

100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

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In 1907, volume 24 (old series 32) of *The Auk* was published, with J. A. Allen continuing as its only Editor and F. M. Chapman continuing as Associate Editor. Photographs commonly accompanied feature articles for the first time, with 20 plates in this volume.

Smaller illustrations were called “text-cuts” and were usually maps. No tables or figures of data were used yet, though information on dates and locations were sometimes embedded in the text in a table-like format.

Many feature articles concerned bird distributions in various regions of states, such as northeastern Illinois and southeastern Michigan. Two articles were concerned with the birds of “extreme” southern Illinois. Records of the birds for specific counties were published for Leon County, Florida; Tishomingo County, Mississippi; and several counties in Montana. Canadian reports concerned birds from Ontario, Toronto, and southern Saskatchewan. Austin H. Clark reported on the birds of Kamchatka, Siberia, and Outram Bangs reported on a collection of 6,000 specimens from the Rio Grande de Terraba region of western Costa Rica. That series of specimens had been collected by C. F. Underwood from April to August of 1906.

Three reports concerned the nesting ecology of Bachman's Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*). G. C. Embury reported his observations on the nesting in Kentucky, finding one swamp with 14 singing males and another with 8 males. He commented that one summer he thought their songs sounded like that of the Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) and the next he thought that they sounded like Chipping Sparrows (*Spizella passerine*). Arthur T. Wayne went into great detail concerning the location and composition of the six nests that he was able to find in South Carolina in 1906. He also commented on the birds sounding like Worm-eating Warblers and Chipping Sparrows. Wayne speculated that his observations were made in the same swamp where Bachman had

collected the first specimen in 1833. In a second article published in the fall, Wayne discussed his further observations during the summer of 1907. One of the birds that he collected that summer was singing a “perfect” Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) song.

Ruthven Deane reported on a large influx of Northern Goshawks (*Accipiter gentiles*) during the winter of 1906–1907 and, to the best of his recollections, there had not been an influx like that since the winter of 1896–1897, 10 years earlier. His report was based on 275 specimens brought to taxidermy shops around the Northeast. Many birds had remains of Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) in their stomachs, but most had been shot by farmers while apparently preying on domestic chickens.

One of the most delightful articles was by C. William Beebe, then Curator of Ornithology for the New York Zoological Society. On 4 August 1906, he collected two cold eggs from a Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) nest, which he deemed to be abandoned. He packed the eggs in his suitcase, and two days later, when he arrived in New York, one of the eggs hatched. The next day, the second egg hatched, and he set about quantifying the behavior of these Common Loon chicks. After about a dozen tries, the chicks learned to eat fish from a pair of forceps. Dropped in a bucket of water, the chicks swam immediately and placed their heads underwater within the first 10 minutes, as if searching. When it was two days old, Beebe moved his hand rapidly over the first chick in the water, and it dove under immediately. Moving his hand slowly elicited no response, and if he moved his hand and snapped his fingers, the chick would follow him anywhere. On day 3, the first chick started preening using its oil gland and could pick up fish on its own, instinctively swallowing each head first. The second chick was not faring well, which puzzled Beebe, until he discovered that it was being violently attacked by its older sibling. He separated the two, and the next morning

both were fine. He put them back together and they started fighting like "game cocks," so he had to separate them again. The chicks gradually learned to feed themselves on dying fish without any help from Beebe. But, alas, on 16 August, "a sudden drop in temperature has proven fatal to the young loons."

The most amazing report was by Thomas S. Roberts, entitled "A Lapland Longspur Tragedy." During March 1904, reports started to trickle in concerning the "destruction of large numbers of small brown birds during the night of 13–14 March" in southwestern Minnesota. Nearly a week later, Dr. L. O. Dart was dispatched to investigate after it was learned that many dead birds, now identified as Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*), still remained on the ground. And, indeed, Dart found lots of dead birds scattered about, which can be seen in the four photographs that accompany the article. Local residents were calling it "the great bird shower." Dart found two lakes covered with ice and dead birds that he estimated were each about 1 square mile (2.56 km²) in area and he systematically sampled square quadrats on the ice, arriving at a density of 5.5 dead birds per 400 square feet (36 m²). Extrapolating from that estimate, he surmised that there were 750,000 dead birds on those two lakes alone. Roberts suggested that the real figure was probably closer to 1 million birds on the two lakes.

On the night of 13 March, there was a steady snow fall without any wind. Night workers, such as watchmen and telegraph operators, observed birds at 11 pm flying low, crashing into buildings and other structures, apparently confused by the lights in the cities. The largest concentrations of dead birds the next day were under street lights. Also, several people reported finding "snow balls" the following morning, from which live birds emerged as the snow melted. Roberts speculated that these birds had become covered in snow and rolled themselves into balls in attempts to escape.

Most specimens examined were fat birds in excellent condition. Many birds had broken necks, broken wings, broken legs, or other obvious injuries. Even a week to 10 days later, Dart encountered massive numbers of injured birds that were still alive but could not fly.

The area over which dead birds were discovered was estimated by Roberts to be about 1,500 square miles (3840 km²). The total number of dead birds was surely in the millions, but Roberts said that he would "leave [that] for your imagination to picture." What is equally incredible, Roberts stated that not a single specimen of another species was collected—every dead bird was a Lapland Longspur.—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*