



## 100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

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## 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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Volume 28 of *The Auk*, published in 1911, surpassed 500 pages (excluding the index) for the first time. The first issue in 1884 had 419 pages, volume 8 had 421 pages in 1891, and volume 18 had 436 pages in 1901. As noted before, there now were over a hundred Short Communications being published each year, as well as nearly 60 reviews of Recent Literature. Oddly, *The Auk* would break 600 pages just 2 years later in 1913 and then decrease during the war years, reaching 600 pages again in 1920. *The Auk* reached 700 pages in 1938, owing mainly to the publication of several committee reports and a list of the membership. That total would not be reached again for almost 30 years, in the mid-1960s. *The Auk* then quickly passed 800 pages in 1969 and 900 pages in 1971.

During the year, there were a number of reports of ongoing, current, and future expeditions. Many were young men seeking adventure and exploration. Started in 1908 and lasting 4 years, the Stefansson-Anderson Expedition of Arctic America was funded by the American Museum of Natural History, surveying northern coastal Alaska and Canada. During 1910, the first specimens arrived at the museum in New York City from collections made during 1909, including bird skins, eggs, and nests. Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879–1962) was an anthropologist and Arctic explorer who was associated with two Arctic tragedies: the abandonment of the crew of the *Karluq* and the attempt to colonize Wrangel Island. He later was the Director of Polar Studies at Dartmouth College and was twice president of the Explorers Club. Rudolph M. Anderson (1876–1961) was a zoologist who was a classmate of Stefansson at University of Iowa. He was instrumental in establishing the migratory bird treaty between the United States and Canada signed in 1916 and was Chief of the Biology Department at the National Museum of Canada from 1920 to 1946.

Several updates were given on the progress of the Kuser Asiatic Expedition, which had begun in December 1909 when (Charles) William Beebe (1877–1962) and his wife left New York City for London aboard the *Lusitania*. The primary objective was to discover the ecology of the wild pheasants and jungle fowl of southeastern Asia by collecting data, taking photographs, and making paintings. Beebe was on leave without pay and the expedition was underwritten by Colonel Anthony R. Kuser, a wealthy philanthropist who maintained a pheasant collection at his mansion in Bernardsville, New Jersey. In London they were joined by artist Robert Bruce Horsfall (1869–1948) and proceeded to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) after several weeks of studying pheasants at the British Museum. From there they traveled to India, Borneo, Burma, China, Japan, Sumatra, and Java. Horsfall returned in August of 1910, but the Beebes continued on, returning via Hawaii, to San Francisco in summer of 1911. Over 2,500 photographs were taken

and eggs and young were collected, as well as many skins of adults. Beebe would produce a four-volume monograph on pheasants, the first of which appeared in 1918. The publications were stunning according to reviews in *The Auk* (36:119–125) and the set is worth thousands of dollars today. Elected a Fellow in the AOU the following year, Beebe was one of the leading scientists of his time. He published widely, wrote books for the lay public on his exploits, and rode the bathysphere to a depth of 3,048 feet (924 m) off the coast of Bermuda in 1934.

A. C. Bent announced a trip to the Aleutian Islands and enlisted the help of a young Alexander Wetmore (1886–1978), Rollo H. Beck (1870–1950), and F. B. McKechnie (1882–1913). The plan was to leave in May aboard a “Revenue cutter” and start at Attu Island and slowly work their way eastward during summer, possibly visiting some islands in the Bering Sea. On 19 May, they set sail from Seattle aboard the U.S. Revenue cutter *Tahoma*, reaching Unalaska on 4 June after several delays. However, the cutter was ordered to be in Cordova in early July to pick up Walter L. Fisher, the new Secretary of the Interior, who was traveling the West trying to convince westerners that their opinions about federal conservation programs would be seriously considered by him (Gould 1973). That left only about three weeks for the 1,600 mile (2,575 km) round trip to Attu. The party still managed to visit eight islands, spending a couple of days on each. Over 200 specimens of ptarmigans were collected as well as many land birds. A specimen of the “rare” Fisher’s Petrel was also reported. Described in 1895 by Ridgway (*Auk* 12:319–322) on the basis of a single specimen, it is now considered to be the Mottled Petrel (*Pterodroma inexpectata*). On 3 July, Bent, Beck, and McKechnie sailed north on the schooner *Polar Bear*, leaving Wetmore at Unalaska to visit Unimak Island and then work slowly homeward along the south side of the Alaska Peninsula while Bent and his party visited the Pribilof Islands and went north to St. Matthew and Hall islands. They reached Nome on 11 July, where the party remained collecting for a week, and then Bent and McKechnie returned to Seattle, leaving Beck to continue the work there until September. By the middle of July about 1,000 birds had been collected. Rollo Beck was one of the most famous bird collectors of his time, before retiring to a fruit farm in California (Pitelka 1986). McKechnie was a landscape architect from Massachusetts who took the trip in the hope of improving his health, but he died shortly after returning to Massachusetts.

The construction of the Panama Canal was well underway and the Biological Survey of the Panama Canal Zone expedition was given the task of documenting the fauna and flora of the region to see what impact the canal would have on each. The

American Society of Naturalists had passed a resolution urging President Taft to approve this study, which he did in 1910. The biological survey started in December of 1910 and ended in January of 1912 at a cost of \$12,000. The survey of birds and mammals was under the direction of Edward Alphonso Goldman (1873–1946) of the Biological Survey. The famous ichthyologist Seth Eugene Meek (1859–1914) of the Field Museum of Chicago and his assistant Samuel F. Hildebrand (1883–1949) of the Bureau of Fisheries were in charge of the field work for reptiles and fishes, and also mollusks and crustaceans. Eugene Amandus Schwartz (1844–1928) and August Busck (1870–1944) of the U.S. National Museum and the Bureau of Entomology were in charge of the entomological work. The botanists were Henri Pittier (1857–1950) of the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and William R. Maxon (1877–1948) of the United States National Museum. Pittier was one of the premier tropical botanists of his time and a national park is named for him in Venezuela in tribute to his work in that country. Maxon spent his entire career at the National Museum and was the leading systematic pteridologists of his time. Many publications came out of this expedition and most were made available online in 2009 ([aquaticcommons.org/2210/1/SAIL\\_2009\\_Panama\\_bibliography.pdf](http://aquaticcommons.org/2210/1/SAIL_2009_Panama_bibliography.pdf)).

In northern South America, several American naturalists were making collections of birds and mammals. Melbourne A. Carriker, Jr. (1879–1965) was in northern Venezuela collecting for the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh and the American Museum of Natural History, as was Wilfred H. Osgood (1875–1947), who was on his first expedition for the Field Museum of Chicago. Carriker would go on to be one of the most important bird collectors in South America in the last century (Wiedenfeld 1997) and, although he became a famous mammalogist, Osgood had been elected a Fellow in the AOU in 1905. William Blaney Richardson (1868–1927), grandfather of the politician Bill Richardson, was collecting in western Colombia for the American Museum, and Samuel Nicholson Rhoads (1862–1952) visited Ecuador to collect mammals and birds in the higher parts of the Andes for the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Frank M. Chapman, Curator of Birds in the American Museum of Natural History, the artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes, and Leo E. Miller (1887–1952), a mammalogist, sailed from New York City for Colombia on 13 March. They landed at Buenaventura on the west coast of Colombia on 24 March, where they connected

with Richardson. The first camp was established on the summit of the coast range and the second camp was made in the Cauca Valley near Palmira. From this point the expedition ascended the main chain of the Andes, returning to other points in the Cauca Valley, and finally to Cali, which formed the base of operations. On 13 May, Richardson and Miller left southward to the vicinity of Popeyen, while Chapman and Fuertes went down the Cauca River to Cartago, then across the central range of the Andes to Giradot on the Magdalena, then descended to Barranquilla, from which a short trip was made through the marshes to Santa Marta, from which port a steamer was taken for New York on 15 June. In August, Richardson returned home and Miller was joined by Arthur A. Allen (1885–1964), fresh out of graduate school and on his first expedition. They collected together into the following spring, when Allen returned to Cornell University after a bout with malaria.

During March and April, Charles Haskins Townsend (1859–1944) led an expedition to the waters off of “Lower California” (= Baja Peninsula) aboard the U.S. steamship *Albatross*. The ship carried a scientific staff of eight people representing the American Museum of Natural History, the New York Zoological Society, the New York Botanic Museum, and the U.S. National Museum. Although much time was spent conducting deep sea dredges for fishes and marine invertebrates, about 650 bird specimens were collected during 36 shore stops. Thought to possibly be extinct, about 125 northern elephant seals were also discovered on Guadalupe Island. Townsend was director of the New York Aquarium from 1902 until his retirement in 1937.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

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