

MATING.

Immediately after the arrival of a sufficient number of local birds, (the females appearing last), and the advent of milder days, courtship commences and continues with increasing vigor for two or three weeks. It is elaborate and ceremonious, often bordering the amusing and ridiculous. The male alights close to the female, often choosing a rather slender and leafless horizontal branch as best suited to an unobstructed view of his graceful form and gay plumage. The female assumes indifference or the silence, dignity and alertness of a critic, while the male bowing, hopping, prancing, dancing, strutting, flirting his wings, pleads and urges his suit with flickering, wacuping and hickcuping notes; finally he sidles up to her, she coyly sidles away, and perhaps takes wing, followed by the one or more suitors to another tree, where the whole performance is repeated. There are sometimes from two to five males, between whom sharp but apparently harmless encounters occasionally take place while in the air, determining, as one correspondent suggests, which one shall next offer his attentions. In due time the female shows her preference, and not infrequently joins in with the bowing and singing of her accepted lover, and if the rejected suitors have not already left in pursuit of some other unmated female, the pair unite in driving them from the premises. As Audubon has stated that the Flicker never fights, it is befitting that we insert some of the testimony at hand: I have not observed the males fighting among themselves for possession of the females, but they display a good deal of friendly rivalry in their efforts to display their good points and in paying attention to the desired females.—Angus Gaines. It is only when approaching the female that the male gives utterance to the familiar and highly sentimental *chuck-a-chuck-a-chuck*, etc., all the while sidling up to her as she sidles away. I have seen the pair make the circuit of a tree several times. It is rare that a rival male molests the actor until the

female takes flight, and then he at once pounces upon him.—Lynds Jones. That the males do not always conduct the courtship is proven by Mr. Benj. T. Gault's experience while collecting in the sunken lands of Arkansas and Missouri—the St. Francis river region. He says: On March 3rd, '94, while visiting Griffin island, on the Arkansas side of the river, my attention was drawn to a small troop of these birds, four in number, clustered together near the top of a dead snag. As other birds were interesting me at the time, slight attention was given to them, but on returning to the same spot an hour or so afterwards, and finding them still there, my glasses were turned upon them; somewhat to my surprise the lot, consisted of three females and one male, the latter holding the most exalted position on the snag, the evident pride of the gentler sex, who were indulging in quite an animated discussion, idolizing his lordship—so to speak—but in tones so low they were scarcely audible from where I stood. I more than judged their earnest intentions by the peculiar swaying motions of their heads, which were very amusing to witness. Never having seen the female do the waiting upon before or since that time, I think their actions were a little out of the ordinary. J. N. Baskett describes a similar scene of two females courting a male, in the *Osprey*. These are the only instances on record, I believe.

When mated the birds become very affectionate and inseparable, few of our native birds excelling them in this respect. It is constantly calling or answering, the male drumming a long rolling call and singing the common song at the top of his voice to equal or excell that of his nearest neighbor; when suddenly missing the female, his calls amount to a perfect shriek, and an answer results in a swift galloping flight as he gurgles a scanny exclamation; alighting beside her he indulges in a series of bows and *we-cup* notes, in which she joins for a time. As the more serious side of life begins, the selection and construction of a nesting place, he becomes less and less noisy, and finally almost silent altogether, except the early morning and before or after shower song, although fully as attentive and helpful to his mate as ever.