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By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

English  
Singing Birds

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Like most Americans interested in birds and books, I know a good deal about English birds as they appear in books. I know the lark of Shakespeare and Shelley and the Ettrick Shepherd; I know the lighthouse of Milton and Keats; I know Wordsworth's cuckoo; I know mavis and merle singing in the merry green wood of the old ballads; I know Jenny Wren and Cock Robin of the nursery books. Therefore I have always much desired to hear the birds in real life; and the opportunity offered last June. As I could snatch but a few hours from a very exacting round of pleasures and duties, it was necessary for me to be with some companion who could identify both song and singer. In Sir Edward Grey, a keen lover of outdoor life in all its phases, and a delightful companion, who knows the songs and ways of English birds as very few do know them, I found the best possible guide.

We left London on the morning of June 9, 24 hours before I sailed from Southampton. Getting off the train at Basingstoke, we drove to the pretty, smiling valley of the Itchen. Here we tramped for three or four hours, then again drove, this time to the edge of the New Forest, where we first took tea at an inn, and then tramped through the forest to an inn on its other side, at Brockenhurst. At the conclusion of our walk my companion made a list of the birds we had seen, putting an asterisk opposite those which we had heard sing. There were 41 of the former and 23 of the latter, as follows:

\*Thrush, \*Blackbird, \*Lark, \*Yellow Hammer, \*Robin, \*Wren, \*Golden Crested Wren, \*Goldfinch, \*Greenfinch, \*Pied Wagtail, Sparrow, \*Duncock (Hedge Accentor), \*Mistle Thrush, \*Starling, \*Rook, \*Jackdaw, \*Black Cap, \*Garden Warbler, \*Willow Warbler, \*Chiff Chaff, \*Wood Warbler, \*Tree Creeper, \*Reed Bunting, \*Sedge Warbler, \*Coot, \*Water Hen, \*Little Grebe (Dabchick), \*Tufted Duck, \*Wood Pigeon, \*Stock Dove, \*Turtle Dove, \*Pewee, \*Tilt (\*Coal Tit), \*Cuckoo, \*Nightjar, \*Swallow, \*Martin, \*Swift, \*Pheasant, \*Partridge.

The bird that most impressed me on my walk was the blackbird. I had already heard nightingales in abundance near Lake Como, and had also listened to larks, but I had never heard either the blackbird, the song thrush, or the black cap warbler; and while I knew all three were good singers, I did not know what really beautiful singers they were. Blackbirds were very abundant, and they played a prominent part in the chorus which we heard throughout the day on every hand, though perhaps loudest the following morning at dawn. In its habits and manners, the blackbird strikingly resembles our American robin, and indeed looks exactly like a robin, with a yellow bill and coal-black plumage. It hops everywhere over the lawns, just as our robin does, and it lives in nests in the gardens in the same fashion. Its song has a general resemblance to that of our robin, but many of the notes are far more musical, more like those of our wood thrush. Indeed there were individuals among those we heard certain of whose notes seemed to me almost to equal in point of melody the chiming of the wood thrush; and the highest possible praise for any song bird is to liken its song to that of the wood thrush or hermit thrush. I certainly do not think that the blackbird has received full justice in the books. I knew that it was a singer, but I really had no idea how fine a singer he was. I suppose one of his troubles has been his name, just as with our own cat bird. When he appears in the ballads as the merle, bracketed with his cousin, the mavis, the song thrush, it is far easier to recognize him as the master singer that he is. It is a fine thing for England to have such an asset of the country-side, a bird so common, so much in evidence, so fearless, and such a really beautiful singer.

The most musical singer we heard was the black cap warbler. To my ear its song seemed more musical than that of the nightingale. It was astonishingly powerful for so small a bird; in volume and continuity it does not come up to the songs of the thrushes and of certain other birds, but in quality, as an isolated bit of melody, it can hardly be surpassed. Among the minor singers the robin was noticeable. We all know this pretty little bird from the books, and I was prepared to find him as friendly and attractive as he proved to be, but I had not realized how well he sang.

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