

CATHEDRAL "FEATHERS"

The Sanctuary In St. James's Cemetery; Where Hundreds Of Birds Dwell

Everyone has heard of Liverpool's grand new Cathedral, but few know the delightful bird sanctuary hidden away in the adjoining St. James's Cemetery. Hundreds of birds dwell in this sanctuary, though it is five miles from open country, and surrounded by slums and busy traffic. The cemetery is the only piece of parkland in the heart of the city.

A little gate, bearing the name "The Liverpool Cathedral Wild Birds' Sanctuary" encloses a corner of the cemetery set aside for nesting-boxes and feeding tables. Beside three bird-tables stands a beautiful stone bird-bath and drinking fountain. On the left is an ornamental stone with the inscription: "This corner has been made a home for the birds, 16th August, 1927, and on a similar stone opposite: "In loving memory of Susannah Spooner, their Friend." Above the fountain is the plainly visible notice: "This water is for the use of the birds only."

The list of birds recorded in the sanctuary at present numbers twenty-three species, ten of which nested last year. To illustrate the popularity of the place with Liverpool's birds I may say that within a quarter-of-an-hour of entering the sanctuary the other day I watched ten different birds.

Starling Town

The usual flocks of starlings and sparrows rose with a whirr of wings from the feeding tables, while the little copse below the Greek Chapel—"Starling Town" it may be aptly called—harboured its usual host of noisy, cheeky, quarrelsome shepsters. Down the pathway came the cheery calls of the tomtits as the little balls of animated blue and yellow fluff bobbed from twig to twig. What consuming activity these little clowns displayed! They looked so fat and strong; everyone of their myriad lively movements, as they flitted gaily from tree to tree, implied vigour and virility; yet each bird weighs exactly one-third of an ounce!

Here and there a hedge-sparrow—like a slender, grey-headed house-sparrow—slipped in and about the tombstones, at least three songthrushes hunted for worms on the Cathedral slopes, and a hen blackbird, disturbed from the shrubbery, suddenly uttered her screaming clatter and flew off to tell all and sundry of my coming. A robin, his russet breast glowing warmly against the winter soil, also hunted for worms. A flash of gold and emerald, and a cock greenfinch, a beautiful bird for the city, landed on the swad.

Pink Pink!

A merry "pink pink," a flutter of white-barred wings, and nearly a dozen gorgeous rainbow birds, decked in blue,

red, and chocolate brown, came into view—chaffinches. They were a mixed company, males and females, as nearly always we get in these northern shires. Turning off the pathway, another dash of colour—a snowball bobbing through the grass! A sparrow with back and wings as white as the ptarmigen now on the Sutherland hills. The pigeons that build in the Cathedral completed the list.

In winter many birds come into the sanctuary from outside the city, and numerous birds that roam about the city call in for a day or two. Occasionally one sees a brown linnet, a yellow bunting, or a twittering party of green linnets. Odd chaffinches are always about, and flocks are frequent. When the elderberries ripen in autumn, missel thrushes come in for the feast, and one cannot help but hear their harsh, scolding notes in the tree-tops.

The other week a little coal tit—like a black-headed tomtit with a little white patch on its nape—came swinging through the twigs while I was watching a robin and a hedge sparrow fighting because neither would give way when they met under the shrubbery. Passing flocks of rooks and jackdaws sometimes pay a visit, but they are not welcomed; their table manners are shocking.

Brown Wrens

Last summer, in the ivy of the steep stone walls, a pair of brown wrens built their nest, and in two localities I found robins nesting. Just below the Greek Chapel, and on the Upper Parliament-street side, blackbirds laid their speckled blue eggs. Many tomtits nest between the stones of the old quarry wall.

Many birds call in at the sanctuary when migrating over Liverpool in spring and autumn. I have known young willow warblers (recognised by their lemon-yellow breasts), whitethroats, and chiff-chaffs to rest here on their great journeys. Rare visitors occasionally look in. A gold crest, the smallest British bird, once spent a sunny afternoon in the sanctuary, and last autumn a little blue-grey nuthatch was seen to run down a tree trunk, more like a mouse than a bird, call "whit-whit," and fly off. Nuthatches are scarce in the North.

Just as you are most likely to find your first coltsfoot of the year blooming in a corner of the sanctuary so will you hear the first little silvery refrains of hedge sparrow song, beginning full of promise but ending so soon, and find the first nest of thrush or robin, or the first and last of the migrant birds, here in our Cathedral sanctuary. Over a week ago a pair of sparrows commenced building in a tree which last year sheltered six nests. Heralds of spring!