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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

The Auk 121(4):1302–1303, 2004

As in previous years, J. A. Allen wrote nearly all the book reviews published in 1904. The most important of those was his review of *Key to North American Birds. Containing a concise account of every species of Living and Fossil Bird at present known from the Continent north of the Mexican and United States Boundary, inclusive of Greenland and Lower California. With which are incorporated General Ornithology: an outline of the Structure and Classification of Birds; and Field Ornithology, a Manual of collecting, preparing, and preserving Birds. The Fifth Edition (entirely revised) exhibiting the Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union, and including descriptions of additional species*, which was published in 1903, four years after the death of its author, Elliott Coues. As Allen pointed out in his review (Auk 21:292–296), the first edition appeared in 1872 and was completely revised in 1884 (second edition). The third (1887) and fourth (1890) editions were similar to the second, so this fifth edition was really the second major revision. Allen felt that it differed so radically from the previous editions that it almost should be considered a new work. The major change from the previous editions was the incorporation of nomenclature used by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). Of course, the AOU did not exist when Coues published his first edition and did not have a *Check-list* when he published the second edition. Because ~250 pages of new material appeared in the fifth edition, it was published in two volumes, which Allen thought was inconvenient.

Having written a long article on the subject four years earlier (Allen 1900), Allen took the opportunity to again question Coues' defense of aptosochromatism in his review:

> Page 82–89, the section on "The Feathers or Plumage," have been rewritten and much new matter added, while pp. 92–94 are also mostly new, and include about two pages of new text on "Aptosochromatism," much of which is positively erroneous and had better have been omitted. Dr. Coues invented the term "aptosochromatism," and was peculiarly sensitive to criticism of its significance and use, as from time to time defined and applied by him, he finally looking [*sic*] upon such criticism almost as a personal grievance. This new exploitation of the subject abounds in positive misstatements and erroneous inferences.

In the mid- to late 1800s, the dogma was that birds molted once a year, with the sense that it was energetically impossible for birds to molt more than once a year. So how does a male bird attain breeding plumage? One way would be to replace feathers of one color with those of another color, an ability that Coues termed "ptosochromatism," and most mainstream ornithologists were coming to the conclusion that birds molt some feathers twice a year. However, another school of thought championed aptosochromatism, or the ability of feathers to change color without molt or feather loss. Coues appears to be about the only leading ornithologist around the turn of the last century who thought feathers could turn colors without molting, and the topic was hotly debated for a number of years (e.g. Allen 1900, Birtwell 1900).

Frank M. Chapman had an announcement asking for information on North American warblers. Three years later, he would publish *The Warblers of North America*. It was also reported that Mr. Chapman had visited Florida to secure nests of Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis)* and Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis)* for display at the American Museum of Natural History. Although he found "a few birds," no material was secured and his trip was deemed "a failure." Reference is also made to Chapman's (1904) attack on the popular writer William J. Long, who was publishing outlandish stories about animal behavior. The previous week in *Science*, William Morton Wheeler (1904) had lambasted Long's contention that woodcocks around Bridgewater, Massachusetts, can repair broken legs by making a cast out of mud and roots. Chapman (1904) summed it up by stating:

> Are we to believe the accusations that the author in question, to put the matter squarely,

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> is a "liar", or have we in Mr. Long a naturalist whose powers of observation, discrimination, and interpretation are so far beyond those of any other student of nature, living or dead, that he is in effect a Galileo among animal psychologists?

Also appearing in 1904 was the following announcement:

> A proposed general work on birds, in large quarto, with plain or colored plates, as may be required, is announced, to be prepared by a "Committee composed of the best Ornithologists of the World." Each family will be published separately, with separate pagination, and will include synoptical tables and descriptions of the genera, species and subspecies, references to the original descriptions, the synonymy, and geographical distribution. The work will be published entirely in English, and the drawings will be by Keulemans. A specimen part, on the Eurylæmidae, by E. Hartert, of the Zoölogical Museum of Tring, has been issued, and will be sent for inspection, post free, on application. This sample part shows that the work will prove of great convenience and value as a technical synopsis of the birds of the world. Subscriptions will be received only for the complete work, on the basis of 4 cts. per page of text, 30 cts. per plain plate, and 60 cts. per colored plate. Subscriptions should be addressed to P. Wytsman, 108, Boulevard du Nord, Bruxelles, Belgium. The New York agents are G. E. Stecbert, and Westermann & Co.

This was referring to the series *Genera Avium*, edited by Philogene Auguste Galilee Wytsman (1866–1925), who lived in Brussels. Between 1905 and 1914, 26 issues were published, written by the leading European and British ornithologists. As mentioned, Ernest Hartert (1859–1933) did the first family. He was employed by Lionel Walter Rothschild as ornithological curator of his private museum at Tring from 1892 to 1929 and was made an Honorary Fellow in the AOU in 1902. Wytsman authored the second family, the Todidae. (Wytsman also started *Genera Insectorum* in 1902, a series that consisted of 219 issues, the last occurring in 1970.)

The remaining 24 family accounts were written by seven authors. Count Tommaso Salvadori (1835–1923) wrote five accounts. He was Vice-Director of the Museum of Zoology at the University of Turin from 1879 until his death. He was the last of the original Honorary Fellows elected in 1883. His personal bird collection is now housed in the Tommaso Salvadori Museum of Natural Sciences in Fermo. Philip Lutley Sclater (1829–1913), of the British Museum, wrote two accounts; he too was one of the original Honorary Fellows in the AOU. Three accounts were written by Alphonse Dubois (1839–1921), Curator of the Brussels Natural History Museum, who completed several definitive works on birds and butterflies of Belgium. He was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the AOU in 1883. One account was written by Carl Parrot (1867–1911) of Munich and published in the year that he died. His bird collection is housed at the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfort. Six accounts were written by Louis Brasil (1865–1918), who was a Professor of Zoology at the University of Caen. He was elected a Corresponding Fellow in the AOU in November of 1918, though he had died the month before.

Most accounts were written by Carl Eduard Hellmayr (1878–1944), who produced seven accounts between 1910 and 1913, while he was Curator of the Bird Department at the Munich Museum. Hellmayr was clearly the young shining star of European ornithology and had published a number of important monographs, making him one of the leading Neotropical ornithologists of his time (see Vuilleumier 2003). He was elected as a Corresponding Fellow in the AOU in 1903, prior to his immigration to the United States in 1922, and eventually became an Honorary Fellow.

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