

A Wood Thrush's Song Not Easily Forgotten

By LYDIA KING FREHSE

Special Writer for The Birmingham Eclectic

As I wait in the summer dusk, I hear the song of the wood thrush. It comes tumbling through the leaves, solemn and serene. To these ears it is one of the loveliest of all bird songs.

The wood thrushes' song is forever linked to long summers spent in the secluded forests of the North woods. Yet for the last six years we have had a pair nesting in the wooded area of the suburb which is our home.

We hear their song early and late, a minor strain in the chorus of the notes of equal value. This is of bird music which we enjoy all summer long.

Next we hear an ascending passage of three notes with a pause between. The most revealing way to study each triad. The first group contains any bird song is to listen to a record poses a perfect minor chord with

back in slow time. This we did one Sunday afternoon. So heard, we could clearly discern how in its third group, the wood thrush holds three notes while a fourth is trilled.



Mrs. Frehse

when once learned can only be described as "thrush-like".

THE RANGE, the rapidity of execution, and the vocal gymnastics of much bird song is wholly beyond the range of the human ear to hear. For the same reasons it cannot be duplicated either by the human voice or any man-made musical instrument. Many attempts have been made in the past to set down bird music on paper by various systems of dots and dashes or by transferring the notes to a musical score. It is only recently

that its true character has been revealed by tape recorder and audio

violinograph. The wood thrush combines a handsome coat with a beautiful voice. In a family whose tastes run strongly to polka-dots, his spots are largest and appear in a bold overall pattern on the white underparts. Distinct lines opposite the eye, the cinnamon brown head coupled with dark wings and back, plus the olive brown tail are all good field marks.

THIS YEAR we saw our first pair on April 22. Now they have just completed the rearing of their second brood. We did not discover the first nest, but the second is placed on the lowest branch of an oak in our neighbor's yard. However, the wood thrush usually prefers to nest low in a more isolated woodland setting where there is an abundant supply of fruit, berries and insects.

All through the two brooding periods we have watched the pair each day, searching diligently in the garden for enough beetles, snails and worms to satisfy the

enormous hunger of their babies.

We have a small mulberry tree whose fruit is just beginning to ripen. For this delicious feast they will have to compete with a large bird population who are all so greedy that few berries remain on the tree long enough really to

The thrush family is world-wide in its distribution. It includes the most famous songsters in the world; the European nightingale and our American hermit thrush. Within our range are the olive-backed and the veery thrush, the blue and the robin. If you have not thought of the two latter as thrushes, listen to the quality of their songs when next you hear their

ALL THRUSHES are highly migratory and prefer the selection of mountains or deep woodlands.

The wood thrush is the most likely of the "spotted breast" group to spend the entire summer within our range, although last week I heard the metallic song of a veery on the edge of our suburban area in a tangle of wild grape and sumac.

Both the hermit and the olive-backed make only brief stopovers on their migration flight. To hear these shy songsters, one must follow them to their summer homes in the fastness of our more northern forests.

NOW I REST in the summer dusk, listening to an overrepeated song. But what can I say of the ecstasy of him who sings? For each living creature although he shares in the common life of all, is yet uniquely absorbed in his own identity.

And, who is to say what impulse prompts the poignant notes which punctuate this stillness? They rise and fall, first seeming to ask and then to answer a question that is as old as life itself.

It is a question that I too am asking, that I too must answer as I sit alone in the summer twilight.

Joins New Marine Corps Combat Unit

Joining the First Provisional Marine Air-Ground Task Force, newest of the Marine Corps combat units, is Private First Class Robert M. Grainger, 31, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Grainger of 1817 Kilbourne, Birmingham.

The Leatherneck reached task force headquarters at Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, as a member of the Third Regimental Combat Team.

The unit will undergo six months of coordinated training with the Marine Air Group 13, the task force's air element; will conduct firing maneuvers on the nearby island of Hawaii, and will conclude its operations with amphibious exercises on Maui, training ground for many thousands of Marines during World War II.

ACCORDING TO Brigadier General James P. Hisey, task force commanding general, "We are concentrating on air-ground training so Marine infantry units and aviation elements can further the type of coordination that has proven itself in two wars. We are also preparing fighting force for any trouble that might break out in the Pacific."

Prior to entering the Corps in 1951, Pfc. Grainger was employed by the General Motors Corp. in Detroit.

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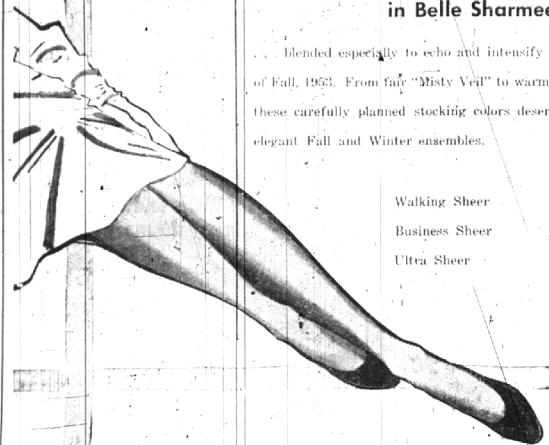
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