

THE FIRST RECORDED LISTS OF BIRDS IN THE  
UNITED STATES.

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IN the January, 1933, number of 'The Auk' Dr. T. S. Palmer in reporting on the Fiftieth Meeting of the A. O. U. refers to a paper by Bayard A. Christy on Topsell's 'Fowles of Heauen,' a manuscript discovered in the Huntington Library at San Marino, California. This manuscript written about 1614, or just prior thereto, contains an early list, with descriptions, of Virginia birds (The Auk, 50, July 1933, pp. 275-283). Doctor Palmer stated that so far as is known this is the earliest list of American birds. Dr. J. J. Murray, President of the Ornithological Society of Virginia, writing Doctor Palmer about this statement reported that he thought there were earlier lists for the southeastern part of the United States and still earlier notes for other parts of the continent. This view he later supported in his 'A Brief History of Virginia Ornithology' (The Raven, March, 1933, vol. 4, pp. 2-11) for he states:

"Ornithological observations in Virginia date back to the earliest years of the seventeenth century. The earliest bird notes from the North American continent, according to a paper read at the last meeting of the A. O. U., come from Canada and are to be found in the writings of Jacques Cartier (1534), one of the early French explorers (The Auk, January 1933, p. 68). Strange to say the ornithological notes from the far southwestern State of New Mexico antedate all others in the United States by virtue of the observations made on Coronado's expedition in 1540-1549 (Birds of New Mexico by Mrs. F. M. Bailey, pp. 1-15). North Carolina comes first among the eastern states, notes of birds having been made on Roanoke Island in 1584 by Captain Barlowe and in 1586 by Thomas Hariot (Birds of North Carolina by Pearson and the Brimleys, p. 1). Virginia comes third among the states, mention of the Red-winged Blackbird occurring as early as 1606 in the papers of George Percy, and a fairly extensive list of birds being given in 1610-1612 by William Strachey, one of the Jamestown colonists, in his book 'The Historie of travaile into Virginia Brittania,' which was printed many years later (1849) in London for the Hakluyt Society" (The Raven, March 1933, vol. 4, pp. 2-11).

Because of its connection with Jamestown and naturalist developments in the Colonial National Monument I became interested

in this list of Strachey's. Having procured the volume from the Library of Congress I was able to substantiate Doctor Murray's statement that earlier lists than that of Topsell are known. Since Topsell states that he is indebted to Doctor Bonham for some of his descriptions and to Mr. Richard Hakluyt for a picture of a Towhee, he may have obtained some of his material from colonist Strachey's writings.

William Strachey's paragraphs relating to birds (pp. 125-126) though quoted in Rives' 'A Catalogue of the Birds of the Virginias' (1890), are again quoted here. In addition to furnishing proof of an actual list, rather than mere notes about birds, as early as 1612, the abstract will be enjoyed for its mention of the Carolina Parquet and Pasaenger Pigeon, both now extinct, as well as for the subject matter, quaint spelling and odd method of presentation:

"Likewise, as they have fruitcs and beasts, so have they fowle, and that great store. Of birdes, the eagle is the greatest devourer, and many of them there: there be divers sortes of hawkes, sparhawkes, laneretts, goshawkes, falcons, and ospreys; I brought home from thence this yeare myself, a falcon, and a tassell, the one sent by Sir Thomas Dale to his highnes the Prince, and the other was presented to the Earle of Salsburye, faire ones. What the prowf of them maie be, I have not learned, they prey most upon fish.

"Turkeys there be great store, wild in the woods, like phesants in England, forty in a company, as big as our tame here, and yt is an excellent fowle, and so passing good meat, as I maye well saie, yt is the best of any kind of flesh which I have ever yet eaten there.

"Partridges there are little bigger than our quailles! I have knowne of our men to have killed them with their small shott, sometime from off a tree five or six at a shoot.

"Cranes, white and grey; herons, both grey and white; woosells, or black byrds, with redd showlders; thrushes, and divers sorts of small byrdes, some carnation, some blew, and some other straunge kyndes, to us unknowne by name.

"In winter there are great store of swannes, geese, brants, duck, widgeon, dottrell, oxeyes, mallard, teale, sheldrakes, and divers diving fowles, and of all these sortes, that abundance, as I dare avowe yt, no country in the world may have more.

"Parakitoes I have seene manie in the winter, and knowne divers killed, yet be they a fowle most swift of wing, their winges and breasts are of a greenish cullour, with forked tayles, their heades, some crymsen, some yellowe, some orange-tawny, very beautifull. Some of our colonie who have seene of the East Indian parratts, affirme how they are like to

that kynd, which hath given us somewhat the more hope of the nerenes of the South Sea, these parratts, by all probability, like enough to come from some of the countreyes upon that sea.

“A kind of wood-pidgeon we see in the winter time, and of them such numbers, as I should drawe (from our homelings here, such who have seene, peradventure, scarce one more then in the markett) the creditt of my relation concerning all the other in question, yf I should expresse what extended flocks, and how manie thousands in one flock, I have seene in one daie, wondering (I must confesse) at their flight, when, like so many thickned clowdes, they (having fed to the norward in the dayetye) retourne againe more sowardly towards night to their roust; but there be manie hundred witnesses, who maie convince this my report, yf herein yt testifieth an untruth.”

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