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Source: The Auk, 120(2) : 574

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2003)120[0574:YAITAO]2.0.CO;2

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100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

The Auk 120(2):574, 2003

In 1903, 33 major articles were published in *The Auk* (new series vol. 20, old series vol. 28), as well as the lengthy "The Report of the Committee on the Protection of North American Birds" (20:101–159), "Twelfth Supplement to the AOU Check-List of North American Birds," and the report of the 20th Congress held in 1902 in Washington, D.C. No memorials of prominent members were published during that year.

The lead article was by J. A. Allen, Chair of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds, on the history and future of the AOU Check-List. Allen believed that there were no more new species to be discovered in North America and that the list would continue to grow as new species from other continents were discovered in North America. Such new records were dismissed as "not very important." Allen thought that most of the future work of the committee would be at the level about the species, at the generic and subgeneric levels. In an interesting passage, he states,

> …there has been so much discontent expressed over the constant changes in the Check-List that it is perhaps proper to consider for a moment whether it is really worth while to have an up to-date Check-List of North American birds.

Elsewhere in this issue, Loomis (20:294–299) argues that the use of trinomials should be discontinued, causing Witmer Stone to write a letter (20:456) stating that saving trinomials was "of greatest importance."

As in previous years, the majority of articles were about birds on islands. Bowdish concluded his article (started in 1902) on the "Birds of Porto Rico," Joseph Grinell discussed the birds of Los Coronados Islands (located off the coast of Mexico just south of San Diego), and Walter Fisher reported on the birds of Laysan Island. Other works discussed birds on Long Island (New York) and Hawaii, migration at Bahama lighthouses, food habits of West Indian birds, anatomy of Darwin's finches, and a new subspecies of nighthawk from the Bahama Islands.

Some articles still had "cutesy" titles, like "The Diary of a Cardinal's Nest" and "The Domestic Affairs of the Bob-white," the author of the latter referring to the male bird as "Old Bob" and his covey as "the White family." Three recently discovered letters written by John J. Audubon were published as an article (20:377–383), because they contained comments concerning his relationship and feelings about some of his contemporaries like Townsend, Nuttall, and Bonaparte. Black-and-white plates were becoming more common and this volume had 22 plates.

One paper of historical note is "The Vernacular Names of Birds" by Edwin W. Doran. Dr. Doran had become concerned that people were starting to use the vernacular name for birds more often than the scientific name and that no one was trying to standardize this practice. As an example, he pointed out, at least 175 vernacular names in the current AOU Check-List were "manifestly incorrect in form." To correct this growing problem, he proposed the "Rules for Compounding Vernacular Names of Birds," which consisted of 4 basic situations: a general name for a bird and its prey or food (sparrow-hawk); a general name for (a) similarities (quail-dove), (b) habit (butcher-bird), (c) characteristic (song-sparrow), or (d) habitat (house-sparrow); any name or words in joint arbitrary use (road-runner); or a phrase consisting of an adjective and a noun (generally not hyphenated—yellowlegs). He then produces a long list "correcting" the vernacular names that appeared in the Check-list. Although a few of his "corrections" apparently were incorporated into the Check-list, most were not, saving us from names like the "dick-cissel".

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