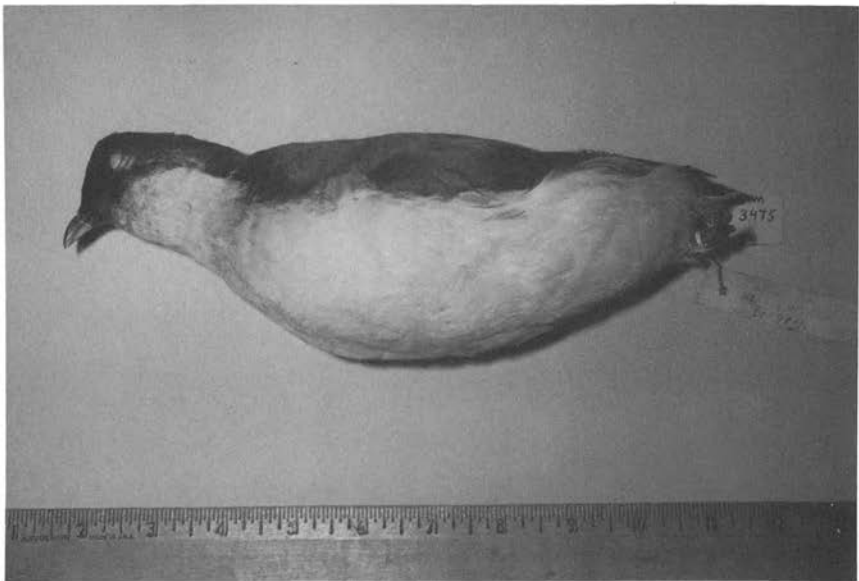


THE REAL FIRST RECORD OF ANCIENT MURRELET FOR MASSACHUSETTS?

by Franklin C. Haas

On November 8, 1992, Matthew Spence found Pennsylvania's first Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) at Lake Ontelaunee, Berks County. Unfortunately, I was birding in another part of the state and did not hear about it until that night. The next day I and many other birders futilely searched Lake Ontelaunee for the bird. While standing on the shoreline talking with Matt about the vagrancy of this species, I mentioned that the easternmost record for the United States, according to DeSante and Pyle (1986), was in Ohio. Matt responded that while working in the Reading (Pennsylvania) Public Museum several years ago, he had come across a specimen labeled as a Dovekie (*Alle*) that was actually an Ancient Murrelet. He said that it had been collected in Boston Harbor!

Upon hearing shortly thereafter that an Ancient Murrelet had been reported from Halibut Point, Cape Ann, Massachusetts, I decided to follow up on this story. Because of other commitments, I was unable to visit the museum until July 1993. I found the specimen in question and present the details here.



Ancient Murrelet, Specimen at the Reading Public Museum, Reading, PA
Photo by Franklin C. Haas

Ancient Murrelet Records for Eastern North America

Location	Date	Source
Jefferson County, Wisconsin	October ?, 1882	Robbins (1991)
Toronto, Ontario	November 18, 1901	James et al. (1976)
Lake Hook, Minnesota	November 5, 1905	Green and Janssen (1975)
Fort Erie, Ontario	November 15, 1908	James et al. (1976)
Montreal, Quebec	April 13, 1913	Godfrey (1966)
Columbia County, Wisconsin	December 9, 1941	Robbins (1991)
Cutfoot Sioux Lake, Minnesota	November 22, 1950	Green and Janssen (1975)
Sandusky Bay, Ohio (2 birds)	March 28, 1951	Thomson (1983)
Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana	May 6, 1954	Lowery (1974)
Pelican Lake, Minnesota	November 14, 1961	Green and Janssen (1975)
Rusk County, Wisconsin	November 10, 1964	Robbins (1991)
Ottawa County, Michigan	July 7, 1965	Payne (1983)
Madison, Wisconsin	April 2, 1967	Robbins (1991)
Fort Ripley, Minnesota	February 28, 1969	Green and Janssen (1975)
Lake Kabetogama, Minnesota	October ?, 1970	Green and Janssen (1975)
Barron, Wisconsin	November 12, 1975	Robbins (1991)
Gary, Indiana	November 8, 1976	Mlodinow (1984)
Lake Winnibigoshish, Minnesota	late October 1979	NAS (1980)
Evanston & Wilmette, Illinois	November 16-21, 1982	Mlodinow (1984)
Crystal Lake, Iowa	October 28, 1987	Hansen (1988)
Whitefish Point, Michigan	November 25-26, 1989	NAS (1990)
Lake Ontelaunee, Pennsylvania	November 8, 1992	Wlasniewski (1992)
Rockport, Massachusetts	November 29, 1992	Forster (1993)

The specimen appeared to be an adult in nonbreeding plumage. The bird was basically dark above and white below. The black on the head extended down to just below the eye and to the base of the nape and was noticeably darker than the dark gray back and wings. There were no wingbars or other white markings on the head, back, or wings. The bill was pale yellow with a small dark tip. The feet were yellow with dark webs. The specimen was noticeably larger, in bulk and length, than adjacent Dovekie specimens, even though it was not prepared in a flat-out position (the head was tilted forward, while the Dovekies' heads were prepared parallel to the back).

Although it was the only Ancient Murrelet specimen there, I examined two dozen specimens at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. There were at least ten in a plumage similar to the Reading specimen, and although some of them had dark feet, many of them had feet that had yellowed and matched the pattern of the Reading specimen (color changes in the bare parts of prepared specimens are not unusual).

Unfortunately, the documentation attached to the Reading specimen is incomplete. Two tags are on the bird. The first one is a small tag with the number RPM 3475. RPM stands for Reading Public Museum. The other tag is written on both sides. This tag appears to be the original tag attached to the specimen. One side has the following written on it:

~~Alle (Linn.)~~
~~Dovekie~~ Ancient Murrelet
Collected in Boston Harbor, Mass.

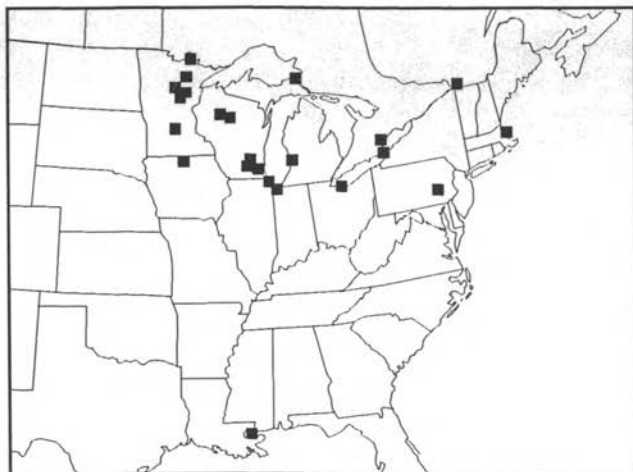
The *Alle* and *Dovekie* are crossed out, and Ancient Murrelet is written in a different handwriting (presumably by Matt Spence). The other side of the tag has the following:

34. Received in ??? from
Frank Webster
27-98-1

The ??? represents a word that I cannot decipher. The 27-98-1 is in a different ink and style and represents the acquisition number of the museum. I am guessing that the tag was on the bird when the museum received it, and the acquisition number was added by museum personnel.

The museum records indicate that this specimen was purchased from a Phillip Laurent on January 15, 1927. There are no other details on the date collected or the whereabouts of the two named individuals.

If anyone in Massachusetts is familiar with either of these names in conjunction with early twentieth century ornithology, both the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee and I would be interested in any information that might shed some light on this specimen.



Ancient Murrelet Records for Eastern North America

Ancient Murrelets are known as extralimital wanderers with at least twenty-three records from the eastern half of North America (not including the subject record). In 1992, for the first time ever, more than one Ancient Murrelet was recorded in different locations in eastern North America (two birds were pulled out of a fishing net in Ohio in 1951). November is the prime month with twelve records, followed by October with four, April with two, and December, February, March, May, and July with one each. The July record was a partially decomposed specimen found on the shore of Lake Michigan (James Granlund, pers. comm.). November appears to be the month most likely to produce future records.

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FRANKLIN C. HAAS publishes and edits *Pennsylvania Birds* with his wife. He is the secretary of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee. Additional photographs supplied by Mr. Haas were provided to the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee, which is reviewing this early report of an Ancient Murrelet in Massachusetts.

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