



## 100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

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## 100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

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General Notes were still dominated by reports of new or stray birds in various states, with an emphasis on New England. But there were several reports on behavior. In what may be the first report of mate guarding, John C. Phillips (1876–1938) described a male Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus*) starting to court a female when he was chased off by another male feeding nearby (*The Auk* 33:77). Phillips concluded that it must have been “a case of trespass.”

Ewing Summers waded in on the idea of presenting bird songs on paper (33:78–80). His thesis was that it was almost impossible to characterize bird songs accurately on paper because of the variation within species. He illustrated this with the way the people from Boston and England pronounce the same words. His refreshing conclusion on how to learn bird songs was to go birding with someone who already knew the birds' sounds, so that they could teach them to you. He had also proposed that music should be characterized on a 3-line staff instead of a 5-line staff, an idea published in an obscure journal (Summers 1908) which he himself said that no one would pay attention to.

William H. Bergtold (1865–1936) was intrigued by the pink eyes of the Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*), as seen at night in the headlights of his car while the bird was sitting in the road (33:81). Although the famous ophthalmologist and ornithologist Casey Wood (1856–1942) had flatly stated in print that birds do not have a tapetum, Bergtold mused that maybe someone should look into the eyes of caprimulgid birds; maybe they do have a tapetum. He stated that “all this reminds one that there is plenty of material still left for original research.” As it turns out, goatsuckers do have tapeta (Nicol and Arnott 1974).

Bergtold had another interesting note (33:439) about “pseudo-masculinity” in the Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*). He had collected what he thought was a male of the species, although with light colors, but upon preparing the specimen it turned out to be a female with perfectly functioning ovaries. The literature on this phenomenon at the time (e.g., Bland Sutton 1890) suggested that the ovaries should be diseased or damaged



**FIGURE 1.** A female Bobolink in male-like plumage (Perlut 2008; used with permission).

for females to display male plumage, but that did not seem to be the case here. A similar report was made by Stoddard (1921) for the Bay-breasted Warbler (*Setophaga castanea*). There apparently have been few publications on this topic in the past 100 years. Perlut's (2008) observation of a female Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) that became a phenotypic male with no fertility is certainly strange (Figure 1), as is the observation of Rimmer and Tietz (2001) of a male Blackpoll Warbler (*S. striata*) that was in female plumage. Parthenogenetic turkeys have been known for quite a long time (Olsen and Marsden 1954), but given that the female is heterogametic (ZY), all parthenogenetic birds are males and a genetic dead-end.

In a third note (33:439), responding to the 1915 report of a 4-winged duck (32:469–480), Bergtold pointed out that Bland Sutton (1890:114) had an illustration of a dove with an extra wing (Figure 2). The specimen was reported to be in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Jens K. Jensen reported on the nest-building behavior of the Yellow Warbler (*S. petechia*) in response to Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) eggs in the nest (33:436).

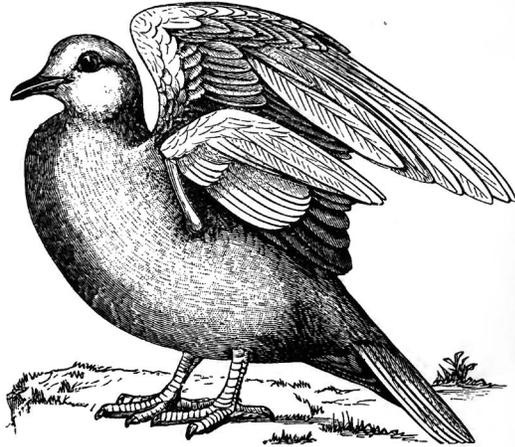


FIG. 62.—A Dove with an accessory wing, probably due to dichotomy.

**FIGURE 2.** Illustration from Bland Sutton (1890) showing a dove with a third wing.

He discovered a completed nest with no eggs on June 1, 1916; returned 5 days later and found another nest on the first with no eggs; returned 7 days later and found a third nest on the second with no eggs; and returned 12 days later and found a fourth nest on the third with one warbler egg. A storm 3 days later caused the failure of all the nests he had found and apparently blew away nests 3 and 4. Examination of nest 1 revealed two cowbird eggs, and nest

2 had a cowbird egg and a warbler egg. Building of new nests over nests with cowbird eggs by Yellow Warblers is well-documented (Friedmann 1963:98–99), and the first documentation is usually attributed to Schrantz (1943), but Jensen would appear to be the first to have reported this behavior, in 1916.

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