

CORRESPONDENCE

Kennard on Snow Geese

Editor of the Auk:

To the casual reader of the editor's review in these pages (44, No. 2, p. 276-278) of Mr. Kennard's article on Snow Geese (Proc. N. E. Zool. Cl. 9, 16 Feb. 1927, p. 85-93) it would appear that Mr. Kennard had attempted to prove the specific difference of the Greater and Lesser Snow Goose on the basis of measurements alone and that in giving a new name to the larger bird he had ignored a previous restriction of Forster's *Anas nivalis*.

A careful perusal of Mr. Kennard's account will show that he did not base specific distinctions on size alone, but that he especially stressed the following characters: the color of the tarsus of the downy young Lesser Snow Goose is black, while the downy young of the Greater is 'mummy brown' or 'dark citrine.' There is also a constant color difference in the tarsi of immature examples of both species. Furthermore a table of *weights* of adult specimens shows no overlapping, but on the contrary brings out very well the important character of the much "stockier build" of the Greater Snow Goose.

The editor claims that Cassin (Proc. Ac. Nat. Sci. Phila., 8, 1857, p. 41) "years later" restricted Forster's name *nivalis* to the greater Snow Goose, and that Cassin's action takes precedence over Kennard's. This would be the case if Cassin had actually "restricted" *nivalis* and had had the true facts behind him, but he did nothing of the kind. He distinguished for the first time the two Snow Geese, applying *Anser hyperboreus* Pallas to the "larger bird more frequent on the Atlantic coast of North America" under which he cited Forster's name as a synonym, and described *Anser albatrus* "western and Northern America, Oregon, rare on the Atlantic." In other words Cassin was mistaken regarding the identity of Pallas' bird, which was certainly a Lesser Snow Goose, and if he did any 'restricting' at all he restricted *hyperboreus* to the Greater Snow Goose, an obvious error that cannot stand as a valid action in face of the facts. Placing *nivalis* as a synonym does not constitute a separate restriction: it must stand or fall with *hyperboreus*.

Mr. Kennard has shown that Forster's description is not sufficient to determine whether the birds he described were Greater or Lesser Snow Geese. Forster apparently was familiar with a white Goose in literature, and he included references that applied to both species, but the specimens he described came from the Severn River, where Mr. Kennard has shown only the Lesser Snow Goose occurs and where at the present time, as it did then, it migrates through in thousands. Forster says, "These white geese are very numerous at Hudson's Bay many thousands being killed annually with the gun." There is no reason to suppose that the snow geese of Hudson Bay in Forster's time belonged to a different species

from the one found there today, so we must take into account all that Forster says of its movements and occurrence there, as Mr. Kennard has done, and thus fix the name with a degree of certainty that is impossible if we depend on the description alone.

The editor argues that this case is analogous to that of subsequent designation of generic types where the ultimate result is quite different from that possibly intended by the original proposer of the genus, but the analogy is misleading for the genus is an artificial grouping whose limits are pretty much a matter of individual opinion, while the species is a natural unit that cannot be dealt with in such an arbitrary fashion.

An arbitrary restriction of a name to a particular species cannot stand after new evidence reveals an error. This evidence we believe Mr. Kennard has furnished conclusively, and the misapplication of names, used for many years for the Snow Geese through ignorance of their relationships, their migrating routes and winter and summer ranges, should be rectified on the basis of present day knowledge, not perpetuated in deference to the unwitting blunder of an early ornithologist.

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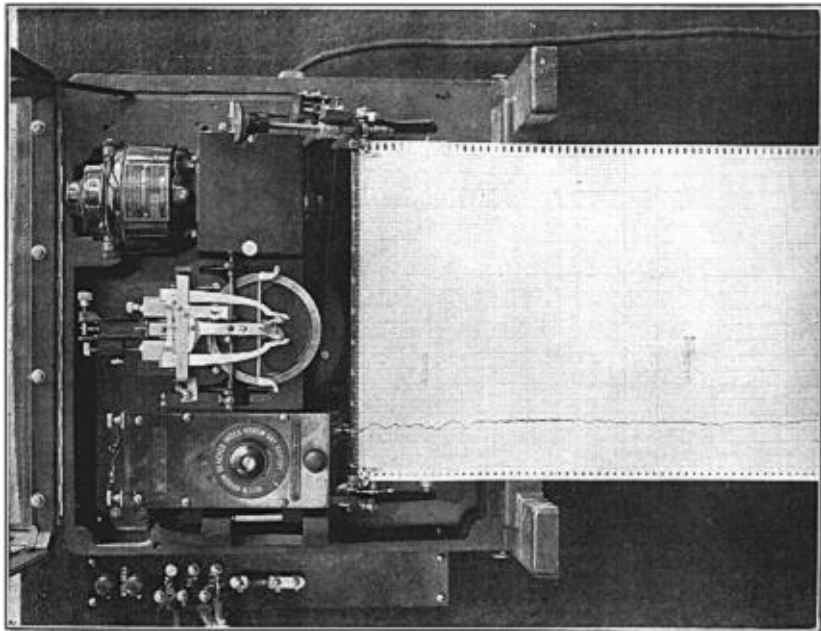
[The Editor has only praise for the ornithology of Mr. Kennard's excellent paper but wished to point out the possibility of differences of opinion regarding the nomenclatural problems involved. He was careful to state that "others may not agree with our views" and in this, at least, he seems to be correct! He still maintains that there are two sides to the question as the rules of nomenclature unfortunately do not recognize the rectifying of "unwitting blunders."—W. S.]

Snowy Owl Report

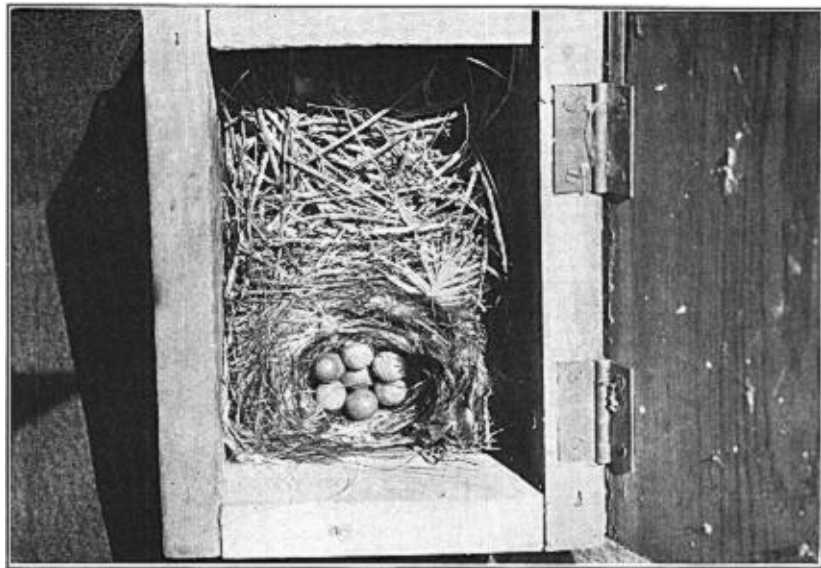
The Editor acknowledges with thanks all the data on Snow Owls kindly submitted by correspondents. The letters were all sent to Prof. A. O. Gross who had already collected much material from New England and who was likewise in receipt of the data gathered by Mr. Ruthven Deane. Prof. Gross has prepared a summary of the flight which will appear in the October 'Auk.'



1. NEST AND EGGS OF GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER, CROSS PLAINS, WIS.
2. NEST AND EGGS OF KENTUCKY WARBLER, WITH TWO EGGS OF THE COWBIRD,
POTOSI, WIS.



1. TEMPERATURE RECORDER.



2. POSITION OF THERMOCOUPLE IN NEST LIKE A
THREAD ACROSS THE EGGS.