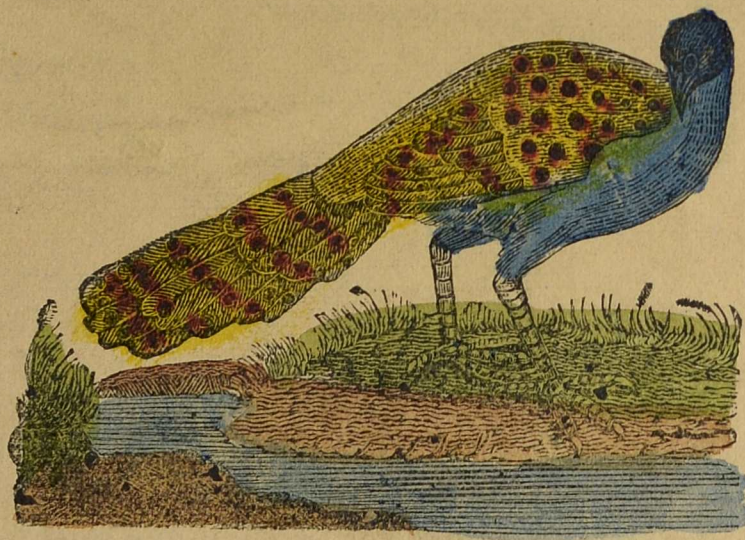
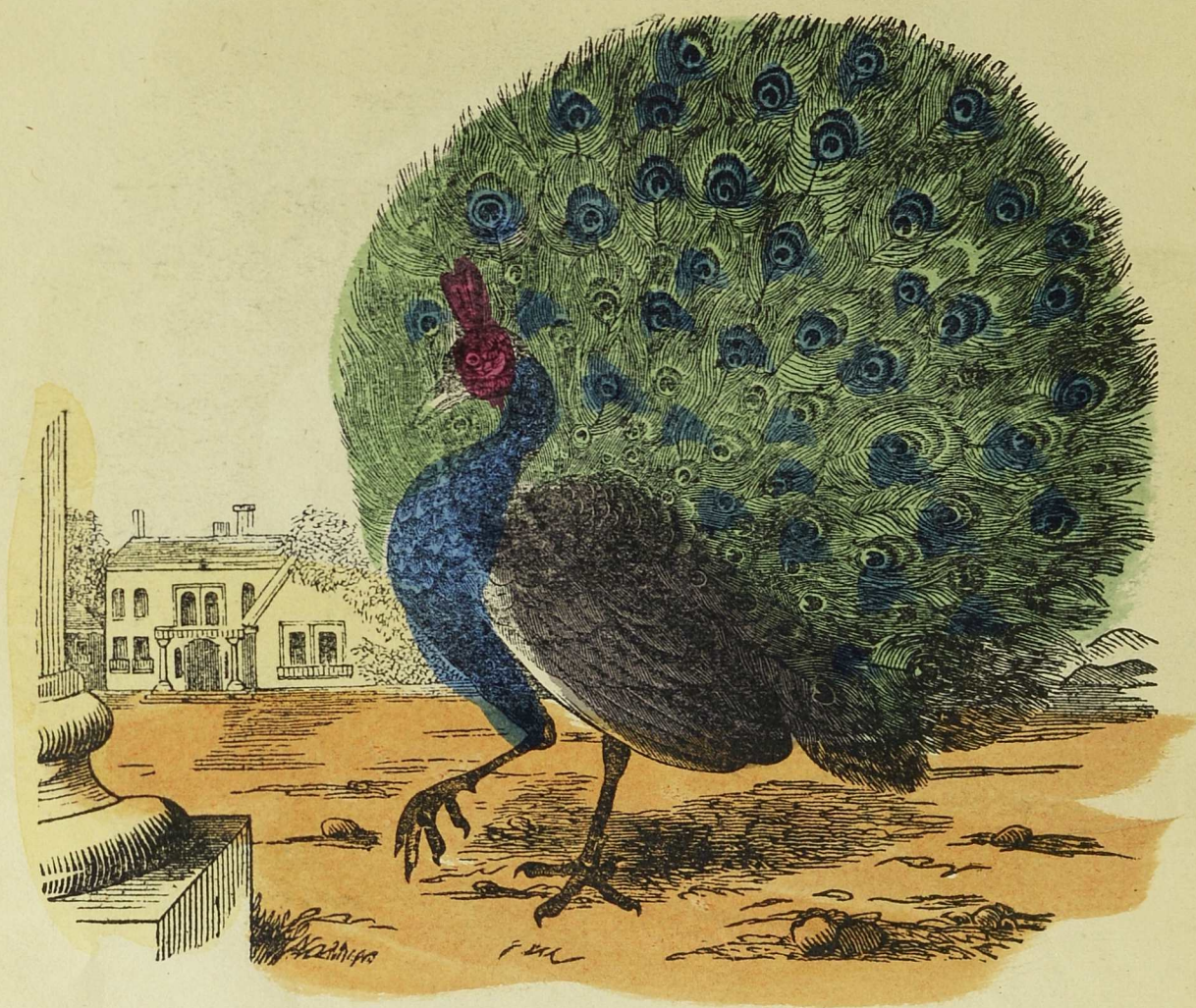


NATURAL HISTORY OF BIRDS.



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THE PEACOCK.

The peacock, by many, is said to have the plumage of an angel. When it appears with its tail expanded, there is none of the feathered creation can vie with it for beauty ; yet the horrid scream of his voice serves to abate the pleasure we find from viewing it. Our first peacocks were brought from the East Indies : and we are assured that they are still found in vast flocks in a wild state, in the islands of Java and Ceylon. There are varieties of these birds, some of which are white, others crested ; that which is called the Peacock of Thibet, is the most beautiful of the feathered creation, containing in its plumage all the most vivid colours, red blue, yellow, and green, disposed in an almost artificial order, as if merely to please the eye of the beholder. The peacock lives about twenty years ; and not until its third year has it that beautiful variegated plumage that adorns it. The Peahen seldom lays above five or six eggs in this climate before she sits.



THE SWAN.

This beautiful bird is as delicate in its appetites, as it is elegant in its form. Its chief food is corn, bread, herbs, growing in the water, and roots and seeds, which are found near the margin. It prepares a nest in some retired part of the bank, and chiefly where there is an islet in the stream. This is composed of water plants, long grass, and sticks; and the male and female assist in forming it with great assiduity. The swan lays seven or eight eggs, white, much larger than those of the goose, with hard or sometimes a tuberculous shell. It sits near two months before its young are excluded which are ash-coloured when they first leave the shell, and for some months after. It is not a little dangerous to approach the old ones, when their little family are feeding round them. Their fears as well as their pride, seem to take the alarm; and they have sometimes been known to give a blow with their pinion, that has broken a man's leg or arm. It is not till they are a twelve-month old that the young swan change their colour with their plumage. All the stages of this bird's approach to maturity are slow, and seem to mark its longevity.



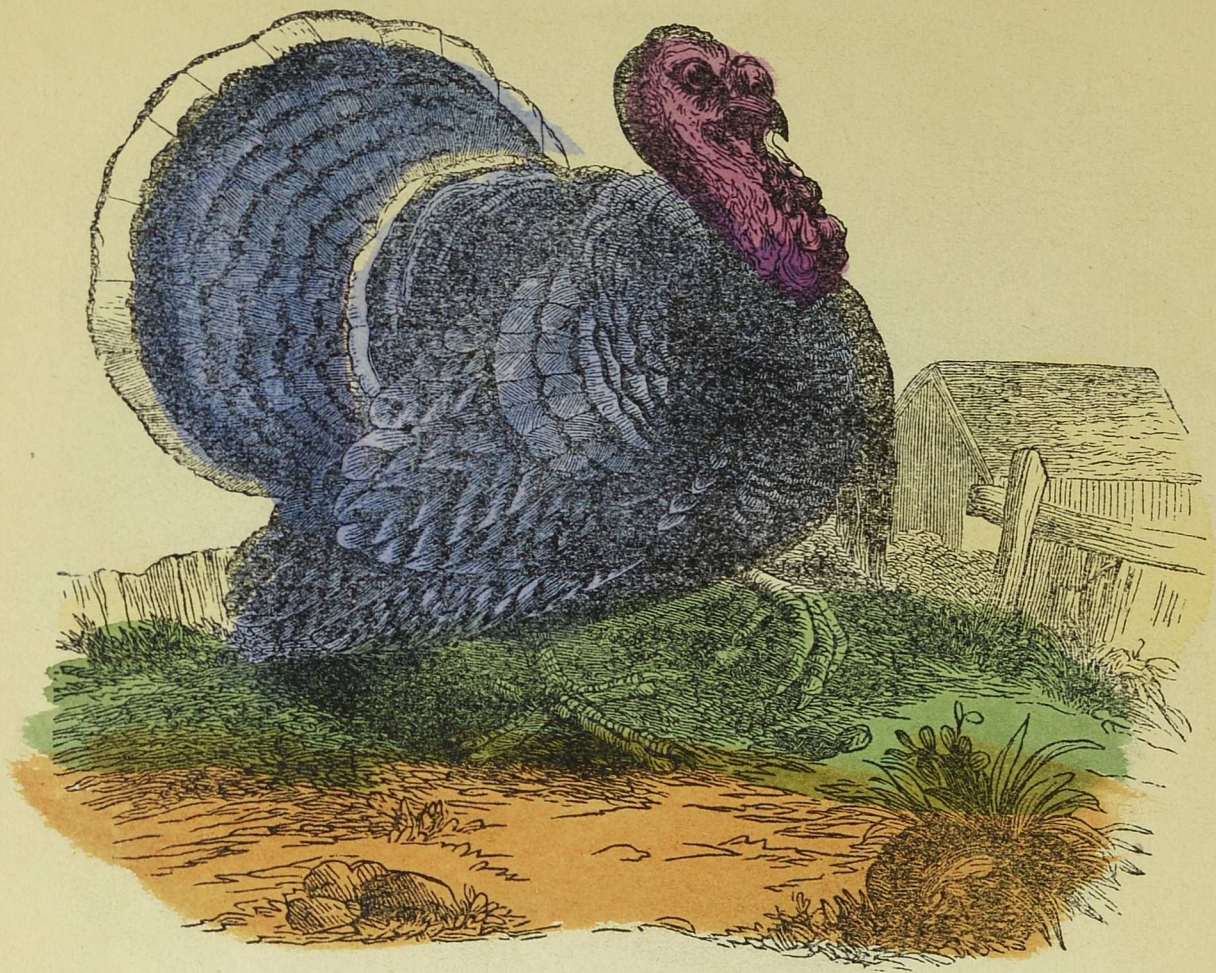
THE EAGLE.

Of all birds the eagle flies highest; and from thence the ancients have given him the epithet of the Bird of Heaven. Of all others also, he has the quickest eye; but his sense of smelling is far inferior to that of the vulture. He never pursues, therefore, but in sight, and when he has seized his prey, he stoops from his height, as if to examine its weight, always laying it on the ground before he carries it off. As his wing is very powerful, he finds no difficulty in carrying off geese and cranes. They also destroy lambs, kids, fawns, and even calves. The nest of this bird is usually built in the most inaccessible cliff of a rock, and generally shielded from the weather by some crag jutting that hangs over it. The period of incubation is said to be thirty days; and when the young are hatched, both the male and female exert all their industry to provide for their wants. Those eagles which are kept tame, are fed with every kind of flesh, whether fresh or corrupting; and when there is a deficiency of that, bread, or any other provision, will suffice. It is very dangerous approaching them if not quite tame; and they sometimes send forth a loud piercing cry, which renders them still more formidable.



THE VULTURE.

The golden vulture, which seems to be the foremost of the tribe, is about four feet and a half long, from the end of the beak to the tail: on the head and neck only are to be seen a few scattered hairs, and the eyes are more prominent than those of the eagle; the plumage on the breast and belly is of a redish colour; the back is black; but the tail and wings are of a yellowish brown. This cruel, unclean, and indolent bird, though totally unknown in England, is common in many parts of Europe; and in Egypt, Arabia, and many other kingdoms of Africa and Asia, vultures are found in great abundance. In Egypt, and particularly in Grand Cairo, there are great flocks of them, which render a most important service to the inhabitants, by devouring all the filth and carrion which might otherwise render the air pestilential. In Brazil, these may be deemed peculiarly serviceable, from the circumstance of their checking the increase of the crocodile tribe, The female crocodile frequently lays her eggs in great numbers, on the side of a river, and covers them carefully with the sand, to conceal them from all other animals. Vultures watch her motions from the branches of the forest, and on her retiring, they encourage each other with loud cries, pour down upon the spot, lay the eggs bare, and devour them in a few moments.



THE TURKEY.

The natal place of the cock and the peacock is pretty well ascertained, but there are stronger doubts concerning the turkey; some contending, that it has been brought into Europe from the East Indies many centuries ago; while others assert, that it is wholly unknown in this part of the world, that it is a native of the New Continent, and that it has not been brought into Europe till the discovery of that part of the world. When young, it is one of the tenderest of all birds; yet in its wild state, it is found plentifully in the forests of Canada, that are covered with snow above three parts of the year. In the natural woods, they are found very much larger than in their domestic captivity. They are more beautiful also, the feathers being of a dark grey, bordered at the edges with a bright gold colour. These the savages of the country weave into cloaks to adorn their persons, and fashion into fans and umbrellas, but never once think of taking into keeping animals that the wood furnish them with in sufficient abundance. The female seems of a milder, gentler disposition, being rather querulous than bold, she hunts about in quest of grain, and pursuit of insects, being particularly delighted with the eggs of ants and caterpillars.



THE OWL.

Of owls there are about fifty species, of which, however, it is not necessary here to notice every variety. All birds of the owl kind may be considered as nocturnal robbers, who, unfitted for taking their prey while it is light, surprise it at those hours of rest, when the tribes of nature are in the least expectation of an enemy. It is not, however, as some have imagined, in the darkest nights, but in the dusk of evening, or in the dawn of morning, that they are best fitted for seeing. It is then that they issue from their retreats, to hunt or to surprise their prey, which is usually attended with great success; it is then that they find all birds asleep, or preparing for repose, and they have only to seize the most unguarded. The nights when the moon shines are the times of their most successful plunder; for when it is wholly dark, they are less qualified for seeing and pursuing their prey: except, therefore, by moonlight, they contract the hours of their chase; and if they come out at the approach of dusk in the evening, they return before it is totally dark, and then rise by twilight the next morning to pursue their game, and to return in like manner, before the broad day-light begins to dazzle them with its splendour.



THE WOODPECKER.

Of this bird there are many kinds, and several varieties of each kind ; but instead of descending into a minute discrimination of every species, we shall select a few only, as to these all the rest will be found to bear the strongest affinity. The green woodpecker is called the *rain-fowl* in some parts of the country ; because when it makes a greater noise than ordinary, it is supposed to foretell rain. It is about the size of a jay ; the throat, breast, and belly, are of a pale greenish colour ; and the back, neck, and covert of the feathers of the wings, are green. But the tongue of this little animal makes its most distinguished characteristic, as it serves both for its support and defence. This is round, ending in a stiff, sharp, bony tip, dentated on both sides, like the beard of an arrow ; and this it can dart out three or four inches from the bill, and draw in again at pleasure. The greater spotted woodpecker is common in England. Buffon says, that it strikes against the trees with brisker and harder blows than the green woodpecker.



THE NIGHTINGALE.

It is not by the beauty of his plumage that this universally-admired bird has become a general favourite, and the theme of almost every poet ; for he is one of the warblers which are humbly attired. He is about six inches long, and the upper part of his body is of a rusty brown, tinged with olive ; the under parts are of a pale ash colour, almost white on the throat and belly, but in his song he surpasses all the choristers of the air, his notes being exquisitely varied, soft, and harmonious, and rendered still more pleasing by their being poured forth in the night, when the other warblers are all silent. The nightingale visits England in the beginning of April, and generally retires in August. It is only found in some of the southern parts of this country, being totally unknown in Scotland, Ireland, and North Wales ; and as it generally keeps in the middle of its favourite bush or tree, it is but rarely seen. The female constructs her nest of the leaves of trees, straw, and moss, and usually lays four or five eggs, but it seldom happens in our climate that all these come to maturity.

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