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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

The Auk 119(4):1216, 2002

Recent Literature found in *The Auk* in 1902 (new series vol. 19, old series vol. 27) consisted of book reviews and a list of publications received, many of which were scientific journals from around the world. All reviews in 1902 were done by the editor, J. A. Allen.

The first review in this volume was of Part 1 of Ridgway's *Birds of North and Middle America,* which dealt with only the family Fringillidae. Ridgway stated that he had been working on this project of cataloging information on the nearly 3,000 birds found in that region from Panama to the Arctic (including the islands of the Caribbean and Galápagos Archipelago), when he was given the task in 1894 of ''making available, through publication, the results of the ornithological work of the Government, as represented in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution.'' Ridgway would go on to author eight parts by 1919, and the project was completed in the 1940s by Herbert Friedmann.

Ridgway was apparently quite outspoken on a number of issues in his book. A few chestnuts were ''science is not literature'' and ''knowledge can not be complete until all is known.'' He also classified ornithology into two types: systematic or scientific, and popular. ''The former deals with the structure and classification of birds, their synonymies and technical descriptions. The latter treats of their habitats, songs, nesting, and other facts pertaining to their life-histories . . . . Popular ornithology is the more entertaining, with its savor of wildwood, green fields, the riverside and seashore, bird songs, and the many fascinating things connected with out-of-door Nature. But systematic ornithology, being a component part of biology—the science of life—is the more instructive and therefore more important.''

Another import work reviewed in this volume was Grinnell's *Check-list of California Birds.* He discussed 491 species and subspecies and lists 33 species as hypothetical, either because no specimen was procured when the species was seen or Grinnell did not feel it was a valid species to begin with. In addition to information on ''status,'' Grinnell discussed distributions by life zones, an approach he championed throughout most of his career.

Interestingly, both Ridgway and Grinnell stated that they more-or-less followed the AOU Check-list for nomenclature, although both took it upon themselves to use their own terminology for certain species and subspecies. In an interesting concession, Allen thought that was perfectly fine because Ridgway had studied the material more closely than the AOU Committee and Grinnell knew more about birds in California than the AOU Committee.

In a rather amusing review of Perkins and Howe's *Preliminary List of Birds of Vermont,* Allen felt obligated to discuss Reginald Heber Howe, Jr.'s review of the same book. Perkins and Howe thought that 264 species occurred in Vermont, but, in his review, Howe reanalyzed the list and came up with 255, having ''expunged'' 27 species and 3 subspecies and added 14 species and 2 subspecies. Allen condescended that Perkins and Howe's list was ''not such a bad list, as lists go when not prepared by an expert . . . ''. But he then took Reginald Howe to task for being too hypercritical in his reassessment.

The Emu, published by the Australian Ornithological Union, started in fall of 1901 and reference is made to *The Condor* having a new look this year, the cover now ''typifying the land of the setting sun and its lordly condor.'' Several members of the society who had passed away during the year were mentioned in biological sketches, most notably Dr. James G. Cooper, the person for whom The Cooper Ornithological Society was named.

Breaking with the policy on publishing supplements to the Check-list every two years, the AOU Committee published its Eleventh Supplement in 1902, based on a meeting that took place in Washington, D.C., from 17–23 April. Four sections were presented: Additions to the Check-list and Accepted Changes in Nomenclature, Proposed Changes in Nomenclature Not Adopted, Species and Subspecies Not Accepted, and Deferred for Further Investigation. Most additions and accepted changes dealt with new subspecies and many changes were based on the works by Ridgway.

In what is classic Brewster, a Letter to the Editor started off with ''It is with reluctance that we offer any criticism of labor which results in so much pleasure and profit as the editing of *The Auk.*'' Brewster and his co-author Hoffmann questioned the identity of two species of birds reported in *The Auk* (19:297), suggesting that ''no record of a bird merely observed, where there is any chance of error, be accepted, unless the observer be well known to the editor, or to some ornithologist of standing and judgment, who will vouch to the editor for the accuracy of the observer.''

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