



100 Years Ago in The American Ornithologists' Union

Author: Smith, Kimberly G.

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The first correspondence in the 1906 volume of *The Auk* is between Ernst Hartert, the author of a recent book on birds of the Palaearctic region (volume III of *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*), and J. A. Allen, Editor of *The Auk* and the reviewer of Hartert's recent book. Although not mentioning Allen by name (23:120–122), Hartert took exception to his book being called "inferior," "unsatisfactory," and containing "certain eccentricities." Hartert had not used any subgenera in his classifications, contending that subgeneric classifications were useless and meaningless. In his rebuttal, Allen contended that some people agree that subgenera are "unnecessary," but they are "few and far between." Allen (23:122–125) conceded that maybe "eccentricities" was too strong a word, but he contended that the work was a "little extraordinary" in that Hartert apparently completely ignored the long-standing rule that "adjectival specific names must agree in gender with the generic name with which they are associated." Allen stated that "for one author to rebel against such a general consensus of opinion, even on the plea of conserving stability in nomenclature, is to introduce a jarring element not at all conducive to either harmony or uniformity," leading him to conclude "it is therefore all the more to be regretted that he has gone so far beyond the original intention of the non-emendation principle as to make it a menace rather than an aid to stability in nomenclature."

Ernst Johann Otto Hartert (1859–1933) collected birds all over the world and worked in museums in Germany and England before being named the first Director of Rothschild Zoological Museum at Tring in the fall of 1892, a position he held for 38 years. He was made a Corresponding Fellow in the AOU in 1891 and an Honorary Fellow in 1902. He was Secretary of the 4th International Ornithological Congress in 1905 and was instrumental in restarting the congresses after World War I, serving as President at the 1926 meeting in Copenhagen.

In Hartert's obituary in *The Auk* (51:283–286), Ernst Mayr stated that "*Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*...will always be one of the classics of ornithological literature. It was the first ornithological work in which the modern principles of classification (broad genera and consistent application of trinomials for geographical representatives) were rigorously applied. It is still today the 'bible' of the Old World ornithologist, and it is primarily responsible for the unparalleled development of Old World ornithology during the last generation." As evidenced by Allen's critique above, Hartert was really way ahead of his time in his use of nomenclature. Mayr referred to Hartert as "one of the greatest ornithologists of all times."

After the 1905 meeting, a committee was formed to discuss the publishing of another edition of the *Check-list of North American Birds*. The edition published in 1886 was deemed out of date, because "in these days of rapid progress in zoological research, twenty years is a long period." However, it was necessary to review the AOU Code before starting on a new Check-list, so a special Code Committee was formed, consisting of J. A. Allen (chairman), Theodore Gill, Henry W. Henshaw, Harry C. Oberholser, Wilfrid H. Osgood, Charles W. Richmond, and Witmer Stone. The committee met in Washington, D.C., for four days, starting on 11 December 1905, and generally agreed unanimously on all changes to the code. A special meeting of the AOU Council was called for mid-January to receive the report, and a meeting of the Nomenclature Committee was to follow to begin the new edition. In a letter to the Editor (23:245), Walter K. Fisher asked that the Committee pay some attention to common names of birds in the new edition:

Names which can be improved upon are such as Louisiana Tanager, Arkansas Kingbird, Arkansas Goldfinch, and possibly a few others with inappropriate geographical handles. Western Tanager has been in literature for

fifteen years and is a better name. I leave the others to the tender mercies of a committee.

The third edition of the Check-list was published in 1910.

In other correspondence (23:246), A. H. Estabrook questioned what progress was being made on the eradication program for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). Seventeen years earlier, the U.S. Department of Agriculture had issued an urgent appeal to deal with this species, and some states, such as Michigan, had started bounty programs for sparrows. Estabrook was of the opinion that "if the whole county is prepared to act in this matter, it is confidently believed that the species can be exterminated from the Continent." The next year, he published results of a survey (Estabrook 1907) that showed that the House Sparrow was well established across the United States, but he still thought extermination was possible:

The letters I have received show that some here, some there, are doing honest work toward sparrow extermination, and while I do not want in the least to discourage them in their efforts, the results are only temporary and the work must be kept up continually. If one State or group of States set to work carefully within their borders, some lasting results will be obtained and the continuous work need only be kept up on the borders of the territory where the sparrow has been exterminated. But a far better way is to have the whole country do this extermination, now, at once, and all over the United States.

It was reported that the collections at Stanford University and at the University of California, Berkeley, had survived the San Francisco earthquake and fire unscathed, but that the California Academy of Sciences building was a total loss. This included a bird collection of 25,000 specimens, featuring seabirds in particular, and a very large ornithology library with many rare books.

How fast can birds fly? Reports from watching birds at night with telescopes estimated that they can fly as fast as 130 miles per hour (about 200 km per hour). This estimate was questioned in a letter by F. A. Lucas (23:479), who observed

that trains traveling at 30 to 50 miles per hour (50 to 80 km per hour) commonly pass birds and ducks flying in the same direction. He further states: "the most enthusiastic gunner would hardly credit a Quandy going down wind with more than seventy-five miles an hour (120 km an hour)." Further, homing pigeons have been shown to return over long distances at just about 1 mile per minute (1.6 km per minute). He concludes that "In view of these facts one may be pardoned for suspecting some error in calculations that ascribe a speed of one hundred and thirty miles per hour to small birds." (Oh, yes, a Quandy is a Long-tailed Duck [*Clangula hyemalis*].)

The first annual meeting of the National Association of Audubon Societies was held on 31 October 1905 in the American Museum of Natural History. Several hundred people attended the afternoon session, where "the principal topic of discussion was cats, in their relation to bird protection." The principal speakers were Dr. George W. Field, President of the Massachusetts Fish and Game Commission; Dr. T. S. Palmer, Biological Survey, Washington; Rev. William Lord, Massachusetts, and Mr. Frank M. Chapman. It seemed to be agreed that if cats could be kept at home, and their owners made responsible for them, as in the case of dogs and other domestic animals, the lives of multitudes of wild birds would be annually saved. At the close of the discussion the following resolution was adopted: "Resolved, that in the interests of humanity and bird protection the National Association of Audubon Societies endorses the movement to make the owners of cats responsible for their acts and welfare."—KIMBERLY G. SMITH, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA. E-mail: kgsmith@uark.edu*

LITERATURE CITED

- ESTABROOK, A. H. 1907. The present status of the English Sparrow problem in America. *Auk* 24:129–134.