

100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

Source: The Auk, 124(4) : 1470-1471

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038\(2007\)124\[1470:YAITAO\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2007)124[1470:YAITAO]2.0.CO;2)

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.



100 Years Ago in *The American Ornithologists' Union*

The Auk 124(4):1470–1471, 2007
© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2007.
Printed in USA.

At the annual meeting in 1907, the Committee on the Revision of the Code of Nomenclature presented its reports to the Council. The committee could not agree on how type specimens should be designated if a type had not been assigned at the time the genus was proposed, so there was a majority and a minority report. After much debate, the Council accepted the majority report; the type for a genus, if none existed or if one could not be determined by the principle of tautonomy, would be the first species mentioned as belonging to the genus.

There were two letters to the Editor, or "Correspondence," published in 1907. The first, *The Concilium Bibliographicum as a Bureau of Ornithological Information*, was sent by Herbert Haviland Field, director of the Concilium Bibliographicum. The International Institute of Bibliography was founded in 1895 in Brussels by two lawyers to coordinate "universal access to all recorded knowledge." Although the organization lasted for over 100 years, it dissolved in 2002, probably a victim of the Internet and Google. Starting from the Dewey Decimal System of classification, the lawyers developed their own system in 1896, referred to as the Universal Decimal System (UDS). The medium they used was 3 × 5 inch (75 × 125 mm) index cards, and each reference had a separate card for various aspects of the work, such that there were 11 million cards in the system by 1914 and it took a 2,000-page book to list the classification system 100 years ago. In 1896, the Concilium Bibliographicum was established in Zurich to print the index cards and distribute them to scientists worldwide and to expand the UDS system. As Field explained in his letter,

Every paper is entered on a bibliographical card, usually with a short statement of the contents, and these cards are most minutely classified. Thus a paper on the Limicolae of Michigan, with notes on nesting and observations on albinism would receive four entries, Limicolae, Fauna of Michigan, Nesting, and Coloration. If

the paper contained descriptions of new forms, each of these would be noted on a separate card. The cards relating to new species are not as yet printed; but the others are supplied in any desired combination, e.g., cards on the Fauna of Michigan, on Nesting or Birdsong, on Migration, on Coloration, or references to a given group of birds, as Limicolae or Parrots.

Researchers would make requests to the Concilium for references on a given topic, and they would receive a packet of index cards by return mail. The cost of this service varied from 1/5 to 1 cent per card, depending on how many cards were in the resulting search; however, the main financial support for this service came from the Swiss government. The point of Field's letter was that American scientists, specifically American ornithologists, were ignoring this service. He expressed his frustration by saying, "Yet how discouraging it is to day by day file away references to the avifauna of each State in the Union, when the information thus collected with endless pains is never used!" Editor Allen pointed out after the letter that the American Museum of Natural History was a depository for the Concilium and that cards could be ordered from Edward S. Field (who may have been Herbert's brother). The Concilium ceased operations in 1940, at the start of the Second World War.

An American by birth, Herbert Haviland Field (1868–1921) was an incredibly talented zoologist who spoke numerous languages and could play almost any instrument (Ward 1921). He was spending a year in the United States to attend the 7th International Congress of Zoology, held 19–24 August 1907 in Boston. There was a large attendance of foreign delegates and members, and zoologists of America were well represented, the registered attendance being about 500. Chairman of the General Committee of the American Society of Zoologists (now the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology), Alexander Agassiz (1835–1910), was president of the Congress. It was reported (*Auk*

24:462–466) that the arrangements for the work of the Congress and for its entertainment were elaborate, and the weather was exceptionally favorable. On Monday evening, a reception was held at the Museum of Fine Arts, through the courtesy of the Trustees, and a reception was given by the President at the Hotel Somerset on Wednesday evening. Mornings were occupied with sectional meetings, general sessions being held in the afternoons, at which the business of the Congress was transacted, followed by the President's address and addresses by distinguished delegates on subjects of wide interest. An attempt to organize a section of ornithology failed through lack of response on the part of ornithologists, who, both abroad and at home, took little interest in the Congress, and only 11 titles on the program were related to ornithology. The Report of the International Commission on Nomenclature was unanimously adopted at the general session held on Friday, and the Congress adjourned to meet in Grätz (Grodzisk Wielkopolski, Poland) in 1910. The week closed with an excursion on Saturday to Harvard University. Woods Hole on Cape Cod was visited on Sunday en route to New York, members of the Congress arriving in New York Monday morning and remaining through the week. The Congress was received on Monday by trustees and officers of the Department of Zoology of Columbia University, and on Tuesday by trustees and officers of the American Museum of Natural History; on Wednesday, the Congress visited Cold Spring Harbor, as guests of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences and the Carnegie Station for Experimental Evolution. They traveled to Sagamore Hill, the summer home of President Theodore Roosevelt, with Field acting as interpreter between the President and all foreign scientists (Ward 1921). Thursday was devoted to visits to the New York Zoological Park and Aquarium, and on Friday an excursion was made to West Point and Castle Rock, the residence of Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857–1935). On Saturday, many members accepted invitations from trustees of Yale University and Princeton University to visit New Haven and Princeton. During the following week, foreign members and delegates visited Philadelphia, Washington, Niagara Falls, and Toronto.

The second letter to the Editor, entitled *Protective Coloration*, was written by Abbott H.

Thayer (1849–1921), a well-known artist from New Hampshire. Thayer's contention was that:

It now proves to be the case that all patterns and colors, upon all animals whatsoever, except such as live in the dark, or are neither predatory nor preyed upon, are, *when seen against the background against which their enemy (or prey) would see them at the critical moment, inexpressibly perfect pictures of this background, and therefore obliteratively colored* [his emphases].

Basically, Thayer contended that predator and prey are colored to be inconspicuous, at a time when most scientists believed that animals were colored to be conspicuous. Thayer would go on to produce a book with his son, Gerald (Thayer 1909), which sparked a huge controversy (e.g., Allen 1912). Editor Allen gave the book a lukewarm review (Auk 27:222–225).

Thayer was clearly a man ahead of his time. John Sage reported that Thayer dazzled the audience at the AOU meeting in 1886 with sweet potatoes painted like birds with white bellies and brown backs that magically disappeared when viewed from a distance (Auk 14:85–86). His ideas about countershading in animals are now known as Thayer's Law. He is also generally considered the "father of camouflage," because of his ideas for countershading troops and military crafts during World War I. Thayer's ideas about troops matching the background drew the wrath of Teddy Roosevelt, who believed that soldiers should be conspicuous and willing to "take it," rather than dressed in some effeminate costume. —KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701 USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

LITERATURE CITED

- ALLEN, F. H. 1912. Remarks on the case of Roosevelt *vs.* Thayer, with a few independent suggestions on the concealing coloration question. *Auk* 29:489–507.
- THAYER, G. H. 1909. *Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom. An Exposition of the Laws of Disguise through Color and Pattern: Being a Summary of Abbott H. Thayer's Discoveries.* Macmillan, New York.
- WARD, H. B. 1921. Herbert Haviland Field. *Science* 54:424–428.