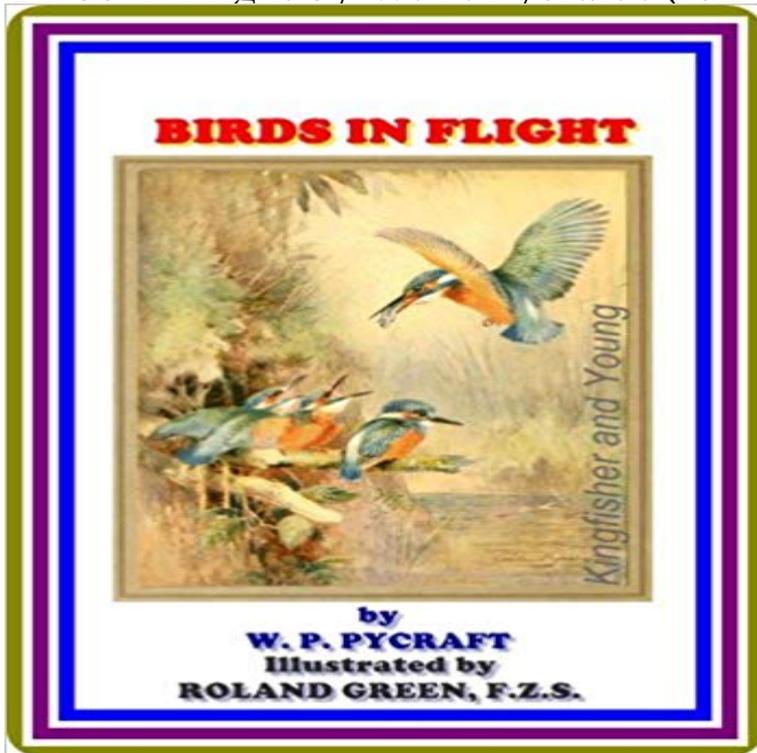


Birds in Flight by W. P. Pyecraft : (full image Illustrated)



There are hosts of people who have a genuine love of our native birds without yearning to possess their skins, or desiring to acquire the reputation of being Ornithologists. They would call them all by name if they could, but seek, alas! in vain, for some book wherein they will find some magic phrase which will enable them to identify every bird they meet by the wayside. Most of our native birds have learnt that discretion is the better part of valour, when in the neighbourhood of Man. Hence one gets but too often no more than a fleeting glance at their retreating forms, which, from frequent encounters, have become familiar, yet they leave no more than a vague image in the memory. What bird was that? I have often seen it but have never succeeded in taking it unawares. This is a question, and its comment, often put to me. Those who are in this quandary, and they are many, are always hoping to find some book which will enable them to correctly name the retreating forms. That book will never be written. In the following pages an attempt is made to aid such enquirers, and at the same time the difficulties of the task are pointed out. It is hoped, however, that this attempt will find a welcome among those for whom it is made. If it helps them to understand something, at least, of the absorbing and fascinating problems which the study of flight in the animal kingdom presents, it will at least have served some useful purpose. The pursuit of the flying bird will inevitably stimulate a desire to know more about the bewildering changes of plumage presented at different seasons of the year, as well as by the striking differences which often distinguish the two sexes, and the immature birds. The endeavour to satisfy this desire will open up a new world. Those who would pass to this knowledge should possess themselves of the Practical Handbook of British Birds. Though most severely practical, and designed for the

serious student alone, even the beginner will find interest in the description of these several plumages, and much else beside that it is essential to know. Now that the study of flight is so much to the fore, some may turn to these pages in the hope of gaining useful information on the theme of mechanical flight. Some help they may find. But it was not for this that they were written. The flight of an aeroplane and the flight of a bird have little in common at present; though something may be learned by the study of gliding flight and soaring, which of course have their place in this book. But anatomical details and mechanical formulæ, necessary to the serious student of flight, would have been entirely out of place here, and they have been omitted. My task has been by no means easy. But it has been enormously helped by the extremely skilful and beautiful work of the artist, Mr. Roland Green. Where birds are concerned, few artists in the past, and very few in the present, have shown any ability to combine accuracy in drawing with ingenuity of composition and faithfulness in colouring. Mr. Green has shown this rare combination; his coloured plates and line-drawings speak for themselves. W. P. PYCRAFT. London, September, 1922

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