



## 100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

Source: The Auk, 129(3) : 571-572

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2012.129.3.571>

---

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](http://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* 129(3):571–572, 2012  
© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2012.  
Printed in USA.

A record 139 General Notes were published in *The Auk* during 1912. New distributional information was reported on birds from a total of 28 states, four provinces, Greenland, and the Galápagos. As usual, Massachusetts had the most reports (19), followed by Pennsylvania (9), New York (8), Maine (6), and New Jersey (5). Charles T. Ramsden continued to make reports from Cuba, including an amazing Large-billed Tern (*Phaetusa simplex*) specimen taken in May of 1909 (*Auk* 29:100), two Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) (29:103), and first records of Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) (29:395) and Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) (29:396).

Some of the more interesting reports were the first Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) collected in the interior of the United States, in South Dakota (29:534–535); the first Sora (*Porzana carolina*) specimen from New Mexico (29:535); the second Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) on the Atlantic Coast (29:99–100), and possibly the second and third records of Yellow-headed Blackbird east of the Alleghenies (29:102–103), all three birds at Philadelphia; the second Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) in Maine (29:106–107); and the second Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) for Long Island (29:389). The latter bird was observed by Julius Johnson and the famous Ludlow Griscom, who wrote “When first seen at long range, we decided that it was a stick with a white top. Five minutes later, to our intense surprise, the stick flew away, and we knew at once it was a Brown Pelican.”

Winthrop S. Brooks (1887–1965) reported finding the 44th extant specimen of the extinct Labrador Duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*) in a box of waterfowl skins at the museum of the Boston Society of Natural History (29:389–390). He was Curator of Birds at the Boston Society of Natural History for 15 years, then Curator of Oology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University from 1928 to 1934. He then retired to Eastham, Massachusetts, where he lived “quietly.”

There were a surprising number of retractions in the 1912 issues. Arthur T. Wayne examined a set of eggs that had previously been attributed to Bachman's Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*) in Georgia in an earlier report in *The Auk* (25:479). He stated that they were immediately recognizable as eggs of Swainson's Warbler (*Limnithlypis swainsonii*) (29:105). Even more curious was the report by J. H. Fleming that the two published records of Dovekies (*Alle alle*) from Ontario were actually Ancient Murrelets (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) (29:387–388). The first report appeared in *The Auk* (19:94) and was described as a young female. The second appeared in *Bird-Lore* (11:174) and was described as

an adult male washed up on the Canadian side of Lake Erie near Buffalo, New York. Fleming had originally examined the first specimen and thought it was a “big” Dovekie, but upon reexamination he realized it was actually a murrelet. The second specimen had been pretty much destroyed by moths, but the wings and some feathers around the head were still intact, allowing Fleming to determine that it too was a murrelet. In a third report, Ned Hollister called into question (29:397–399) several reports made by A. J. Shoenebeck concerning birds he had seen in Wisconsin that he published in a pamphlet in 1902. Henry K. Coale had republished the most unusual records in *The Auk* (28:275–276, 29:238). Hollister was convinced that Shoenebeck had just misidentified birds—for example, juvenile marsh birds as Black Rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) and cormorants as Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*). Shoenebeck also reported the first Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) and the first nesting Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*), but being primarily an oologist interested in egg collecting, he kept no specimens of any of the birds that he reported.

In this issue, Coale also reported that a friend flushed a Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) into the large web of a black and yellow spider (most likely *Argiope aurantia*) and the spider quickly started wrapping the bird in silk. His friend finally intervened, scaring the spider away and freeing the warbler unharmed (29:105). In another note, Charles W. Townsend reported an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) carrying a nearly 570-g (1.25-pound) freshly killed female Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) (29:554). Townsend had five speculations on how the crow obtained the grouse, concluding that it probably knocked it out of an apple tree, since the grouse's crop was full of apple leaves and blossoms. He concluded that

In whatever way the tragedy occurred it is certainly surprising that a Crow should have succeeded in flying with such a heavy burden as a Ruffed Grouse, and on this account alone, if for no other, the case is worth putting on record.

The controversy of the day was whether the female Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) carried her single egg in her breast feathers, held in by her feet, and incubated the egg while sitting on a tree branch without a nest. This possibility was first reported in Bendire (1892), who quoted Otho C. Poling that in southern Arizona he had shot two birds with an egg in their breast feathers held in by their feet. He also stated that sometimes female pigeons he had shot were splattered with broken egg, leading him to conclude that some female pigeons carry an egg around and incubate by landing

on a tree branch. Bendire (1892:126) stated that “I have quoted, without further comment, the remarkable statement of Mr. Poling, in regard to the alleged removal of eggs by this pigeon.”

Born in Illinois in either 1870 or 1871, Poling would have been about 20 years old when he made those observations near Fort Huachuca. Harry S. Swarth (1878–1935) published “Birds of the Huachuca Mountains, Arizona” in 1904 (*Pacific Coast Avifauna* no. 4), in which he cited works by Poling, and Bendire’s book, but made no mention of the egg-carrying behavior. However, in 1912, Wallace Craig (1876–1954), one of the leading authorities on pigeon behavior at the time (see 126:943–944), felt compelled to point out that this is “extremely improbable” (29:392–393), refuting a statement by Knowlton (1909:420) that this behavior “seems to be established beyond question.” Craig pointed out that pigeons never carry anything in their feet and that the most likely explanation was that the eggs found by Poling had been glued to the feathers by albumin from a cracked or broken egg. In the next issue (29:540–541), Swarth weighed in with the observation that Poling’s report was “read with amusement” at the time,

without feeling the need of formally refuting the story. This, however, should have been done years ago, for such stories are

sometimes repeatedly and widely quoted, as this one has been, until they are generally accepted as established facts.

Swarth concluded that it was “ridiculous” to believe that Band-tailed Pigeons carry eggs. Swarth went on to become a Fellow in the AOU in 1916 and had a distinguished career of service to both the AOU and the Cooper Ornithological Club, as it was known then. Switching careers, Poling was one of the most important field lepidopterists early in the 20th century, collecting numerous type specimens and having more than 20 butterflies and moths named after him.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

#### LITERATURE CITED

- BENDIRE, C. 1892. Life histories of North American birds with special reference to their breeding habits and eggs, with twelve lithographic plates. Special Bulletin no. 1. U.S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- KNOWLTON, F. H. 1909. *Birds of the World: A Popular Account*. Henry Holt, New York.