

## **100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union**

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

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# 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union



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Most of the General Notes published in *The Auk* in 1908 dealt with distributional records of birds east of the Mississippi River. For example, Witmer Stone reported that European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) were now well established in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware (Auk 25:221–222). G. C. Embury reported on a specimen of Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) taken in January 1908 in Virginia, which he thought was the first record east of Texas (25:224).

Two reports concerned banded ducks: Henry Oldys captured a Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) hen in October 1907 in New Jersey with an aluminum band bearing the markings “T. J. O. D. 48” (25:80), and E. Seymour Woodruff pointed out that a similar report had been published in the magazine *Field and Stream* of a female Redhead (*A. americana*) in November 1907 in New Jersey with the band “T. J. O. D. 49” (25:216). Both authors wondered who had banded these ducks, but the bander’s identity was never discovered (Woods 1945). Leon J. Cole (1909:139) lamented during a talk at the 1908 AOU meeting that these two recoveries had “no especial value” unless the bander could be identified.

H. W. Henshaw reported the death of Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) nestlings parasitized by larvae of bird bot flies (Caliphoridae), which may be the first such report for North America (25:87–88). He concluded that “Truly, sometimes Mother Nature seems to be a bit indifferent to the sufferings of her creatures.”

Henry Wetherbee Henshaw (1850–1930) was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was a boyhood friend of William Brewster. The famous collector C. J. Maynard taught both of them how to make study skins while in their teens. According to Nelson (1932:401),

Both were very skillful and it is doubtful if they have ever been excelled in the rapidity with which they could prepare a well made specimen. Dr. C. Hart Merriam tells of an occasion about half a century ago when he witnessed, in the old south tower of the Smithsonian Institution, a contest in preparing bird skins between Robert Ridgway, Elliott Coues, William Brewster and Henshaw. The last two nearly tied in the lead but Henshaw won, having skinned, made up and labelled a good museum specimen of a small bird in less than three minutes.

Along with Brewster and others, Henshaw founded the Nuttall Ornithological Club in Cambridge. His early career was spent mostly in the western United States, and he was a member of the famous Wheeler Geographical Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian. Because he was in poor health, he moved to California in 1892 and then to Hawaii in 1894. Having recovered, he returned to Washington, D.C., in 1905 to work at the Biological Survey and was named Chief of the Survey when C. Hart Merriam

resigned in 1910. He held that position until 1916, when he retired because of health problems. Henshaw joined the AOU in 1883 soon after it was formed and he served on the first Committee on Nomenclature. He twice served as Vice-President (1891–1894, 1911–1918) of the Union but declined to be President, because he disliked the role of officers at annual meetings.

In what may be another first report and a sign of future problems, J. Hooper Bowles reported on possible lead poisoning in Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) wintering in Puget Sound, Washington (25:312–313). He found three birds that were dead or dying whose stomachs contained lead shot. Given that this was a very popular area for duck hunting, he suggested that there could be many tons of shot in the marshes. This was followed by a report in the next issue by W. L. McAtee of a similar situation with Canvasbacks at Lake Surprise, just east of Houston, Texas. Around the first of January, emaciated and diseased ducks were found in the rushes along the shore. Examination of many of these birds revealed large numbers of lead shot in their gizzards. McAtee prophetically stated that (25:472)

Epidemics such as we now have evidence of on Puget Sound and at Lake Surprise, in all probability will increase in number, adding another to the almost overwhelming array of unfavorable conditions, against which our ducks must more and more hopelessly struggle.

Waldo Lee McAtee (1883–1962) was born in Indiana, attended the University of Indiana as an undergraduate, and completed a Master’s degree there on Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) and agriculture. He spent 44 years working for the Biological Survey, during which time he was credited with founding the field of economic ornithology. Much of his research focused on the food habits and diets of birds. Incredibly prolific, he published more than 1,250 pieces during his career (Kalmbach 1963). A Fellow in the AOU, McAtee served as Treasurer from 1920 to 1938. He also was the first Editor of the *Journal of Wildlife Management*.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: [kgsmith@uark.edu](mailto:kgsmith@uark.edu)

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