

## CHAPTER XXX.

Taming and Education of Wild Animals—The Eagle ; his want of docility—Courage and Intelligence of the Noble Falcons—The Hound—Return of Cats to their home—Maternal Instinct of Cats—The Carrier-pigeon—Wood-pigeons—Dovecot Pigeons—Sight of Pigeons—Blue-rock Pigeons—Crested Titmouse—The Robin ; pugnacious disposition of—Sparrows ; impudence of.

ALMOST every wild animal is more or less capable of being reclaimed, and rendered, if not of actual use to us, at least an object of interest and amusement. In all attempts to educate them, patience and temper on the part of the teacher is the first requisite. If, fortunately, he be endowed with this important qualification, he will scarcely find any bird or beast so wild or so obstinate "*ut non mitescere possit.*" But some, it must be admitted, scarcely repay the labour bestowed upon them. The eagle can be tamed, but to no great extent. Naturally of a greedy and craving disposition, he is not to be depended upon at all times ; and though he may show a certain degree of affection for his keeper, he can seldom be safely approached by strangers.

An eagle, although he may have been trained for

a long time and with great care for the purpose of hunting, is just as likely to swoop at and kill his master's dogs, or even to attack a man himself, as to fly at any game. In this he differs from the falcons, that is those of the hawk tribe, who are called "noble falcons," in contradistinction to those termed "ignoble." The Iceland, the Greenland, the peregrine, and the merlin also, are all "noble falcons." The latter, formerly in high repute for the chase, is now so seldom seen in this country, either alive or dead, that little is known as to his merits; but the other noble hawks whom I have enumerated are all of a most kindly and tractable disposition, and possess that great courage which gives them the full confidence in man which is necessary for their education. These birds have also great aptitude to receive instruction; their habits are social, and before they have been long in confinement they become perfectly contented with their lot. When out in the field, a trained hawk is in no way flurried or alarmed by the movement of men or dogs, but sits looking, when unhooded, with calm confidence on all that is going on around him; and although his fine dark eye evinces neither fear nor disquietude, not the smallest bird can pass without his immediately descrying it, and intently watching it until it is lost in the distance—and great

must that distance be which conceals any bird from the falcon's eye. I have often fired my gun off at a bird, with a hooded hawk sitting on one arm, without his evincing the least fear or uneasiness,—as great a proof of his courage as need be required. In fact, a hawk, like a dog, soon learns to look upon her master as her best friend.

When a well-trained hawk has pursued a bird to any distance out of sight of her master, and misses catching it, she invariably flies straight back to the place whence she was first started. I scarcely know a more pleasing sight than to see the falcon returning with direct and rapid flight, searching for her master in the exact spot, although in a strange and new country, where she had last seen him. If, however, she has killed a prey, this quick return does not take place, and the falconer must follow as straight as he can in the line of her flight; by doing so he will seldom fail to find her. A hound, in the same way, after a chase of many hours' duration, if he lose the huntsman, will always return to the spot he started from.

The instinctive power possessed by so many animals of finding their way back again, either to their accustomed home or to the place from which they had started, appears almost inexplicable, as in many instances it is certain that they cannot

be guided by any sense analogous to those which we possess. Well-authenticated instances of dogs and cats, and horses also, finding their way back from great distances to their home, although the mode in which they have been conveyed from it has deprived them of all assistance from their organs of sight, are so frequent as scarcely to excite attention; and yet how wonderful must be the intelligence which guides the animal!

One of the most unquestionable instances of a cat's displaying this faculty which has come under my own immediate observation was that of a kitten about three parts grown, who certainly had never been in the habit of going ten yards from the house door. Wishing to get rid of her, I sent her in a bag to a person who lived more than two miles from my own residence. Although the cat travelled over a road perfectly unknown to her, and in a bag, which entirely prevented her seeing anything, she was the next morning purring about as usual, and claiming attention in the kitchen, as if she had never left it.

Another curious instance of a cat's travelling capabilities fell under my notice. By some means she discovered the place to which her kitten had been taken, more than a mile off; and every night the poor mother went to suckle her young one,

returning, when the process was over, to perform the same service to another kitten left at home. In this instance the cat lived in a large town, through some of the streets of which, as well as a good mile of the outskirts, she had to take her nightly walk. Many a danger from boy and dog the poor animal must have gone through during her peregrinations ; nothing, however, stopped her as long as the kitten required her maternal attention. Notwithstanding these amiable traits in the feline character, I must condemn the cat as an animal who in general repays all the care and kindness of her master with but little strength of affection. Indeed her instincts seem to attach her only to the fireplace or loft in which she has been accustomed to live, and not to the kind hand which feeds her. Some instances of love for their owners I have known ; but, in comparison with that shown by dogs, they are rare and slight, although the domestic bringing-up of, and kindness shown to, cats is often greater, and less mixed with the severe correction often inflicted upon dogs.

The sense which leads the carrier-pigeon hundreds of miles in so short a time, and in so direct a course, is inexplicable. After circling for a few moments, the bird decides unhesitatingly on its exact line of flight, though it may never have seen

the country before, and has not the assistance of the example and guidance of any more experienced companions, as is always the case with migrating birds.

The carrier-pigeon is very beautifully shaped, with broad chest and most powerfully jointed wings. Except as to the head and feet, this kind of pigeon has very much the form of a falcon, and is peculiarly well fitted for long-continued and rapid flight.

The wood-pigeons in this country are to a certain degree migratory, imitating, *longo intervallo*, the American passenger-pigeons, in shifting their quarters from one part of the kingdom to another, being influenced in their migrations by the abundance or scarcity of food.

The common dove-cot or blue pigeon generally flies several miles, morning and evening, to favourite feeding-places, seldom seeking for food in the immediate neighbourhood of the pigeon-house. In the months of May and June the house-pigeons have most difficulty in procuring food, the crops being all unripe, and none of the seed-corn remaining on the surface of the ground. At this season, too, few weeds have ripened; and the pigeons have therefore to depend in a great measure for their own subsistence and that of their young on the minute seed of the turnip, which is sown at this period.

It must require no little labour to enable them to fill their crops with this small seed. As in this country the turnip-fields are for the most part drilled and rolled, the poor birds have the greater difficulty in satisfying the hunger of their young ones; and no young bird requires so much food as an unfledged pigeon, in proportion to its size and weight.

The power of the pigeon to alter the focal length of its eye must be very great, as it is able to see equally well an object at a distance of many miles and a minute seed not more than half an inch from the end of its bill.

The turtle-dove is sometimes, but only rarely, met with as far north as Morayshire, but the stock-dove is never seen in that part of the country: if once introduced, I should imagine that it would thrive perfectly well, as both the climate and the natural productions of the district are suited to it.

The hardy little blue-rock pigeon abounds on all the sea-coast of Scotland, where the rocks are steep and broken into fissures and caverns—one moment dashing into its breeding-place, and rapidly flying out the next; then, skimming the very surface of the breakers, this little bird gives animation and interest to many a desolate and rugged range

of cliffs as far north as Cape Wrath and Whiten Head. It abounds also in most of the islands. Frequently living where there is little cultivated ground, the blue-rock pigeon feeds on many green plants, and I have also found its crop nearly full of small shells. Whatever its principal food may be, it is a particularly well-flavoured and delicate bird, and much superior in this respect to either the dove-cot-pigeon or the wood-pigeon.

A very beautiful little bird, and one not generally known to breed in Britain, is the crested titmouse. From the number of specimens which have been procured by Mr. Dunbar from the woods of Strathspey it is evident that this bird must be there in great abundance, although it does not appear to extend its visits to other parts of the country, with the exception of the woods about Dulsie on the Findhorn. In these picturesque and beautiful woods the crested titmouse is found, but not in such numbers as in Strathspey. Its habits are the same as those of the other species of tomtits, searching actively among the fir-trees for insects, and hanging from the branches in every possible attitude, probing every crevice with its tiny but strong bill. All the kinds of titmice are very carnivorously inclined, feeding greedily on any dead bird or other animal which they may meet with. Our favourite, the



robin, is not much behind them in this respect, having a very great partiality for raw meat and dead animals.

Although so much protected, and in fact enjoying an almost entire immunity from all human persecutors, the robins do not appear to increase in numbers; this is, in all probability, occasioned by the bird generally breeding on the ground, and being thereby exposed to the attacks of weasels, rats, etc. Were it not for this, the almost sacred character the robin has always held amongst bird-nesting schoolboys and juvenile sportsmen must have caused its numbers to increase; but we still see the same dead branch or the same railing-head occupied by a single robin year after year; no rivals spring up to dispute the favourite perch.

Of all pugnacious birds the robin is the most determined fighter. When snow and frost cover the ground, and we feed the birds at the windows and on the gravel walks, thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, and many other birds come to share the crumbs, but none dare eat if any robin is there, until the fiery little fellow permits him. Thrushes and all are beaten and driven away, and even after he has crammed himself to repletion, the robin will sit at the window and drive away with the most furious attacks every bird whose hunger prompts

him to try to snatch a morsel of his leavings. Perched amidst the crumbs, he looks the very personification of ill temper and pugnacity. The thrush, on the contrary, allows every bird to feed with him, and puts on a complaining but not an angry look when an impudent sparrow or tomtit snatches the morsel of bread from his bill.

In large towns it is curious to see how accustomed sparrows become to all the noises and sights by which they are surrounded. You see a flock of sparrows feeding in the middle of a paved street, an omnibus comes rattling along, shaking the very houses and making din and noise enough to deafen a miller, yet the sparrows merely hop out of reach of the wheels, and do not take the trouble to go a yard farther. Knowing, either from instinct or long experience, that they are safe from gun or trap, where every passer by is too intent on his own more important matters to waste a thought upon them, they become most impudently confident of their own safety.

Like all other birds, sparrows adapt themselves without difficulty to whatever place they happen to live in. In towns they make their nests in curious holes and corners under the tiles and roofs of the houses, or about the projections and carvings on churches and old buildings. In country villages

they delight in holes in thatched roofs or in corn-stacks, while in less populous localities they build almost wholly in trees, and even in hedges not many feet from the ground, keeping, however, a watchful and knowing eye to the security of the place they fix upon for their loosely-made and conspicuous nest. There seems to be one *sine qua non* in the choice of their abode, and that is the vicinity of man. Sparrows never wander very far from houses and towns; in fact this bird appears to be more at home on the roof of a house in the midst of a populous city than in any other situation. Basking in the sun on a lofty wall or house-top, a flock of sparrows look down upon the crowded streets with a pert, impudent air, chattering and chirping to each other as if making their remarks on the busy throng below them, and seem as perfectly at their ease in the midst of the noise, bustle, and smoke, as the impudent set of schoolboys who look up at them with a longing eye.

---