

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 published in *The Auk* in 1901 (new series vol. 18, old series vol. 26) were primarily centered around identification of species distributions, mostly in the United States, and to a lesser degree Canada, Mexico, and islands such as Bermuda and Hawaii. As was common at that time, the county was the unit of choice by many authors, although some reports were for new state records. Several authors had multiple notes published in 1901—Leverett M. Loomis, of the California Academy of Sciences, being tops with eight contributions.

The majority of the General Notes were based on specimens, either newly collected or ones that already existed in a collection, but that may not have been widely known. An example of the first case would be the collection of a “Mexican” Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) in Nebraska in December of 1898 (18:109), which Merritt Cary put in his private collection. An example of the latter would be Loomis’ note (18:104–105) concerning the first AOU Checklist mentioning Bonaparte’s Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) in Central America and the Second Edition stating “not yet reported from south of the United States. . . .” Loomis pointed out that there were three specimens from Mazatlan, Mexico, in the collection of the California Academy of Sciences. Several reports were of birds seen at sea while authors were crossing the Atlantic or steaming up the Pacific coast. Reginald Robbins was surprised to see “Mother Carey’s chickens” (=Wilson’s Storm-Petrel, *Oceanites oceanicus*) in November in the mid-Atlantic on his way back to Boston from Liverpool (18:105). In another note (18:110–111), Robbins reported a Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) landing on his boat about 300 miles (480 km) east of Boston on 19 August 1900. He concluded that the bird “was lost,” and, interestingly, speculated that maybe it was a young bird in its first attempt to migrate.

One note concerned the collection of a male Bachman Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*) in South Carolina by Arthur Wayne (18:275). On 15 May 1901, his attention was drawn to the bird that sounded like a lazy Parula Warbler (=Northern Parula, *Parula americana*), and he collected the specimen after watching

the bird for “13 minutes.” Examination of the testes “proved that procreation was going on.” Wayne admitted that he usually did not go into areas like where he found this bird after about 10 April due to the “myriads” of ticks and chiggers (“red bugs”). “In these jungles, the rattlesnake is at home and the stoutest of heart would quail.”

Another note concerned the increase in Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) sightings in Ontario, Canada, during the last few years of the 1890s (18:191–192). Clearly, the birds had been in decline and had all but disappeared by 1870, but recent increases in sightings led G. C. Tremaine Ward to speculate that the species was recovering and soon would reach its former levels of abundance. Would that that were true. At the other extreme is the report (18:194–195) of a European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) specimen collected in North New Haven, Connecticut, 120 km (75 miles) from New York City.

It was not unusual to have two notes on the same subject accompany each other. For example, one report by Reginald Howe, Jr. (18:111) on a specimen of Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) from Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, is followed by a note on the same topic by Herbert Coggins (18:111–112). Sometimes these pairs related to differences of opinion, as with the exchange between William Palmer and Frank Chapman on the proper name for Southern Yellowthroat or the Florida Yellowthroat (18:197–198), a disagreement that began in the previous volume of *The Auk*.

Probably the most unusual pair of notes (18:106–107) concerns the first breeding female Cory’s Bittern (=Least Bittern, *Ixobrychus exilis*) discovered in Ontario, Canada in June of 1898. James Flemming and J. H. Ames were sitting in the store of a Mr. George Pierce, when Mr. Pierce appeared with a female bittern and an egg. Ames realized that the female was gravid with another egg and Fleming confirmed that upon making the specimen the next day. In essence, Flemming’s note confirms that Ames was correct that there was an egg in the bird and Ames’ note confirms that it was his idea. Flemming stated that a matter of this importance (i.e. the identification of the bittern eggs) warrants two notes in *The Auk*.