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100 YEARS AGO IN THE AOU

## 100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

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The 34th meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union convened at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia on Monday evening, November 13, 1916, nearly a year and a half after the last meeting in San Francisco. The business meeting was called to order by President Albert K. Fisher, with 23 Fellows present; and, for the first time, 14 Members were represented. The membership of the union stood at 860 at the start of the meeting.

Four Fellows had died since the last meeting. Daniel Giraud Elliot (born in 1835), a Founder and the second President of the AOU, died in New York City, on December 22, 1915, of pneumonia. He spent most of his career as an unpaid associate at the American Museum of Natural History, with the exception of a 12-year stint as Curator at the Field Museum in Chicago. He traveled widely and frequently in pursuit of his research interests in birds and mammals. He used his wealth to produce beautifully illustrated monographs on pheasants, birds-of-paradise, and hornbills. He published a major opus on the primates of the world a few years before his death.

Wells Woodbridge Cooke (born in 1858) died quite abruptly, also from pneumonia, in Washington, D.C., on March 30, 1916. Cooke conceived the idea of having observers throughout the Mississippi River Valley report movements of migratory birds in the early 1880s, a project that blossomed into a huge database of notecards, which are currently being digitized by the North American Bird Phenology Program. In his memorial in *The Auk* (34:119–132), T. S. Palmer called Cooke “the father of cooperative study of bird migration in America.” In more modern terms, we should call him “the father of citizen science.” Later in the meeting, Paul Bartsch (1871–1960), an ornithologist turned malacologist at the Smithsonian Institution, would propose that a memorial fountain to Cooke be placed on the grounds of the Smithsonian, but that apparently went nowhere.

Foster Ellenborough Lascelles Beal (born in 1840) died suddenly from a stroke in Branchville, Maryland, on October 1, 1916. He will always be remembered for his study of bird foods. Starting with his first academic

position at (now) Iowa State University, he postulated that the birds in Iowa ate 196,537 bushels (~5,335 tonnes) of weed seeds each year (Beal 1879). In his memorial to Beal (34:243–264), W. L. McAtee stated that this estimate “has been quoted hundreds of times, and which apparently will go on forever.” Well, apparently not; it was based on how many seeds a captive canary could eat in 24 hours. Nonetheless, the Biological Survey was looking for someone to systematically examine diets of birds of the United States, and Beal was their man. During his career with the survey he examined and categorized 37,825 bird stomachs, and his *Farmer's Bulletin* on “Some common birds in their relationship to agriculture” was reprinted 50 times and had over a million copies distributed. He also produced more than a dozen other publications on the food habitats of woodpeckers and major passerine groups.

Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Alexander Mearns (born in 1856), a Founder of the AOU, died from diabetes in Washington, D.C., on November 1, 1916. He had been a surgeon in the military from 1882 to 1899, stationed at various posts around the United States. From 1899 to 1903, he was a medical officer in several army institutions. From 1903 to 1907, he traveled twice to the Philippines and to Guam. He was then appointed medical officer to the International Boundary Commission between Mexico and the United States. In 1909 he retired from the army as a lieutenant colonel, and later that year he was invited by Theodore Roosevelt to accompany the Smithsonian–Roosevelt African Expedition as a naturalist. From 1911 to 1912, he was a member of the Childs Frick expedition in Africa to collect and prepare specimens of birds that Frick later presented to the Smithsonian. He is remembered not only for the large bird collections he made in his journeys, but also for his collections of mammals, plants, and mollusks.

With four openings available, three new Fellows were elected. James H. Fleming (1872–1940) lived his whole life in Toronto, Canada, and was considered an authority on birds of that region. He was a stalwart at annual meetings and served as Vice President (1926–1932) and then President (1932–1935) of the AOU. His personal

collection of over 32,000 specimens, now in the Royal Ontario Museum, was considered the most comprehensive private collection of birds in North America at the time. Harry S. Swarth (1878–1935) was associated with the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley, for most of his career, starting when it opened in 1908. In 1927 he became curator of the Department of Ornithology and Mammalogy at the California Academy of Sciences. W.E. Clyde Todd (1874–1969) was associated with the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for most of his long career, which included an additional 23 years after his retirement. His major works were *Birds of Western Pennsylvania* (1940) and *Birds of the Labrador Peninsula and Adjacent Areas* (1963). Todd is the only person to be awarded the Brewster Medal twice (1925 and 1967) by the AOU, now an impossible feat given that the rules for the medal have changed.

Two Honorary Fellows had died since the last meeting. Henry Eeles Dresser (1838–1915) was a British ornithologist who authored more than 100 scientific papers on birds and several books concerned with geographic distribution, descriptions of new species, and bird eggs. Two of his most famous works were the nine-volume *Birds of Europe* and the *Manual of Palearctic Birds*. John A. Harvie-Brown (1844–1916) was a Scottish ornithologist who published nearly 250 works. A wealthy landowner, he could devote time for expeditions, particularly to Russia, and spent summers cruising the Scottish coast in his small yacht, specially designed for collecting birds and eggs on remote islands. One Corresponding Fellow had died, Lieutenant Colonel Edward A. Butler (1843–1916). During his military duties in India and Africa, he was a bird collector who supplied specimens to museums and private collections. Two Members had died: Ewen Somefled Cameron (1855–1915), who was the husband of the famous Montana photographer Evelyn Cameron (Lucey 1990); and Egbert Bagg (1850–1915), an original member of the AOU and an amateur ornithologist who documented birdlife in and around Oneida County, New York.

Three Honorary Fellows, 10 Corresponding Fellows, 3 Members, and 170 Associates were elected. One of the Associates was a young Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), who had just been transferred by the Forest Service to Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1915. Initially hoping for a



FIGURE 1. Fatland Ford.

career as a forester, fortuitously he was reassigned duties that dealt with recreation, publicity, fish, and game. Minimizing his attention to the first two duties, Leopold focused mainly on wildlife management and conservation, which would become his lifelong passion. He let his membership lapse in 1920 but rejoined the AOU in 1929; he was elected as Member in 1935.

Three days of morning and afternoon sessions followed the opening business meeting, and the registered attendance was the largest ever. On the first night, 144 people dined at The Roosevelt restaurant on Chestnut Street. The highlight of the evening was a slide show of famous ornithologists “from juvenile to adult plumage.” The second day’s afternoon talks were illustrated with motion pictures for the first time. After adjournment, field trips were taken to the pine barrens of New Jersey and to Mill Grove (historic home of J.J. Audubon) and nearby Fatland Ford (Figure 1; former home of his wife, Lucy Audubon).

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