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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

The Auk 119(3):895–896, 2002

General Notes published in *The Auk* in 1902 (new series vol. 19, old series vol. 27) continued to document new records for species, primarily at the state level, and changes in of species distributions, mostly within the United States. The majority of the General Notes were based on specimens, either newly collected or ones that already existed in a collection. However, a surprising number of reports were now being made with ''glasses,'' suggesting that watching birds through binoculars was becoming more popular and was becoming a reasonable alternative to shooting specimens. This trend follows closely after the start of Christmas Bird Counts in 1900 and the launch of the journal, *Bird-Lore,* in 1899.

A number of reports dealt with birds moving northward, and there were three notes on Gray Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) wintering in New England. Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), which apparently were a popular cage bird at the time (Auk 19:205–206), were established as resident in Ontario and becoming more common in Massachusetts, as were Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*; Auk 19:292), and Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) was found in Massachusetts for the first time in spring (Auk 19:292) and the first nest was reported from Connecticut (Auk 19:90–91). Eurasian Widgeon (*Anas penelope*) specimens were the subject of three notes, including the first for North Carolina (Auk 19:76), and Herbert Brown provided a detailed account of an invasion of Lewis's Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes lewis*) in Arizona during fall of 1884 (Auk 19:80–83). Ames (Auk 19:94–95) offered a solution to the ''Kicker'' bird mystery (see Auk 118: 572–573)—Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)—which was wrong.

Certainly a strange report was the specimen of a King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) reported by A. C. Bent to have been shot at a fresh water pond in Bridgewater, Massachusetts (Auk 19:196), but the strangest report was of a pair of Belted Kingfishers (*Ceryle alcyon*) in Hawaii (Auk 19:199). A pair of birds appeared near Hilo in November of 1901 and one, a female, was collected while the other disappeared. Henshaw speculated that it was a male and female and lamented the fact that the birds did not find a more isolated spot, so that they may have bred the following year and populated the island with kingfishers. Two other notes in this volume document the occurrence of Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*) for the first two times in the Hawaiian Islands.

A common practice was to start a note discussing one subject and end the note by discussing another topic totally unrelated to the title. For example, Comey (Auk 19:86), in his note on ''Cardinals in Cambridge, Massachusetts,'' ended up discussing the early records for Hooded Warblers (*Wilsonia citrina*) in Massachusetts, the topic of a note he published the previous year (Auk 18:397).

Several knotty taxonomic problems were addressed in this issue. J. A. Allen dispelled the notion that two species of Herring Gull exist, the American and the European herring gull (Auk 19:283–284). Elliot Coues had proposed the two species based on subtle differences, particularly on the amount of white in the wing tips, but Allen had earlier thought that those differences were age related. Having had the opportunity to examine 40 adult birds from the British Museum, Allen concluded that the amount of white in the wing tips varies with age, meaning that only one species of Herring Gull exists. Oddly, Crochet et al. (Auk 119:603–620) rekindle this debate elsewhere in this volume.

Gerald Thayer tackled the issue of Brewster's Warbler color variation (Auk 19:401–402), stating that only birds with *absolutely* (his emphasis) white under parts were Brewster's Warblers. We now know that Brewster's Warblers are hybrids between Blue-winged (*Vermivora pinus*) and Golden-winged (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) warblers and that another form, Lawrence's Warbler, is usually produced as a backcross between Brewster's and Blue-winged warblers. But this was a period when Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers were coming into contact in southern New England (see Gill 1980, Auk 97:1–19) and hybrids were becoming more common in that area. Thayer argued that there were intergrades between Brewster's and Blue-winged warblers, but none between Brewster's and Golden-winged warblers, so Brewster's cannot be a hybrid between those other two species. He believed that Lawrence's Warbler was the obvious hybrid between Blue-winged and Golden-winged warblers. He concluded that either Brewster's Warbler was a species whose habitat was yet to be discovered, or, most likely, that it was an independent color-phase of the Blue-winged Warbler.

Lastly, F. A. Lucas presented an essay critical of the usefulness of pterylography and pterylosis as the basis for a system of classification of birds, as proposed by Clark the previous year(Auk 18:370–

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381). ''Pterylosis'' refers to the analysis of the distribution of areas that have feathers (or pterylae) on the surface of a bird, as opposed to the areas that lack feathers (apteria). Lucas' thesis was that secondary characteristics that appear on the surface of an animal cannot be used to override conclusions drawn from skeletal features, such as the skull and tarsus. In a rather stylish manner, Lucas began his remarks praising Clark's ''most able and interesting article,'' later concluding in the final paragraph that it would be ''rank heresy'' to believe that Clark's ideas are correct.

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