

## *A Day in Texas Woods*

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On the evening of May 6, 1892, I made my preparations for an all day tramp in the woods of Travis County.

I intended to go to sleep early, but the low, sweet song of a Mockingbird and the melancholy notes of a Chuck-will's-widow kept me awake till nearly midnight.

I awoke in the morning, just as the sun was rising over the post-oaks in the east and one of the first sounds I heard was Jack, my Mockingbird, practising in a minor key, the Chuck-will's-widow's cry, but when he heard me, he stopped as if ashamed of himself and broke into a wild succession of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher notes that would have driven their originator frantic.

On my way out as I walked through the University campus, a Western Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus strigatus*) rose from the tall grass and perched on a chaparral bush (*Berberis trifoliata*) in which his mate was patiently incubating her eggs and listening to his morning song. Nearby a Nonpareil (*Passerina ciris*) in the top of a sycamore tree sang a loud, clear song, almost like a Cardinal's, until a jealous Mocking-bird rushed at him and forced him to beat a hasty retreat to a cedar bush where he chirped angrily but stopped when his late pal looked towards him.

As I wended my way nearly due north through the thinly settled suburbs, a flock of Bronzed Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula aeneus*) flew swiftly eastward to their distant feeding grounds and nearby, hidden in the dense foliage, Orchard Orioles quarreled in the trees that border the grass-grown lane.

Farther on, in the post-oak woods, Painted Buntings (*Passerina ciris*), Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and Crested Flycatchers (*Myiarchus crinitus*) were feeding together, a Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) hammered away at an old, live oak stub and a low, moaning sound came from a dense elm thicket to the right. When I approached the thicket the sound died away and a male Road Runner (*Geococcyx californianus*) dashed off through the trees, leaving the female to protect her eggs or run as she felt inclined. She chose the latter course and taking a flying leap from the nest she reached the ground thirty feet away and quickly disappeared in the underbrush.

The nest was on old Mocking-bird's, repaired and enlarged to suit its present owners. It was in an elm tree eight feet up and contained only one egg so I left it for a complete set.

Just in front in the mesquite thicket that borders the prairie, the merry, jumbling song of a Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) directed my steps to where the pretty, little pensile nest was swinging in the fork of a horizontal mesquite limb. It contained three eggs, faint pinkish white, irregularly speckled with reddish-brown.

To the north the prairie stretches out as far as the eye can see and trees are few and far between. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*Milvulus forficatus*) and Orchard Orioles have taken possession of most of the nesting places and some of the former have commenced to build their nests. Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) were perched on the barbed wires and their monotonous notes, chip-zerp, zerp, zerp, ship-ip, zerp, zerp, zerp, zerp, were pleasing though somewhat harsh. Turning westward, I made my way through the tall prairie grass towards a group of live oaks, behind which the cedar-clad, limestone hills rose one behind the other, until they were lost in the hazy distance. At my feet a muddy, sluggish creek bordered by high, rank weeds, flowed lazily through the rich, black, waxy, prairie soil. Among the bright green weeds and water grasses that bordered it and marked its course from a distance, Western Blue Grosbeaks (*Guiraca caerulea eurhyncha*), Indigo Buntings (*Passerina cyanea*) and Field Sparrows (*Spizella pusilla*) were conspicuous. A single Solitary Sandpiper (*Totanus solitarius*) standing by the edge of a marshy pond looked the embodiment of silence and thoughtfulness. Overhead a flock of Dwarf Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater obscurus*) were wheeling, and, borne by the cool north wind, the mellow notes of the Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) were wafted down from the willow grove at the head of the creek. In the hackberry trees which grew at irregular intervals along side the fences, Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) were numerous, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Dickcissels hovered over abandoned fields overrun with Johnson grass, while countless Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon lunifrons*) skim over the prairie in search of insects.

As I entered the live oak grove that borders Shoal Creek, A Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) sailed slowly away, two Yellow-breasted Chats (*Icteria virens*) held an animated conversation right in front of me, but prudently kept out of sight and a Baird's Woodpecker (*Dryobates scalaris Bairdi*) was searching for insects high up in the knotty trunk of the oak tree. The rocky sides of the creek were lined with hundreds of Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*), who had come for miles to enjoy the shade and water. Before I came in sight they took alarm at the indignant chirping of Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) and noisily flew away in company with a Green Heron (*Ardea virescens*) that stood on one leg in the water for hours. I took a drink from the clear, limestone spring that bubbled up close by the side of a deep still pool, and walked on through a field of corn where Texas Bobwhites (*Colinus virginianus texanus*) and Western Meadow Larks (*Sturnella neglecta*) were whistling merrily. In a telegraph pole by the side of the railroad, Plumbeus Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis agilis*) had its nest, but to my disappointment it contained young birds. Deep in the recesses of thick, low cedar brakes, Cardinals and Summer Tanagers (*Piranga rubra*) were numerous, but a rare bird is here and its low sweet notes, cher-weasy, weasy, weah, were heard on every side. Slipping up to a tree where one was singing, I took careful aim and brought him down. As he laid on his back with his wings half spread, the rich golden-yellow cheeks, black throat and white breast with irregular black marks at the sides, showed him to be a Golden-cheeked Warbler (*Dendroica chrysoparia*), and an old nest in a tree close by encouraged me to search for his home but I did so in vain.

In the deep, shady cañon between the mountains Texan Tufted Titmice (*Parus bicolor texensis*), Cardinals, White-eyed and Black-capped Vireos (*Vireo noveboracensis* and *Vireo atricapillus*) were always in sight, but their nests were not so noticeable.

Following the course of the trickling stream that ran down the cañon to the west, birds were few, Cardinals were chirping in the underbrush and several Chuck-will's-widows (*Anthus carolinensis*) were flushed from the darker thickets. A group of cattle, mavericks and strays, gazed wonderingly at me for a moment, then turned and dashed away through the thick cedars, pausing occasionally to watch me, but starting on as I came near.

After a long, hard tramp over hot limestone mesas, made hotter by a dense covering of mountain cedars, the cool shade of elm and pecan trees growing at the junction of Bull Creek and the Colorado River are very pleasant. Here Mockingbirds, Nonpareils, Orchard Orioles and a few Crows (*Corvus americanus*) were feeding; from yonder gray cliff marked with long lines of green, where maidenhair ferns have obtained a foothold on water-bearing strata, the clear, full notes of a Cañon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus conspersus*) came rippling down, to be repeated again and again by countless echoes until they died away in the distance.

Passing on through thistle patches, where sometimes in the spring and fall, Mexican Goldfinches (*Spinus psaltria mexicanus*) come to eat the seed, I followed the road that wound down along between the river and steep cañon walls, that rose almost from the waters edge. In the rocks and thick brush Rock Sparrows (*Peucaea ruficeps eremoeca*) were flitting here there seemingly without rest. High up on the side of the cliff a Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) was laying the mud foundation for his nest, while above him in a tuft of grass, a Boucard's Sparrow (*Pucaea ruficeps boucardi*) sat on her four eggs, unmindful of the hot sunshine that beat on the stone around her and withered the grass that protected her nest.

As the sun neared the western horizon, Turkey and Black Vultures that had wheeled over the country in broad circles all day, sought roosting places, the smaller birds took shelter in the thick bushes, the tree frogs began their weird chorus, and as the sun went down Texas Screech Owls were heard on every side. Occasionally the ghostly cries of a Western Horned Owl awoke the echoes through the dim cañons and flying away, left the woods still as death. But gradually the usual night sounds began and continued until they were interrupted again.

Western Nighthawks were circling overhead in quest of insects as I entered the city. The town clock struck nine when I arrived home, tired, without having collected anything of importance, but well satisfied with my tramp.

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