



## 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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## 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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In 1905, volume 22 (old series 30) of *The Auk* was published with J. A. Allen continuing as its only Editor. Frank M. Chapman continued as Associate Editor. A subscription to *The Auk* was \$3.00, including postage, and payment was "strictly in advance."

Several feature articles concerned bird distributions in the Caribbean, including "Extirpated West Indian birds," "The West Indian parrots," "The Lesser Antillean macaws," "The Greater Antillean macaws," "The Cuban Crab Hawk, *Urunitinga gundlachii* (Cabanis)," "Summer birds in the Bahamas," and "List of birds collected or observed during the Bahama Expedition of the Geographic Society of Baltimore." The last two papers are interesting in that they both fail to mention the Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla insularis*), which occurs there. Today, it is a bird of great conservation concern, having recently been proposed as a separate species (Hayes et al. 2004).

A paper by Louis Bishop compared specimens of Blue-winged (*Vermivora pinus*) and Golden-winged (*V. chrysoptera*) warblers in Connecticut (22:21–24). He concluded that Lawrence's Warbler is a leucochroic phase of the Blue-winged Warbler, which one day may become a species, and that Brewster's Warbler is a hybrid between Blue-winged and Golden-winged warblers. Of course, today we know that they are both hybrids. Speaking of pale-colored birds, Jonathan Dwight, Jr., presented an argument (22:34–38) that subspecies of birds from arid environments should not be described merely if the plumage is pale in color as compared with those members "growing in the land of moisture." He starts his remarks by hoping: "A more progressive generation of ornithologists will no doubt possess itself of higher standards for estimating the value of sub-species."

Unpublished letters of J. J. Audubon were still popular, with fourteen being published in 1905, including one letter (22:31–34) from William Swainson to Audubon, written in 1830

while the two men were in negotiations to be co-authors on *Ornithological Biography* (Audubon subsequently chose William MacGillivray to be his co-author); a short letter (22:170–171) from Audubon after he had spent 60 hours painting a Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*); four letters (22:172–175) written by John J. Abert to Audubon in 1848; and eight more letters (22:248–258) written by Swainson to Audubon during 1828–1830. All four articles were authored and annotated by Ruthven Dean (1851–1934). A teenage friend of William Brewster and Henry Henshaw growing up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Dean helped start the Nuttall Ornithological Club and the AOU. Having outlived his boyhood friends, Dean became the Grand Old Man of the AOU during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Known as "the Audubon man" for his hobby of Auduboniana, he was a prodigious letter writer, in many cases corresponding with other ornithologists for nearly 50 years.

There were a number of articles on bird migration, such as "The migrations of certain shorebirds" (22:134–140) by Austin H. Clark, "Warbler migration in southeast Louisiana and southern Mississippi" (22:289–296) by H. H. Kopman, and "The direction of flight in the fall migration at New Haven, Connecticut" (22:372–378) by Louis B. Bishop, but the most interesting was the lead article, "Routes of bird migration" (22:1–11) by Wells W. Cooke.

Having analyzed spring migration dates for the coast of Texas for a number of years, Cooke determined that species such as Black-and-white Warblers (*Mniotilta varia*) and Northern Parulas (*Parula americana*) were showing up earlier on the north Texas coast than they were in southern Texas. Also, Worm-eating Warblers (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) were found in northeastern Texas in migration, but they were virtually unknown in southern Texas. Third, a number of species, such as Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*), were common on the Texas coast in spring migration, but unknown

from Mexico. Drawing on those three observations, Cooke concluded that birds must be flying over the Gulf of Mexico. The second part of his paper deals with eastern U.S. migrants that winter in Panama and northern South America. Using data collected on islands in the Caribbean, Cooke concluded that many species fly directly to the Yucatan Peninsula, whereas a few other species island-hop their way across the Caribbean. He stated that as many as 75% of the migratory species in the eastern United States fly across the Gulf of Mexico to their wintering grounds. In the third part of his essay, he discussed birds that do not commonly occur in the Gulf states in fall migration, such as Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*). Here, he argued, admittedly on negative data, that the lack of records in those states suggested to him that at least 22 species of birds were flying over the Gulf states and the Gulf of Mexico to reach the wintering grounds.

From a historical perspective, the most interesting paper was written by Joseph Grinnell on "Where does the Large-billed Sparrow spend the summer?" (22:16–21). The crux of the problem was that the Large-billed Sparrow, now a subspecies of the Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis rostratus*), was the last land-bird species that occurred in California for which the breeding grounds were still not

known. (It has been proposed again for full-species status [Zink et al. 1991].) Grinnell was perplexed that he could not find this species in summer, because he had scoured California and eastern Oregon looking for it. Grinnell presents so much negative evidence about the species breeding in California that he has to admit, "In recounting the foregoing evidence I have not been endeavoring to prove that the Large-billed Sparrow does not breed at all!" Finally, Grinnell concluded that the sparrow must be flying south to breed in summer and flying north in fall to winter in southern California. Although he admits this is "absurd," he was, in fact, right: we now know that this species breeds in tidal marshes around the Gulf of California to the south and returns to the north in winter.

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