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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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Of the 33 feature articles published in 1909 in *The Auk*, a little over a third dealt with distributional studies, such as the first breeding Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) in Massachusetts (Auk 26:337–345). A few were on natural history that was still being discovered, such as the nesting of Bohemian Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) in the Northwest Territories (26:10–12). Some others have been mentioned in previous columns, like William Brewster's attempt to describe male American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*) as a new species in 1902, and now as a subspecies (26:175–179), and Jonathan Dwight Jr.'s rebuke that "the 'Red-legged Black Duck' as a subspecies does not appear to have a leg left to stand on—not even a red one" (26:425). Referring to the article published in 1908 about swans going to their death over Niagara Falls, Cole mentioned that the first description of the falls in English in 1750 discussed the destruction of birds (26:63–65).

Leon Jacob Cole (1877–1948) had another article on the importance of "tagging" birds for studying their movements. Cole apparently thought about tagging birds while tagging fish in 1902. In this paper, he announced the formation of a committee by the New Haven (Connecticut) Bird Club to systematically band birds in that area; he was an Instructor of Zoology at Yale University at the time. However, realizing that this was a small effort, he brought the matter before the AOU at the 1909 meeting. On 8 December 1909, about 30 members of the AOU met in New York to form the American Bird Banding Association. Cole was elected president, but in 1910 he took a position at the University of Wisconsin, where he had a distinguished career as a geneticist and animal breeder and built what is today the Department of Genetics (Dickerson and Chapman 1989). The Association floundered in his absence until the fall of 1911, when the Linnaean Society of New York took over the operation, which would become the United States Federal Banding Office in 1920. Today Cole is considered the father of American bird banding (McCabe 1979). Cole joined the AOU in 1908 and was made an Elective Member in 1934. Robert McCabe (1914–1995, AOU Fellow), his colleague at the University of Wisconsin, nominated Cole for Fellow in 1946, but he was not elected, which led McCabe (1979:131) to conclude that he was "forgotten even by the enlightened and those who should have remembered."

Some other interesting titles in this volume were "Instinctive stillness in birds" by William Palmer, in which he contended that staying motionless was a critical component of cryptic coloration and that birds instinctively did that (26:23–36); "The habitat groups of North American birds in the American Museum of Natural History" by J. A. Allen, describing the new 25 displays at the museum that presented birds by habitat for the first time, which opened to the public on 25 February 1909 (26:165–174); and "An inquiry into the history of the current English names of North American land birds" by Spencer Trotter, where he presented the history of names based on English or Latin origin, song, habitat, color, place, or person's name (26:346–363).

Four articles were written by Charles Wendell Townsend (1859–1934), who was born in Boston, attended Harvard College and Harvard Medical School, and was a very successful obstetrician in Boston. In 1892, he moved to a house in Ipswich, from which he commuted south to Boston weekly. In 1903, he published *The Birds of Essex County*, the first of many books he would later author. In 1906, he traveled with Glover M. Allen (1879–1942, AOU Fellow, Editor of *The Auk*) to Labrador, and subsequent trips led to a series of books about Labrador, its people, and its natural history. With the death of his wife in 1917, he gave up his practice and devoted the rest of his life to travel and study. Trips included a leisurely round-the-world cruise during 1926 and 1927, travel down the west coast of South America in 1928 and 1929, and a trip around the African coast during 1931 and 1932. He joined the Nuttall Ornithological Club in 1877 and the AOU in 1901, being elected a Fellow in 1923.

Townsend's first paper dealt with the ecology of English Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in the city of Boston, based mainly on observations he made while walking the "brick-lined streets" (26:13–19). Admitting that he would probably never get to the point of liking English Sparrows and lamenting that they had driven nearly all other cavity-nesting birds from Boston over the past 30 years, he felt compelled nonetheless "to jot down my observations on the habits of this much hated, and therefore much neglected bird," as it was about the only bird seen with any regularity in the city. He first discussed song and singing behavior, noting dawn choruses in spring and summer. Townsend was unimpressed with much of the species' repertoire. Noting that young English Sparrows that were separated from their parents and associated with songbirds readily learned the song of the foster parents, he suggested that training young English Sparrows in urban areas to sing like songbirds could alleviate the affliction of their "song." Next he addressed their "courting that goes shamelessly on under our very feet." He described, in great detail, mating displays in which several males courted a single female and several instances of violent fights between males. Lastly, he described roosting behavior of English Sparrows in the trees at the King's Chapel burying ground on Tremont Street. The roost was used year-round, but the birds were more numerous in fall and winter,

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with as many as 3,400 counted entering the roost in one night. A recent trip I took to the burying grounds at dusk in March 2009 revealed no sparrow roost, only House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), the new urban specialist, foraging among the gravestones.

In Townsend's second paper, titled "The position of birds' feet in flight" (26:109–116), he suggested that birds fly with their legs either extended behind or drawn up in front. In general, most non-passerines appeared to extend their legs, whereas woodpeckers, hummingbirds, and passerines fly with them drawn in front. Townsend pointed out that some species within groups such as gulls do one or the other, and that some species do both, extending their legs during takeoff and withdrawing them in flight. In the introduction, he stated that "all studies of this sort are interesting in themselves, and may be of help in determining relationships," but the paper ended abruptly, with no discussion of what those relationships might be, and the importance of this paper seems lost in time.

In a similar vein, Townsend's next paper dealt with "The use of wings and feet of diving birds" (26:234–248), where he placed such birds into two groups: those that use their wings for underwater propulsion and those that use their legs. Birds that use their wings underwater generally have them open upon impact, whereas birds that use their legs have their wings tightly folded at their side. Birds like Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*), which have their wings half-folded, probably use neither wings nor feet but rely on the height and speed of the dive in capturing prey. Unlike in the previous paper, Townsend speculated widely on the evolutionary relationships between propulsion and morphology. Reliance on wings for underwater movement led to loss of flight, as in penguins; reliance on wings for flight and underwater movement led to "imperfection of their wings for both purposes," as in many alcids; and perfection of foot propulsion led to retention of large wings for aerial flight, as in cormorants. Curiously, Townsend speculated that several species were in the process of losing the ability to fly because of increased underwater propulsion. These included the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), which already had lost the ability to walk on land, and, according to Townsend, whose wings were now so small that it could not take off from the surface of the water on a calm day. In his *Birds of Essex County*, he expressed the opinion that loons were "approaching the wingless conditions."

His last contribution was on the invasion of Carolina Wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) into New England during 1908 (26:263–269). Before 1908, the species was a rare summer visitor to Connecticut and Rhode Island and accidental in the rest of New England. However, beginning in the summer of 1908, numerous individuals appeared around Boston and eastern Massachusetts and other areas of mostly southern New England, and many survived the mild winter of 1908–1909. Reflecting a sign of the times, Townsend knew of only two specimens that had been collected (one in Maine). Speculating on how many would have been collected if this invasion had happened 20 years earlier, Townsend stated that "bird-students" now had the opportunity to "study these interesting and entertaining birds." Further, Townsend thought that "it can hardly be expected that the Carolina Wren will make the extension of its range permanent," but during the past century, this species' range gradually moved northward, so that the northern edge of its breeding range was in eastern Massachusetts by 1980 (Petersen and Maservey 2003), and it is firmly established in Massachusetts today as a permanent resident. Urbanization may have been a help to this species' northward movement. I had a pair of birds spend the snowy winter at my house in southern Massachusetts this year, eating suet at my feeder during the day and roosting under the eaves of my front porch every night.—Kimberly G. Smith, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

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