



100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

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Source: The Auk, 127(3) : 725

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2010.127.3.725>

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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union



The Auk 127(3):725, 2010
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Printed in USA.

In 1910, just over 100 General Notes were published in *The Auk*, and they were mostly a paragraph or less in length. Only 12 dealt with something other than distributions of birds. New information was reported on birds from a total of 24 states and three provinces, with Massachusetts having the most reports (13), followed by Michigan (9), New York (8), Illinois (7), Maine (6), and New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (5 each). There was only one report from outside Canada and the United States: Charles T. Ramsden reported seeing three Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) in Cuba on 12 June 1910 (*Auk* 27:452). A naturalist with wide-ranging interests, he would co-author the classic *Herpetology of Cuba* with Thomas Barbour in 1919.

Probably the most exotic report (27:80–81) was of a Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savanna*) collected in Marion, Maine, on 1 December 1908. Ora Willis Knight (1874–1913) authored the note, opining that “The statements of taxidermists are naturally open to suspicion where pecuniary matters are concerned, so it is always desirable to have confirmatory evidence where obtainable. The evidence in the present case seems entirely satisfactory.” A chemist by trade, Knight wrote *The Birds of Maine* (1908), was an accomplished botanist, and was what today would be an Elected Member of the AOU.

A first for New England was the Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) observed by S. Prescott Fay (1884–1971) on the island of Martha's Vineyard off the coast of Cape Cod during May and June 1910. He and C. E. Brown watched the bird forage for quite a while and were able to relocate it several weeks later. However, Fay concluded that “it can only be regarded as a very rare straggler, scarcely deserving a place on our New England list.” Having graduated from Harvard University in 1907, Fay published 10 notes in *The Auk* between 1908 and 1912 on birds of Massachusetts, but that was the end of his publications. He led the famous 1914 expedition across the Northern Rockies, from Jasper, Alberta, to Hudson's Hope, British Columbia, and his journal of that trip has recently been published (Helm and Murtha 2009). Fay was an ambulance driver during World War I in France and went on to have a career in the American Field Service, an organization that was started by World War I ambulance drivers.

A strange report was made by Henry K. Coale (1858–1926), who joined the AOU in 1883, concerning a Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) first seen flying on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River in 1904 (27:75). It was shot at but flew across the river to Burlington, Iowa, where it was electrocuted by a light wire. It was mounted and Coale saw it in a store window, stating that the specimen was the first state record for both Illinois and Iowa.

Albinism was still of interest, and there were reports of a white-crowned, splotchy brown and white Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) and a Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

with some white primaries in the left wing (27:91–92) and a white-headed White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) (27:457). A mostly white male Barn Swallow was shot on the flats of Monomy Island off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts (27:219). The strangest report was made by Albert W. Honywill, Jr., of an albino duck shot in Minnesota (27:78) that had “no trace of a colored feather anywhere.” Because of the condition of the specimen, he was unable to say with any certainty what species it was, but he suggested that it was a Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), or perhaps an American Widgeon (*A. americana*). Honywill was a stalwart of the New Haven (Connecticut) Bird Club but apparently spent summers in Minnesota, as he published two articles in *The Auk* on summer birds he observed there (28:229–237, 31:82–86).

Wells W. Cooke (1858–1916) presented evidence that the type locality of Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) was actually St. Joseph, Missouri, not “Fort Union (?)” as listed on the specimen tag (27:342–343). Using notes and journals of J. J. Audubon, who described Bell's Vireo, Cooke was able to establish that the type specimen had been collected by J. G. Bell on 6 May 1843. Audubon had stated that Bell's Vireo probably occurred as far north as Fort Union, but Cooke thought that he was in error. In fact, the actual location of Fort Union was in dispute, so Cooke had E. A. Preble look for it in 1910. Preble discovered that the current state line between North Dakota and Montana went through the site of the fort. Cooke concluded that “as most of the buildings were in on the Dakota side, it seems best to consider that Old Fort Union was in North Dakota.”

Cooke was the first luminary in the study of bird migration in North America. He envisioned cooperative observations of bird movements, and in 1881–1882, he invited ornithologists in Iowa to send him lists of winter birds and dates of first arrival of migrants. This quickly spread to the whole Mississippi River Valley, and results were published on an annual basis. After stints in Vermont, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, he took a position with the Biological Survey in Washington, D.C., in 1901, where the remaining 15 years of his career were spent studying migration and distribution of birds. He kept file cards on each migratory record, learning to write with both his right and left hands to avoid writer's cramp, and announced in 1915 that he had surpassed his millionth card. He died in March 1916 after a short bout with pneumonia.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

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