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Source: The Auk, 127(2) : 469-470

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2010.127.2.469

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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union



The Auk 127(2):469–470, 2010
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Printed in USA.

In 1910, all the articles in *The Auk* dealt with birds in North America, with the exception of one article about a bird in South America. A total of 27 articles dealt with bird distributions, five from Massachusetts, four from Michigan, two from Ohio, and one each from 13 other states. Four were from Canada: two from Labrador and one each from Ontario and Saskatoon. Charles Townsend's article (Auk 27:177–181) on courtship behaviors of Common Golden-eyes (*Bucephala clangula*) and Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*) was the only piece on animal behavior.

In a long, rambling essay, H. W. Henshaw discussed the migration of Pacific Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) to and from the islands of Hawaii (27:245–262). As discussed previously (125:757), Henshaw spent 10 years in Hawaii in an attempt to improve his poor health. Largely discounting various theories concerning sunken continents in the Pacific Ocean, sunken land bridges, and stepping-stone islands that no longer exist to explain plants and animals on Pacific islands, Henshaw correctly concluded that the Hawaiian Islands have been isolated for a long time. He speculated that the first migrating plovers found the islands by accident thousands of years ago, but that now, by following favorable prevailing winds, birds have no problem finding the islands. During spring migration, he noted flocks of plovers headed out over the ocean, usually at dusk, flying due north. The birds had molted into breeding plumage and were very fat, so he speculated further that the birds were flying to Alaska, and, having calculated the distance and flight speed, he estimated that it would take ~60 h. Both of these conclusions have been proved correct by recent radiotracking studies (Johnson et al. 1997, 2004). In fall, adults started to appear in August and molted upon return, and juveniles arrived later. To Henshaw, fall migration was easy to explain: if the birds remained on their breeding grounds, they would perish in winter. However, spring migration was more difficult to explain: why would the birds leave the paradise of Hawaii for a 3-month round trip to Alaska? Henshaw concluded that the spring migration was at least "not necessary, except in so far as made so by the tyranny of habit." He continued, "This explanation at least has the advantage that it explains nothing, and hence leaves the problem open." Taken as a whole, Henshaw's speculations 100 years ago are remarkably close to the truth.

Leon J. Cole presented the banding report for 1909 (27:153–168), beginning with a short history of the banding of wild birds in North America and abroad. Progress had been made in designing new leg bands made out of flattened aluminum sheets that could be wrapped around the leg of a bird, similar to bird bands that are used today. Two sizes were used: a smaller no. 2 and a larger no. 4. Prior to that, closed bands were cut from aluminum tubing and had to be slipped over the foot of the bird, which meant that they were used primarily on nestlings and not adult birds. Besides a unique number, the new bands were stamped simply "NOTIFY THE AUK NEW YORK." White record blanks were sent out with the bands, to be filled in as bands were used and later returned. Record blanks were kept in chronological order, and any recovery of a band was recorded on a red card that could be attached to the original white card. Approximately 5,000 bands were distributed, and approximately 1,000 of those were put on birds in 1909. By 1 December, 31 recoveries had been made (3%), which Cole thought was quite satisfactory. Cole discussed two studies in detail: the dispersal of juvenile Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) from a colony in Barnstable, Massachusetts, and from a colony near Washington, D.C. Cole ended his report by raising questions about the effects of bands on birds. The first question was whether birds with bands were being shot to secure the bands, and the answer was no. The second question was whether the bands damaged the birds' legs, and again the answer was no. However, several banders had experienced difficulty in getting banded nestlings back into the nest if they were banded close to fledging, and this had resulted in the death of nestlings in some cases. Cole saw this premature fledging as the single biggest problem and called on banders to report which species were more susceptible to premature fledging and at what age nestlings were likely to fledge prematurely, so that we can "govern our operations accordingly."

In this volume, William Brewster attempts yet again to save face in an article (27:323–332) concerning his proposed "new" species of "Red-legged" Black Duck made in *The Auk* in 1902, which was previously discussed in this column (119:586). In the April issue of 1909, Brewster made his rebuttal to the AOU Committee's rejection of his new species (26:175–179), but in the October issue, Jonathan Dwight, Jr., published an article (26:422–426) on plumages and rejected Brewster's attempt to save the "Red-legged" Black Duck as a subspecies. He pointed out that the birds in question were adult (male) American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*) in breeding plumage, concluding that "under these circumstances the 'Red-legged Black Duck' as a subspecies does not appear to have a leg left to stand on—not even a red one." Brewster felt obliged to pick up the gauntlet once again, and the beginning of his article is classic Brewster:

> As Dr. Dwight saw fit to remove the button from his foil before attacking the Red-legged Black Duck and me, its devoted champion, in 'The Auk' for October, 1909, I feel free to defend both the bird and myself with a similarly naked weapon. If by so doing I am fortunate enough to prick my formidable adversary here

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> and there between the joints of his coat of mail he will remember that 'faithful are the wounds of a friend' and perhaps will value them accordingly. He has indulged in no little keen but perfectly good-natured fun and satire at my expense, and at that of some of my ornithological beliefs. I shall endeavor to repay him, as best I may, in his own coin, with perhaps some accrued interest added. (27:323)

Incredibly, there was another article is this same volume that proposed another new species that does not exist. In the only article on birds outside of North America, William E. D. Scott (1852–1910) described a new species of caracara from a single specimen obtained from an exchange with the Museo La Plata in Buenos Aires. The bird had been collected in Chubut, Patagonia. He named it *Ibycter circumcinctus*, and it was generally referred to as "Scott's Caracara." The possibility that this specimen represented a hybrid was first raised by François Vuilleumier (1970), who conducted research on speciation of High Andean birds for his doctoral work under Ernst Mayr. Today, this unique specimen is considered a hybrid between the White-throated Caracara (*Phalcoboenus albogularis*) and the Mountain Caracara (*P. megalopteris*) (McCarthy 2006). A founding member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, Scott died shortly after the appearance of this work. At the time of his death, he was curator in the department of ornithology at Princeton University and was working on a book on the birds of Patagonia.—Kimberly G. Smith, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA; e-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

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Date of Issue (Vol. 127, No. 2): 30 April 2010

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