clear moonlit nights when not the faintest rustling of its wings could be heard.

Their power of sight during the day seems to be rather of an equivocal character, as I once saw one alight on the back of a cow, which it left so suddenly afterwards when the cow moved as to prove to me that it had mistaken the object on which it had perched for something else. At other times I have observed that the approach of the grey squirrel intimidated them if one of these animals accidentally jumped on a branch close to them, although the Owl destroys a number of them during the twilight. It is for this reason, kind reader, that I have represented the Barred Owl gazing in amazement at one of the squirrels placed only a few inches from him.

The Barred Owl is a great destroyer of poultry, particularly of chickens when half-grown. It also secures mice, young hares, rabbits and many species of small birds, but is especially fond of a kind of frog of a brown color, very common in the woods of Louisiana. I have heard it asserted that this bird catches fish, but

never having seen it do so, and never having found any portion of fish in its stomach, I cannot vouch for the truth of the report.

About the middle of March these Owls begin to lay their eggs. This they usually do in the hollows of trees on the dust of the decomposed wood. At other times they take possession of the old nest of a Crow or a Red-tailed Hawk. In all these situations I have found their eggs and young. The eggs are of a globular form, pure white, with a smooth shell and are from four to six in number. So far as I have been able to ascertain they rear only one brood in a season. The young, like those of all other Owls, are at first covered with a downy substance, some of which is seen intermixed with and protruding from the feathers some weeks after the bird is nearly fledged. They are fed by the parents for a long time, standing perched and emitting a hissing noise in lieu of a call. This noise may be heard in a calm night for fifty or probably a hundred yards and is by no means musical. To a person lost in a swamp it is indeed extremely dismal.

The plumage of the Barred Owl differs very considerably in respect to color in different individuals, more so among the males. The males are also smaller than the females, but less so than in some other species.

During the severe winters of our middle districts those that remain there suffer very much; but the greater number, as in some other species, remove to the Southern states. When kept in captivity, they prove excellent mousers.

The antipathy shewn to Owls by every species of day bird is extreme. They are followed and pursued on all occasions; and although few of the day birds ever prove dangerous enemies, their conduct towards the Owls is evidently productive of great annoyance to them. When the Barred Owl is shot at and wounded it snaps its bill sharply and frequently, raises all its feathers, looks towards the person in the most uncouth manner but, on the least chance of escape, moves off in great leaps with considerable rapidity.

The Barred Owl is very often exposed for sale in the New Orleans market. The Creoles make *gumbo* of it, and pronounce the flesh palatable.

[The Barred Owl, *Strix varia*, appears in Plate 46 of *The Birds of America*.]

Chuck-will's-widow

The Chuck-will's-widow and the Whippoorwill, both named for their calls, fly at dusk or at night scooping insects into their prodigious fringed mouths. Both are categorized as goatsuckers because they were once imagined to nurse from the goats whose presence and activity stirred up the insects. In his plate Audubon depicted two Chuck-will's-widows harassing what he calls a harlequin snake. There are harmless snakes with similar patterns, but the fact that Audubon's specimen has red bands touching yellow ones identifies it as a coral snake, an American relative of the cobra with a deadly bite; if he or his assistant Joseph Mason handled it, they did so at great risk.

Our goatsuckers, although possessed of great power of wing, are particularly attached to certain districts and localities. The species now under consideration is seldom observed beyond the limits of the Choctaw Nation in the state of Mississippi or the Carolinas on the shores of the Atlantic, and may with propriety be looked upon as the southern species of the United States. Louisiana, Florida, the lower portions of Alabama and Georgia are the parts in which it most abounds; and there it makes its appearance early in spring, coming over from Mexico and probably still warmer climates.

About the middle of March the forests of Louisiana are heard to echo with the well-known notes of this interesting bird. No sooner has the sun disappeared and the nocturnal insects emerge from their burrows than the sounds "*chuck-will's-widow*," repeated with great clearness and power six or seven times in as many seconds, strike the ear of every individual, bringing to the mind a pleasure mingled with a certain degree of melancholy which I have often found very soothing. The sounds of the Goatsucker at all events forebode a peaceful and calm night, and I have more than once thought are conducive to lull the listener to repose.

The deep ravines, shady swamps and extensive pine ridges are all equally resorted to by these birds; for in all such places they find ample means of providing for their safety during the day and of procuring food under night. Their notes are seldom heard in cloudy weather and never when it rains. Their roosting places

are principally the hollows of decayed trees whether standing or prostrate, from which latter they are seldom raised during the day excepting while incubation is in progress. In these hollows I have found them lodged in the company of several species of bats, the birds asleep on the moldering particles of the wood, the bats clinging to the sides of the cavities. When surprised in such situations, instead of trying to effect their escape by flying out they retire backwards to the farthest corners, ruffle all the feathers of their body, open their mouth to its full extent and utter a hissing kind of murmur not unlike that of some snakes. When seized and brought to the light of day they open and close their eyes in rapid succession as if it were painful for them to encounter so bright a light. They snap their little bill in the manner of Flycatchers and shuffle along as if extremely desirous of making their escape. On giving them liberty to fly I have found them able to proceed until out of my sight. They passed between the trees with apparently as much ease and dexterity as if it had been twilight. I once cut two of the quill feathers of a wing of one of these birds and allowed it to escape. A few days afterwards I found it in the same log, which induces me to believe that they like many other birds resort to the same spot to roost or spend the day.

The flight of the Chuck-will's-widow is as light as that of its relative the well-known *Whippoorwill*, if not more so, and is more graceful as well as more elevated. It somewhat resembles the flight of the Hen-harrier, being performed by easy flappings of the wings interspersed with sailings and curving sweeps extremely pleasing to the bystander. At the approach of night this bird begins to sing clearly and loudly and continues its notes for about a quarter of an hour. At this time it is perched on a fence stake or on the decayed branch of a tree in the interior of the woods, seldom on the ground. The sounds or notes which it emits seem to cause it some trouble as it raises and lowers its head in quick succession at each of them. This over, the bird launches into the air and is seen sweeping over the cotton fields or the sugar plantations, cutting all sorts of figures, mounting, descending or sailing with so much ease and grace that one might be induced to call it the *fairy of the night*. If it passes close to one, a murmuring noise is heard, at times resembling that spoken of when the bird is caught by day. It suddenly checks its

course, inclines to the right or left, secures a beetle or a moth, continues its flight over the field, passes and repasses hundreds of times over the same ground and now and then alights on a fence stake or the tallest plant in the place, from which it emits its notes for a few moments with increased vivacity. Now it is seen following a road or a path on the wing and alighting here and there to pick up the beetle emerging from its retreat in the ground; again it rises high in air and gives chase to the insects that are flying there, perhaps on their passage from one wood to another. At other times I have seen it poise itself on its wings opposite the trunk of a tree and seize with its bill the insects crawling on the bark, in this manner inspecting the whole tree with motions as light as those by which the Hummingbird flutters from one flower to another. In this manner Chuck-will's-widow spends the greater part of the night.

The greatest harmony appears to subsist between the birds of this species, for dozens may be observed flying together over a field and chasing insects in all directions without manifesting any enmity or envy. A few days after the arrival of the male birds the females make their appearance and the love season at once commences. The male pays his addresses to the female with a degree of pomposity only equaled by the Tame Pigeon. The female, perched lengthwise on a branch, appears coy and silent, whilst the male flies around her, alights in front of her and with drooping wings and expanded tail advances quickly, singing with great impetuosity. They are soon seen to leave the branch together and gambol through the air. A few days after this, the female, having made choice of a place in one of the most retired parts of some thicket, deposits two eggs, which I think, although I cannot be certain, are all that she lays for the season.

This bird forms no nest. A little space is carelessly scratched amongst the dead leaves and in it the eggs, which are elliptical, dull olive and speckled with brown, are dropped. These are not found without great difficulty, unless when by accident a person passes within a few feet of the bird whilst sitting, and it chances to fly off. Should you touch or handle these dear fruits of happy love and, returning to the place, search for them again, you would search in vain; for the bird perceives at once that they have been

meddled with and both parents remove them to some other part of the woods where chance only could enable you to find them again. In the same manner they also remove the young when very small.

This singular occurrence has as much occupied my thoughts as the equally singular manner in which the *Cow Bunting* deposits her eggs, which she does like the *Common Cuckoo* of Europe one by one in the nests of other birds of different species from her own. I have spent much time in trying to ascertain in what manner the Chuck-will's-widow removes her eggs or young, particularly as I found, by the assistance of an excellent dog, that neither the eggs nor the young were to be met with within at least a hundred yards from the spot where they at first lay. The Negroes, some of whom pay a good deal of attention to the habits of birds and quadrupeds, assured me that these birds push the eggs or young with their bill along the ground. Some farmers, without troubling themselves much about the matter, imagined the transportation to be performed under the wings of the old bird. The account of the Negroes appearing to me more likely to be true than that of the farmers, I made up my mind to institute a strict investigation of the matter. The following is the result.

When the Chuck-will's-widow, either male or female (for each sits alternately) has discovered that the eggs have been touched, it ruffles its feathers and appears extremely dejected for a minute or two, after which it emits a low murmuring cry, scarcely audible to me, as I lay concealed at a distance of not more than eighteen or twenty yards. At this time I have seen the other parent reach the spot, flying so low over the ground that I thought its little feet must have touched it as it skimmed along, and after a few low notes and some gesticulations, all indicative of great distress, take an egg in its large mouth, the other bird doing the same, when they would fly off together skimming closely over the ground until they disappeared among the branches and trees. But to what distance they remove their eggs I have never been able to ascertain; nor have I ever had an opportunity of witnessing the removal of the young. Should a person coming upon the nest when the bird is sitting refrain from touching the eggs, the bird returns to them and sits as before. This fact I have also ascertained by observation.

I wish I could have discovered the peculiar use of the *pectinated claw* which this bird has on each foot; but, reader, this remains one of the many desiderata in ornithology, and I fear, with me at least, will continue so.

The Chuck-will's-widow manifests a strong antipathy towards all snakes, however harmless they may be. Although these birds cannot in any way injure the snakes, they alight near them on all occasions and try to frighten them away by opening their prodigious mouth and emitting a strong hissing murmur. It was after witnessing one of these occurrences, which took place at early twilight, that the idea of representing these birds in such an occupation struck me. The beautiful little snake gliding along the dead branch between two Chuck-will's-widows, a male and a female, is commonly called the *Harlequin Snake*, and is, I believe, quite harmless.

The food of the bird now under consideration consists entirely of all sorts of insects, among which the larger species of moths and beetles are very conspicuous. The long bristly feathers at the base of the mandibles of these birds no doubt contribute greatly to prevent the insects from escaping after any portion of them has entered the mouth of the bird.

These birds become silent as soon as the young are hatched, but are heard again before their departure towards the end of summer. At this season, however, their cry is much less frequently heard than in spring. They leave the United States all of a sudden, about the middle of the month of August.

[The Chuck-will's-widow, *Caprimulgus carolinensis*, appears in Plate 52 of *The Birds of America*.]