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Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

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100 YEARS AGO IN THE AOU

100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

Kimberly G. Smith

Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA
kgsmith@uark.edu

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There were 92 General Notes published in *The Auk* during 1914, most of which dealt with new distributional information. Reports were made from 25 states, 2 provinces, and Cuba. As usual, Massachusetts had the most Notes (19), followed by Colorado (7), and New York, Rhode Island, and Illinois (4 each).

A. K. Fisher reported that a female Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) had been shot near the mouth of the Mississippi River in Louisiana in December of 1912 with a band on her leg, 186A (*The Auk* 31:100). Fisher hoped that the bander would come forward. This Note was picked up by other sporting journals, such as *Sporting Life* (62(26):22) and *Field and Stream* (82:244), the editor of that magazine making the following observation:

> These experiments in the marking of birds will certainly be very helpful in the study of migration and should tell us much about the routes and the distances which they travel. On the other hand it must be remembered at the present time practically no one except ornithologists—and by no means all of them—know anything about what is being done in this matter and it is certainly well worth the while of all interested in this subject to make known to the public everything possible about it. Only by continued publicity can the bird banders hope to receive back any considerable proportion of bands that they attach and to learn much the movements of the banded birds.

People had been waiting to find the first Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) in Canada for at least 10 years and it finally happened on 2 May 1914 when 2 birds were found at Point Pelee, Ontario, by J. S. Wallace and A. E. Saunders (*The Auk* 31:402). They had been seen several previous years on Belle Island which is between Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario, but this was the first occurrence on Canadian soil.

European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) continued to colonize New England and there were reports of flocks in Providence, Rhode Island, in November of 1913 (*The Auk* 31:249). Flocks also were seen in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during winter of 1913–1914, where only single birds had been seen previously (*The Auk* 31:249–250). Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) were more common in summer in Massachusetts, with one report from Truro in July of 1914 (*The Auk* 31:536) and one from Martha's Vineyard in July of 1913 (*The Auk* 31:101) by G. Kingsley Noble (1894–1940). Noble made another amusing Note about a pair of Killdeers (*Charadrius vociferous*) that landed on the field during the Harvard–Yale freshman football game in 1913 (*The Auk* 31:101). The Killdeers landed during the third period, then flew over the crowd, calling, with several students whistling in return. The birds returned to the field, only to be disturbed by an eruption from the crowd after a Harvard play. They called once or twice and flew up and away. Noble was an undergraduate at Harvard University at the time, who went on to have a distinguished career as a herpetologist at the American Museum of Natural History.

A strange theme of the Notes was the carrying of items by birds. Charles T. Ramsden reported shooting male Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) during spring migration in Cuba and finding snails in their feathers (*The Auk* 31:250). A. Pilsbry of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, identified them as *Succinea riisei*, which occur on St. Croix and Puerto Rico, but not Cuba. That report lead W. L. McAtee to respond in the next issue that G. E. Beyer of Tulane University commonly found snails of the genus *Physa* on Upland Sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) during spring migration on the Louisiana coast (*The Auk* 31:404–405). McAtee went on to discuss a report by Ellicott (1908) of a Blue Jay (*Cyannocitta cristata*) putting ants amongst its feathers. Both Ellicott and McAtee assumed that the jay was storing food in its feathers, possibly to feeding nestlings. However, what Ellicott described was classic anting behavior in Blue Jays (e.g., Eisner and Aneshansley 2008).

In what would be debated for the next 70 years, C. C. McDermid reported an American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) carrying a nestling in its legs (*The Auk* 31:398–399). In contrast, the European Woodcock (*S. rusticola*) had long been linked to this behavior (St. John 1849:222):

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EUROPEAN WOODCOCK carrying a chick. Depicted in *A Labour of Love* by Archibald Thorburn (1860–1935), considered one of the best bird illustrators of his time.

> It is a singular, but well-ascertained fact, that woodcocks carry their young ones down to the springs and soft ground where they feed. Before I knew this, I was greatly puzzled, as to how the newly-hatched young of this bird could go from the nest, which is often built in the rankest heather, or from any place where they could possibly feed, down to the marshes. I have, however, ascertained that the old bird lifts her young in her feet, and carries them one by one to their feeding-ground. Considering the apparent improbability of this curious act of the woodcock, and the unfitness of their feet and claws for carrying or holding any substance whatever, I should be unwilling to relate it on my own unsupported evidence; but it has been lately corroborated by the observations of several intelligent foresters and others, who are in the habit of passing through the woods during March and April.

By the 1920s, it was generally agreed that the European Woodcock carried their young to suitable habitat or to escape predators (e.g., Stendall 1926), the young variously reported as between the thighs, in the feet, in the bill, or even on the back of the adult. Several other reports appeared in *The Auk* (Grinnell 1922, Schorger 1929), but it was Johnson's (1984) observation of young clinging to the breast of an adult that lead "Bud" Tordoff (1984) to contend enough of this nonsense! Tordoff dismissed out-of-hand the idea that young woodcocks could cling to anything with their feet or bill. Next he went on to describe the bizarre flight that woodcocks make, as if crippled, when leading predators, or in Tordoff's case his hunting dogs, away from a nest or chicks. Superficially, it could be thought that the woodcock is carrying something when it really is not. Thirdly, Tordoff contacted all his woodcock research friends and none, including Tordoff, had seen this behavior while in some cases conducting research for decades on the species. George "Andy" Ammann (1910–2008), who Tordoff called the dean of woodcock banders, was convinced the American Woodcock did not carry young, but though that maybe the European Woodcock did. Tordoff remained "skeptical." Harrison Bruce Tordoff (1923–2008) was a Fellow and Past President of the AOU, who had a long and distinguished career as Director of the Bell Museum at the University of Minnesota. As it turns out, American Woodcock is another bird that carries snails (*Succinea unicolor*) in its feathers (Dundee et al. 1967).

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