

## **100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union**

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

Source: The Auk, 126(3) : 704

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2009.5709>

---

BioOne Complete ([complete.BioOne.org](https://complete.BioOne.org)) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at [www.bioone.org/terms-of-use](https://www.bioone.org/terms-of-use).

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

---

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.



## 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

*The Auk* 126(3):704, 2009  
© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2009.  
Printed in USA.

In all, 99 General Notes were published in *The Auk* during 1909, almost all of them dealing with distribution issues. As in previous years, Massachusetts led the way with 14 notes on bird distribution, followed by Maine with 8, Colorado with 7, and 6 each for New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Twenty-six states were represented, with 10 reports from Canada and 1 from the District of Columbia. No General Notes concerned other countries.

A few are of historical significance. Alva Howard Felger (1868–1952) reported that the last Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) was shot in Illinois in 1905 (*Auk* 26:78). In another note, he documented the expansion of the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) into Colorado, wondering whether “the little thief” that stole drying hazelnuts from him as a child was following him as “the little tormentor” to steal drying hazelnuts in Denver (26:85–86). Felger, who joined the AOU in 1898 and was an Honorary Life Associate, was born in Illinois and spent most of his adult life as a high-school biology teacher in Denver, Colorado. He was an avid amateur ornithologist, and his bird collections, as well as his butterfly and moth collections, were donated to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Following up on his note in 1908 of six remaining Passenger Pigeons (*Ectopistes migratorius*), Ruthven Deane reported on the last pair (26:429). The Milwaukee group of four males had died of tuberculosis during fall of 1908 and spring of 1909, and the Cincinnati Zoo's pair consisted of a 24-year-old male and a 13-year-old female, probably infertile. That female, named Martha, died at about 1 pm on 1 September 1914, signifying the extinction of a once-abundant bird in a matter of decades.

In “A note on the English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)” (26:78–79), Charles W. Townsend and John H. Hardy, Jr., presented a morphometric analysis of English (House) Sparrows, some collected in the Boston and Cambridge region near the time of the species' introduction into New England (1872–1886), others collected primarily in Arlington, Massachusetts (where Hardy lived), in 1907, and a third group collected near Liverpool, England, in 1907 and shipped to Hardy “in the flesh.” Sample sizes were small, and, of course, the authors presented no statistics, but their conclusions were striking: early New England specimens were larger than the current English ones, and the beaks of the current New England birds were about 1 mm longer than those of the other two groups. They concluded that

it would seem that in the early years of struggle only the more vigorous, larger birds survived and that under favorable conditions the larger size was continued with an added increase in the size of the bill. A larger series may invalidate these conclusions, but they are given for what they are worth.

Clearly one of the earliest studies of evolutionary biology published in North America using birds, this largely forgotten

work has been overshadowed by the famous data set of 136 English Sparrows collected by Hermon Bumpus in Providence, Rhode Island, on 1 February 1898 after a long period of snow, sleet, and rain (Bumpus 1899). Half of those birds had died and half survived. Unlike Townsend and Hardy, who presented only mean values by sex, Bumpus (1899) published his entire data set for use in the future. For instance, Johnston et al. (1972) used multivariate statistics to show that larger males had survived better than small males, which contributes to a “double whammy” for small male English Sparrows: they do not survive as well as bigger males, and females apparently prefer to mate with the latter. Conclusions regarding survival and sexual selection might also explain the results of Townsend and Hardy.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Richard F. Johnson and Robert K. Selander conducted a continent-wide examination of variation in morphology and skeletal elements of English Sparrows in North America, for which they were awarded the AOU's Elliott Coues Award in 1975. One of their papers concerned a comparison of birds from Europe, North America, and South America in terms of size and sexual dimorphism (Johnston and Selander 1973). They found subtle differences in the size of males from North America and Europe: males were generally larger in North America, but the variation was clinal, with larger males in the northern part of their study areas and smaller males in the southeastern United States.

And what are we to make of Townsend and Hardy's interpretation of a 1-mm change in bill size in about 30 years? Seventy years later, Rosemary and Peter Grant demonstrated that changes in selection on bill size can occur that rapidly in finches within the Galapagos Islands and that 1 mm can mean a lot in terms of survival (Weiner 1994). Townsend and Hardy were definitely ahead of their time.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

### LITERATURE CITED

- BUMPUS, H. C. 1899. The elimination of the unfit as illustrated by the introduced sparrow, *Passer domesticus*. *Biology Lectures, Marine Biology Laboratory, Woods Hole*:209–226.
- JOHNSTON, R. F., D. M. NILES, AND S. A. ROHWER. 1972. Hermon Bumpus and natural selection in the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. *Evolution* 26:20–31.
- JOHNSTON, R. F., AND R. K. SELANDER. 1973. Evolution in the House Sparrow. III. Variation in size and sexual dimorphism in Europe and North and South America. *American Naturalist* 107:373–390.
- WEINER, J. 1994. *The Beak of the Finch*. Knopf, New York.