100 years ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

Source: The Auk, 132(3) : 765-766

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1642/AUK-15-80.1

The Auk
Ornithological Advances
AmericanOrnithology.org

Volume 132, 2015, pp. 765–766
DOI: 10.1642/AUK-15-80.1

100 YEARS AGO IN THE AOU

100 years ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

Kimberly G. Smith

Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA
kgsmith@uark.edu

Published July 1, 2015

Most of the General Notes published during 1915 still dealt with new distributional records, like European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) reaching Hanover, New Hampshire (*The Auk* 32:496), but there were now more references to animal behavior. One note described the escape behavior or "concealing behavior" of the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) (*The Auk* 32:95), another discussed the nest defense behavior of Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) (*The Auk* 32:100–101), and another documented the reuse of an old nest by a pair of American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*), leading Dewitt C. Wing (1878–1951) to wonder "whether this is a common practice among robins, or any other species." (*The Auk* 32:106–107). It made sense to him: Why not use a perfectly good old nest rather than spend time building a new one. L. L. Jewel watched a Spotted Sandpiper swim under water and wondered "From what period in his ancestry did he inherit this almost obsolete instinct?" (*The Auk* 32:227). Another author reported that a male Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) started diving in the presence of a diving female Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) (*The Auk* 32:96–97). He suggested that young ducklings dive for food, so maybe this was an adult reverting to a juvenile behavior.

Francis H. Allen apparently had continued to collect data on the earliest singing birds during the breeding season on 6 mornings in 1913 and 5 mornings in 1914 near Boston, concluding as he did in 1913 (see *The Auk* 130:397) that the American Robin is still the earliest singer (*The Auk* 32:110–113). In fact he now contended that the new data showed that Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) were nearly 30 minutes behind the robin, not the 13 minutes he had claimed in 1913. He also cautioned that in conducting such research, one had to "include only the songs that indicated a permanent morning awakening." According to Allen, other researchers were including "sporadic night songs," which led to the wrong conclusion of which bird actually was the earliest. Allen dismissed Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) as an early singer, stating that it was a nocturnal singer, usually around 10 p.m., and he further dismissed Song Sparrow as it sang very early in the morning "before he gives evidence of having awakened for the day." Allen had presented his finding at a meeting of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, but, although supportive, few if any members expressed an interest at joining him at 3 a.m. (before there was daylight savings time).

Not to be outdone, Horace W. Wright, the target of much of Allen's criticism, wanted to assure everyone that he was getting up at 2 a.m. and that the American Robin was not the first singer at his study site in New Hampshire (*The Auk* 32:240–241). Not only were Chipping and Song sparrows the first singers, but there were 5 other species that usually sing before robins.

Someone who did embrace Allen's research was the famous Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), the father of the study of phenology. He alluded to his study of morning bird songs in the July chapter of *A Sand County Almanac* (Leopold 1949:41–44), but he had been linking bird song in the morning to illumination for 4 years prior to his death (Leopold and Eynon 1961). He used a National Lamp Works foot-candle meter (Figure 1), which he held in his lap while sitting. He was comparing the behaviors around his house in Madison, Wisconsin, with those at the rural "Shack" made famous by his book. American Robin was second to sing after Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) at his cabin in Wisconsin on that July morning (Leopold 1949:42).

Several notes discussed Cape May Warblers (*Setophaga tigrina*) attacking grapes. McAtee (1904) was possibly the first ornithologist to address this issue and emphatically stated that Cape Mays only drank grape juice, so that grapes *per se* were not in their diet. He concluded "it seems not too much to expect that we should without complaint furnish, for a few days in the year, the drink to wash the great numbers of our insect enemies down to their destruction." McAtee was arguing the beneficial aspect of the broad insectivorous diet versus the destruction of a few grapes by Cape Mays.

Bee keepers, however, had already discovered that the Cape May Warbler was the main culprit giving honey bees

FIGURE 1. Picture of National Lamp Works foot-candle meter manufactured by General Electric in the 1920s and 1930s.

a bad rap as the destroyer of grape crops (Root 1903:40–41). In this scenario, Cape Mays arrived at vineyards at daybreak and punctured grapes for their juice and then honey bees visited the punctured grapes for the rest of the day, leading owners of the vineyards to the conclusion that the honey bees had damaged the grapes. Prior to this demonstration, it was a mystery because it had been clearly demonstrated that honey bees have no interest in intact fruits.

A different picture was painted by Frank L. Burns in his neighborhood in Berwyn, northwest of Philadelphia (*The Auk* 32:231–233). During fall migration in 1913 and 1914, many Cape May Warblers attacked his grape vines during the day, apparently to drink grape juice. He shot a number of warblers attacking his crop and, ironically, sent ten stomachs off to McAfee for examination. McAfee's report was that the warblers had been eating a number of beneficial insects, prompting him to state, "I should say that these Cape May Warblers did very little to pay for the destruction of grapes." Burns estimated that the destruction of grapes in his area "must have been many tons worth several hundred dollars." Franklin Lorenzo Burns (1869–1946) was a commercial painter by trade, but had a love of ornithology from an early age. He joined the AOU in 1891 and was elected a Member in 1901. His major opus was *The Ornithology of Chester County, Pennsylvania,* published in 1919. Strangely, Burn's extensive observations were followed in *The Auk* by a note of only 6 lines about 3 Cape May Warblers eating grapes in fall migration, also in Pennsylvania (*The Auk* 32:233–234). A third note later appeared that year (*The Auk* 32:498), stating that Cape May Warblers were "unusually abundant" on Long Island during fall of 1914 , and that "they might be found at all hours of the day in the grape arbor, where they were observed to puncture the grape skins with their bills and drain out the juice."

So it appeared that fall of 1914 was a "flight year" for Cape May Warblers in eastern Pennsylvania and New York. Years later, Brooks (1933) related the story of the "flight year" in 1909 when all the grape crops were destroyed in his region of West Virginia by Cape Mays. They appeared again in 1910, but then did not appear again until September of 1931 when they appeared "in droves" and destroyed an unusually heavy grape crop in 2 days. As Brooks (1933) lamented, the Cape Mays "made one puncture, and the insects did the rest."

LITERATURE CITED

Brooks, M. (1933). Cape May Warblers destructive to grapes. Auk 50:222–223.

Leopold, A. (1949). A Sand County Almanac. Oxford University Press, New York.

Leopold, A., and A. E. Eynon (1961). Avian daybreak and evening song in relation to time and light intensity. Condor 63:269–293.

McAtee, W. F. (1904). Warblers and grapes. Auk 21:489–491.

Root, E. R. (1903). The ABC of Bee Cultures. Revised Edition. A. I. Root Company, Medina, Ohio.