

Released when received.

Office of Information, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

WELCOME THE THRUSHES.

These Birds Do The Farmer Little Harm and Much Good.

Washington, D. C.,                      That thrushes--the group of birds in which are included robins and bluebirds--do a great deal of good and very little harm to agriculture, is the conclusion reached by investigators of the United States Department of Agriculture who have carefully studied the food habits of these birds. Altogether there are within the limits of the United States eleven species of thrushes, five of which are commonly known as robins and bluebirds. The other six include the Townsend solitaire, the wood, the veery, the gray-cheek, the olive-back, and the hermit thrushes.

The robins and bluebirds nest close to houses, and even the shyest of the other species are content with the seclusion of an acre or two of woodland or swamp. For this reason the thrushes are among the best known and most carefully protected of native American birds, and at times their numbers become so great that it is feared they will do much harm to crops and fruit. The recent investigations of the Department of Agriculture, however, show that there is very little ground for this fear. On the other hand, they destroy such a vast number of insects each year, that it is probable that without them many crops would suffer serious damage.

Of all the thrushes, the robin is probably the best known. It has been frequently accused of destroying fruits and berries, but it has now been ascertained that this only occurs in regions that are so thickly settled that there is no wild fruit upon which the robin may subsist. In some years the bird is a great pest in the olive orchards of California, but it is probable that they are driven to the orchards because of the scarcity of native berries at these times. Where wild fruit is available, the birds seem to prefer this to the cultivated varieties.

Like the robin, the bluebird is very domestic, but unlike the robin, it does not prey upon any cultivated product or work any injury whatsoever to the fruit grower. During the fruit season, in fact, five-sixths of its food consists of insects. It seems, therefore, that the common practice of encouraging the bluebird to nest near houses by placing convenient boxes in which it may build its

home is thoroughly justified.

A detailed description of the habits of the robins and blue-birds is contained in Bulletin No. 171 of the United States Department of Agriculture. Bulletin No. 280, which has just been published, takes up the habits of the six other species of the thrush group, which are not quite so well known. These birds also feed principally on insects and fruit, but a great portion of the fruit which they consume is wild berries. Domestic fruits are eaten so sparingly by these species that the damage done is quite negligible.

The bird known as the Townsend solitaire is noted chiefly for its song which is said to be at times the finest of any of the thrush family. This thrush, however, confines itself almost entirely to the mountains and gorges of the far West. The wood thrush, on the other hand, is distributed over the eastern part of the United States, and is a frequenter of open groves and bushy pastures. This thrush also is noted for its sweet song, especially in the early evening. It does not nest in gardens or orchards, however, and is seldom seen about farm buildings, so that many people who are familiar with its song would not know the bird by sight. The wood thrush consumes a number of very harmful insects such as the Colorado potato beetle and white grubs. The fruit which it eats, it usually picks up from the ground instead of taking fresh from the tree. There is therefore no reason why the wood thrush should not be rigidly protected.

The food of the other varieties also seems to consist of little that it injures anyone to have the birds eat, while on the other hand they destroy multitudes of harmful insects each year.

##

##