

"The Humming-bird," says Wilson, "makes its first appearance in Georgia, from the south, about the 23rd of March, two weeks earlier than it does in the county of Burke, sixty miles higher up the country towards the interior, and at least five weeks sooner than it reaches this part of Pennsylvania. As it passes on to the northward, as far as the interior of Canada, where it is seen in great numbers, the wonder is excited, how so feebly constructed and delicate a little creature can make its way over such extensive regions of lakes and forests, among so many enemies, all its superiors in strength and magnitude. But its very minuteness, the rapidity of its flight, which almost eludes the eye, and that admirable instinct, reason, or whatever else it may be called, and daring courage which Heaven has implanted in its bosom, are its guides and protectors.

"About the 25th of April, the Humming-bird usually arrives in Pennsylvania, and about the 10th of May begins to build its nest. This is generally fixed on the upper side of a horizontal branch—not among the twigs, but on the body of the branch itself. Yet I have known instances where it was attached by the side to an old moss-grown trunk, and others where it was fastened on a strong rank stalk or weed in the garden, but these cases are rare. In the woods, it very often chooses a white-oak sapling to build on; and in the orchard or garden, selects a pear-tree for that purpose. The branch is seldom more than ten feet from the ground. The nest is about an inch in diameter, and as much in depth. A very complete one is now lying before me, and the materials of which it is composed are as follows:—The outward coat is formed of a small species of bluish-grey lichen that vegetates on old trees and fences, thickly glued on with the saliva of the bird, giving firmness and consistency to the whole, as well as keeping out moisture. Within this are thick-matted layers of the fine wings of certain flying seeds, closely laid together; and, lastly, the downy substance from the great mullein, and from the stalks of the common fern, lines the whole. The base of the nest is continued round the stem of the branch, to which it closely adheres, and, when viewed from below, appears a mere mossy knot or accidental protuberance. The eggs are two, pure white, and of equal thickness at both ends . . . . . On a person's approaching their nest, the little proprietors dart around with a humming sound, passing within a few inches of one's head; and should the young be newly hatched, the female will resume her place on the nest, even while you stand within a yard or two of the spot. The precise period of incubation I am unable to give; but the young are in the habit, a short time before they leave the nest, of thrusting their bills into the mouths of their parents, and sucking what they have brought them. I never could perceive that they carried them any animal food, though I think it highly probable that they do. As I have found their nests as late as the 12th of July, I do not doubt but that they frequently, and perhaps usually, raise two broods in the same season.

"The Humming-bird is extremely fond of tubular flowers, and I have often stooped with pleasure to observe his manœuvres among the blossoms of the Trumpet-flower. When arrived before a thicket of these that are full-blown, he poises or suspends himself on wing for the space of two or three seconds, so steadily that his wings become invisible, or only like a mist, and you can plainly distinguish the pupil of his eye looking round with great quickness and circumspection: the glossy golden green of his back, and the fire of his throat, dazzling in the sun, form altogether a most interesting appearance. When he alights, which he frequently does, he always prefers the small dead twigs of a tree or bush, where he dresses and arranges his plumage with great dexterity. His only note is a single chirp, not louder than that of a small cricket or grasshopper, generally uttered while passing from flower to flower, or when engaged in fight with his fellows; for when two males meet at the same bush or flower, a battle instantly takes place, and the combatants ascend in the air, chirping, darting and circling round each other, till the eye is no longer able to follow them. The conqueror, however, generally returns to the place to reap the fruits of his victory. I have seen him attack, and for a few moments tease, the King Bird; and have also seen him, in his turn, assaulted by a Humble-bee, which he soon put to flight. He is one of those few birds that are universally beloved; and amidst the sweet dewy serenity of a summer's morning, his appearance among the arbours of honeysuckles and beds of flowers is truly interesting.

"This little bird is extremely susceptible of cold, and if long deprived of the animating influence of the sunbeams, droops, and soon dies. A very beautiful male was brought to me, which I put into a wire cage, and placed in a retired shaded part of the room. After fluttering about for some time, the weather being uncommonly cool, it clung by the wires, and hung in a seemingly torpid state for a whole forenoon. No motion whatever of the lungs could be perceived on the closest inspection, though at other times this is remarkably observable; the eyes were shut; and, when touched by the finger, it gave no signs of life or motion. I carried it out to the open air and placed it directly in the rays of the sun, in a sheltered situation. In a few seconds, respiration became very apparent; the bird breathed faster and faster, opened its eyes, and began to look about, with as much seeming vivacity as ever. After it had completely recovered, I restored it to liberty, and it flew off to the withered top of a pear-tree, where it sat for some time dressing its disordered plumage, and then shot off like a meteor.

"The flight of the Humming-bird from flower to flower greatly resembles that of a bee, but is so much more rapid, that the latter appears a mere loiterer to him. He poises himself on wing, while he thrusts his long, slender, tubular tongue into the flowers in search of food. He sometimes enters a room by the window, examines the bouquets of flowers, and passes out by the opposite door or window. He has been known to take refuge in a hothouse during the cool nights of autumn, to go regularly out in the morning, and to return as regularly in the evening, for several days together.