

LABRADOR RECORDS OF EUROPEAN BIRDS.

BY O. L. AUSTIN, JR.

WHEN Mr. H. F. Witherby published his "A Transatlantic Flight of Lapwings" (*British Birds*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, June, 1928, pp. 6-13; reprinted in *Bird Lore*, Vol. XXX, No. 4, 1928, p. 248) all the data on that remarkable flight had not yet come to light. This is especially true of the occurrence of the birds in Newfoundland Labrador. He mentions in his paper solely a radio message from Commander MacMillan stating that the Lapwings were seen near Nain on December 22nd. On my trip along the coast this past summer, I procured from the natives several skins of European species, Lapwings and three others, together with a few facts concerning their arrival and sojourn on the coast. Through the courtesy of Dr. Hellmayr of the Field Museum of Chicago, I am able to incorporate the complete data of the European birds collected by the Rawson-MacMillan Expedition with my own notes.

I reached Battle Harbor early in June. The natives told me several Lapwings had been seen there, and though a few had been killed, no specimens had been saved. Nobody knew the exact date of their arrival, except that it was during a spell of exceedingly mild weather during the week before Christmas. The same story was echoed all along the coast, and I saw no proof of the occurrence of the birds until I reached Gready. Robert Stevenson, the wireless operator there, had saved for me a live female Lapwing which was one of a pair that had been wing-tipped by a hungry native when the birds arrived in December and kept alive in his hut all winter. The male perished from cold and neglect, but the female managed to pull through—probably because it was not as badly wounded as its mate. Stevenson bought it from the native at Easter time, and kept it alive on a diet of oatmeal, mussels and chopped seal and whale meat. We took the bird aboard the "Ariel" August 23 and tried to bring it home alive in a crude cage on deck. It seemed healthy, spirited and contented in its new surroundings, eating all the mussels

we could open and all the whale meat we could chop up for it. But, for no apparent reason, it died suddenly two weeks later during a rainy, stormy night off the west coast of Newfoundland. I saved the rather bedraggled skin, and performed an autopsy which showed nothing but the atrophied wing-tip, extreme emaciation and a trace of biliousness.

Stevenson told me the Lapwings were numerous in Sandwich Bay and Hamilton Inlet, between Gready and Northwest River. They occurred in flocks numbering from ten to fifty individuals apiece. He could give no accurate dates, but reiterated the statement concerning the mildness of the weather when the birds arrived.

Dying of either starvation or cold must have been the fate of all the birds that reached Labrador and were not shot. My only other Lapwing specimen is one that an Eskimo woman at Makkovik found dead in April, after the snow had partially melted and exposed the carcass. Such was its state of preservation in this excellent natural cold-storage, that she was able to make a very fair flat skin of it. Every native I interviewed who had killed any of the birds complained that they were much too poor and thin to eat, which is quite an admission from either a Live-yere or an Eskimo.

The two skins of Lapwings brought back by the Rawson-MacMillan Expedition were taken near Hopedale (not Nain). One of these, a male, was shot December 24, 1927; the other, not sexed, late in December, 1927. Both skins have traces of immaturity, which neither of my skins shows. These two Hopedale records comprise the northernmost known occurrence of the species during the flight.

Stevenson, at Gready, saved me the skin of a European Coot, *Fulica atra atra* Linn., which was taken at Separation Point, Sandwich Bay, during the week preceeding Christmas, 1927. The bird was not sexed. I have compared it with the excellent series in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and find its identity beyond question. Mr. Zimmer of the Field Museum found a female taken by the Rawson-MacMillan Expedition at Tangnauvik Island, Anatalak Bay, late in December, to be identical with the series of the European species in that Museum. These two

specimens are the first definite records of the European Coot in continental North America, the A. O. U. 'Check List' giving solely "casual in Greenland."

There are two records of the occurrence in Labrador of the American Coot, *Fulica americana* Gmelin, the only ones to my knowledge for the species on our Atlantic coast north of the south shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. One of these is recorded from Nain by Turner in 1880, the other from Sandwich Bay by Dr. Grenfell in 1899 (Townsend and Allen, "Birds of Labrador," Proc. Bost. Soc. Nat. Hist., No. 7, 1906, pp. 345-346). It is unfortunate that neither specimen is preserved. The European Coot differs from the American only in lacking the white markings on the edge of the wing and under tail-coverts, differences which, not knowing the existence of these characters or suspecting the occurrence of the European bird, only a person of extremely acute perception would notice or remember. Turner did not personally see the bird he records—it was described to him by a native so accurately that he was able to identify it "beyond possibility of doubt." No one with sufficient knowledge to differentiate between the two species saw the specimen of which Dr. Grenfell tells. Hence I believe it more likely that both birds were of the European rather than the American species.

Of more importance are two shore-bird skins I bought from another Eskimo woman at Makkovik. She brought them to me, wanting to know what they were, as neither she nor any one else there had ever seen birds like them. On comparing the two skins with specimens in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, I find one to be a European Common Snipe, *Capella gallinago gallinago* (Linn), and the other a European Jack Snipe, *Limnocryptes minimus* (Brünn). Of course, neither bird is sexed. They are both open, flat skins, and exceedingly good ones for native products. The Eskimo woman killed them December 24, 1927, near her winter house in Jack Lane's Bay. They were undoubtedly driven over by the same storm that brought us the Lapwings.

I was surprised that the Eskimo regarded the Common Snipe as a strange bird. It differs from our Wilson's Snipe only in the width of the black and white bands of the axillaries (my specimen

shows the white bands distinctly wider than the black), and earlier in the same day on which I bought the skins, I flushed four and collected one Wilson's Snipe in a swamp within a hundred yards of her hut. They nest commonly at Makkovik and are not an uncommon bird in the interior and on the coast as far north as Jim Webb's Bay. However, these Labrador breeders must be well on their way south by December.

The 'Check-List' gives *Capella gallinago gallinago* as casual in Greenland and accidental in Bermuda, so that this is its first continental record. The only previous record for *Limnocyptes minimus* within the precincts of the North American list is one taken the spring of 1919, probably April, on St. Paul's Island in the Pribilof Group (Condor, XXII, September, 1920, p. 173.)

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