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100 Years Ago in The Auk



From "A Plea for the Metric System in Ornithology," by C. Hart Merriam (1884 *Auk* 1: 203-205):

"It seems to me extremely unfortunate that most of our ornithological writers persist in the employment of the confusing and irrational system of inches and hundredths, or, still worse, inches and lines, in the measurement of birds and their eggs The metric system is so simple, and its advantages so numerous, that it has already become the acknowledged standard in all departments of science. Certainly none will gainsay that its universal adoption is inevitable sooner or later. Then why defer the hour and thereby increase the already too great number of measurements that must eventually be reduced to the metric system? The labor of converting a series of measurements from one scale to another is not small, and life is too short for busy men to be obliged thus needlessly to waste valuable time A glance at the scientific journals of the day shows that this system is in vogue in all parts of the world, not only among physicists and chemists, but also among naturalists. Even in the United States it is largely employed by mammalogists, osteologists, palaeontologists, herpe-

tologists, and ichthyologists; by those engaged in the study of our invertebrates, and by botanists. Why then should American ornithologists, who desire and profess to keep abreast of the progress of knowledge in their department, permit themselves to postpone the acceptance of this most useful addition to their armamentarium by the continued employment of a scale of linear measure that is incommensurable with others, incongruous in itself, and fast becoming obsolete?"

From "Notes and News" (1884 *Auk* 1: 207):

"The A.O.U. Committee on the 'Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds' has held a second session in Washington, lasting eighteen days, which was devoted mainly to a consideration of the status of the species and subspecies. From the progress already made, it seems probable that the Committee will be able to make a detailed and final report to the Union at its next meeting."