

# THE CONDOR

## A Bi-Monthly Magazine of Western Ornithology

---

Volume XXII

January-February, 1920

Number 1

[Issued January 26, 1920]

---

### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

By HENRY WETHERBEE HENSHAW

*(Continued from volume XXI, page 222)*

PROFESSOR SPENCER F. BAIRD

IN HIS historical summation of American ornithology, Dr. Coues has called the period of activity following the Audubonian era the Bairdian period. The name is well chosen, for America has produced no greater ornithologist. Whatever his errand to Washington, no bird lover in those days ever visited the city without calling on Prof. Baird, in his little office in the north tower of the Smithsonian. Baird's love of young men was as great as his modesty and urbanity, and no one ever left his presence without the impression that he had seen and talked with a really great man. So great was his personal magnetism that no one could long know without loving him. His wisdom and sound judgment were ever at the disposal of those in need, especially the young man struggling to gain a foothold on the ladder of science, and it has been given to few men in this country to wield the personal influence in science that he did. Though he had given up all active work in ornithology and other branches of natural science, before I saw him in 1872, in favor of administrative work, he was as keenly interested in the labors of others as ever, and his first question to the man just returned from the field was, "Well, what about the season's work? Tell me all about it".

For years he set apart his winter Sunday evenings to informally receive all friends who chose to call, and many used to avail themselves of the privilege, which insured a cordial welcome and a pleasant evening with the Professor and his wife and his daughter, Lucy. Mrs. Baird's injunction, "Now you must not talk shop in my parlor", was, I fear, frequently disregarded, chiefly owing to the Professor's keen desire to keep in close touch with everything that was going on in the domain of science. Interested as he was in other branches of natural science, I am sure that Baird's first love, the study of birds, ever held first place in his heart.

I saw Professor Baird for the last time just before he left Washington on what proved to be his last visit to Wood's Hole, where he died in August, 1887. A recent visit of several weeks to the place and to the surrounding scenes made

familiar to him by years of association often recalled him vividly to mind, and renewed the keen sense of personal loss which came to me when I first heard of his death. In his paper entitled "An Appreciation of Spencer Fullerton Baird" (*Science*, n. s., vol. 48, July 12, 1918) Professor Edwin Linton, speaking of his death, pays the following tribute to the memory of this great naturalist which so perfectly reflects my feelings and thoughts that I cannot forbear to quote his words. "I remember the day and the hour. It was afternoon, and the tide was low. I recall a picture of a red sun hanging over Long Neck and reflected in the still waters of Great Harbor, of sodden masses of seaweed on the dripping piles and on the boulder-strewn shore; and there rises again the thought that kept recurring then, that the sea is very ancient, that it ebbed and flowed before man appeared on the planet, and will ebb and flow after he and his works have disappeared; and a singular, indefinite impression came to me, as if something had passed that was, in some fashion, great, and mysterious, and ancient, like the sea itself."

#### MEETING WITH C. HART MERRIAM

It was in 1872 that I first met Dr. Merriam, then a boy of sixteen, just back from his first trip to the Yellowstone region with the Hayden Survey. He had much to tell of the wonders of the region, which then had been seen only by a favored few, and where he had made a valuable collection of birds, which we examined together with mutual interest. This was the beginning of a close friendship which has endured with no lessening to the present time.

#### COLLECTING SEASON OF 1873

In 1873 I spent several weeks at Fort Garland in southern Colorado, and here was able to devote more uninterrupted time to the study of birds than at any other place during my connection with the Survey. It was near here, at the base of Mt. Baldy, in June, that I discovered that the Williamson and Brown-backed woodpeckers were one and the same species, the former being the male. Chancing to shoot a female first, almost immediately I shot a male, and, laying them side by side, their relationship was at once apparent. Later I found mated pairs occupying the same cavity in live aspens, their favorite nesting tree, which of course was proof positive of their relationship. While it is true that, contrary to the rule that obtains among the woodpeckers, the male and female of the species are very differently colored, it is difficult to understand why the true facts of the case should so long have escaped the notice of closet ornithologists. The subject is mentioned here, not because of its importance, but because of the great interest the statement of the facts at the time called forth.

While spending a week on the Rio Grande, ninety miles northeast of the fort at the summer cavalry camp, a rather remarkable incident occurred which may be worth mentioning as it could hardly occur today. The ridges above and back from the river were clothed with pines and heavily brushed in places, and at that season (middle June) were a favorite resort of bears, signs of which abounded. One morning I shot a junco out of a small tree, which fell in a dense thicket, and I was a good deal surprised, to put it mildly, when, following the report, a large bear tore through the brush only a few feet away. That he made excellent time his tracks subsequently showed, but as I had the down hill side of the proposition I am sure he did not run so fast as I did. On returning to

claim my specimen, I found that the bird had actually fallen on his bearship as he lay snugly curled up asleep.

The large collection of birds made by me during this season was further enriched by a collection of some two hundred specimens made by Dr. J. T. Rothrock and Dr. C. G. Newberry in Colorado.

#### ACQUAINTANCE WITH CAPTAIN CHARLES E. BENDIRE

It was in this year also that on my way to Denver for the field season I called on Captain Chas. E. Bendire, then stationed in St. Louis. Some correspondence on bird matters had passed between us, and I received a cordial greeting which led to a pleasant acquaintance of many years' standing. Later, in 1889, I spent a few days with him at Camp Walla Walla, Oregon, where he was stationed for several years. Though the Captain was an enthusiastic and most successful collector of eggs, he was also much interested in birds, and from first to last collected many, not a few of them new or rare. He was, too, an excellent observer, as was abundantly proved when he came to write his "Life Histories of North American Birds" which, to the great loss of ornithology, he did not live to finish. After his retirement, he made Washington his permanent home.

When I found he was in doubt as to the best place of deposit for his magnificent collection of eggs, the fruit of years of collecting in the western wilds, I endeavored to influence him in favor of the National Museum. Though he seemed to be impressed by the advantages suggested he did not at once make up his mind. I therefore explained the situation to Prof. Baird, who talked the matter over with him, with the result that he presented his collection to the Museum. He was appointed Curator of Oology, and for many years had the care of his beloved eggs, and did much to build up the Museum oological collection to the preëminent position it came to occupy.

#### MEET C. E. AIKEN AT COLORADO SPRINGS

On my way to Washington from Arizona in the fall of 1873 I stopped off at Colorado Springs to make the acquaintance of Mr. C. E. Aiken, with whom I had had correspondence when he was living in Chicago. Finding that he was at his father's sheep ranch at Fountain, a few miles off in the foot-hills, I procured a saddle horse and in a few hours was talking birds with him at the ranch. He had already begun the collection of Colorado birds. The following season, 1874, Mr. Aiken joined the Survey and made a fine collection of birds in southern Colorado, amounting to over three hundred specimens.

#### APACHES OF ARIZONA

During this trip and that of 1874 I saw much of the Apaches, then somewhat in their primitive state; and a wild lot they were. Though many were armed with guns of antique pattern, they had by no means entirely relinquished the bow and arrow. Most of the arrows were tipped with hoop iron, but some of them had stone points, which, however, they no longer manufactured, so far as I could find out, but picked up, the heritage from a former generation. Many of them still carried long, iron-tipped spears, but these, though wicked looking weapons, so far as I could ascertain served chiefly to play a favorite gambling game which consisted in hurling them through the air to a distance and noting their relative positions. Altogether, they proved the wildest Indians I had ever seen, and confidence in their brotherly love and good-will

was in nowise strengthened by the numerous graves visible along every road and trail we travelled, all telling the same tale: "Killed by Apaches". Many of the headboards testified to the fact that the victims were women and children from distant states in search of homes, and little imagination was required to picture the sad fate meted out to them by unrestrained savage ferocity.

Apparently these particular Apaches had never seen a breech-loading shot-gun; and when, near Camp Apache, a couple of them, employed as guides, pointed out to me a bit of cover where a Massena Partridge had taken refuge—a bird I had long looked for in vain—great was their astonishment when I put it up and killed it on the wing as it flew away. A few days afterwards old Pedro, the chief of the band, with a dozen followers, came to our camp with an interpreter and asked to see the man who could kill flying birds with a gun. They examined the gun with great interest, and presently requested to see a specimen of my skill. When I killed a raven as it was flying over the camp I became in their eyes a man of mark, and Pedro, taking me aside, pulled from under his blanket a goodly sized bag of coin which he offered for the big medicine gun, and appeared much chagrined at my refusal to sell it to him.

#### FIELD SEASON OF 1874

My trip in 1874 from Santa Fe southward across the Gila via Fort Wingate, Zuni, and Camp Apache, to Camp Grant and Bowie not only yielded large collections in the several branches of natural history, but more rarities than any other made by me. Not only was much of the country traversed comparatively unknown, but the attention of the small party of three, consisting of Dr. J. T. Rothrock, Botanist, James M. Rutter, Assistant, and myself, could be given entirely to natural history work. At Camp Grant I obtained the first specimen of the Refulgent Hummingbird, a Mexican species not hitherto detected within our limits. The Santa Rita Mountains yielded another hummingbird new to our fauna, the Broad-billed (*Iache latirostris*), while in the neighborhood of Camp Bowie was found still a third species, the Slender-tailed Hummer (*Calothorax lucifer*). The beautiful little Red-faced Warbler, also new to our fauna, was found to be not uncommon near Camp Apache and on Mount Graham, while at old Camp Crittenden two other additions to our fauna were made—the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*), and the Arizona Woodpecker (*Dryobates arizonae*).

Even on this, my most productive trip, however, comparatively little time could be spent in any one locality, and a day or two of hurried work was often all that could be spared to a locality which would have well repaid weeks or even months of labor, as was proven by the results obtained by other collectors years after my brief visits. Moreover, the changed conception of species and subspecies, and the accumulation of series of specimens from various parts of the country, especially in private collections, resulted in the description as new of many birds first collected by the Wheeler Expedition. Some of these, indeed, were thought to be new when collected, but were passed by until their status could be more satisfactorily determined by additional specimens or larger series. As examples I may cite the following:

*Baeolophus inornatus griseus*, Iron City, Utah, 1872; *Hylocichla fuscescens salicicola*, Fort Garland, Colorado, 1873; *Certhia familiaris montana*, Camp Apache, Arizona, 1873; *Otocoris alpestris arenicola*, Denver, Colorado, 1873; *Meleagris gallopavo merriami*, Camp Apache, 1873; *Junco cinereus palliatus*,

Mt. Graham, Arizona, 1875; *Chamaea fasciata henshawi*, Walker's Basin, California, 1875; *Hylocichla ustulata oedica*, Santa Barbara, California, 1875; *Aphelocoma insularis*, Santa Cruz Island, California, 1875.

#### FIELD SEASON OF 1875

In 1875 the operations of the Survey extended to California, which I had long desired to visit. Field work began June 1, when Dr. Rothrock, Dr. Loew, and myself visited Santa Cruz Island in the Santa Barbara Channel, then almost wholly given up to sheep raising, for the purpose not only of making natural history collections but of participating in the investigations of Paul Schumacher, who was then engaged in archaeological researches in behalf of the Smithsonian Institution. Though only a few days were spent on the islands a number of interesting birds were collected there, including the types of the Island Jay (*Aphelocoma insularis* Henshaw). Here also, were obtained the first specimens of the Island Shore Lark, subsequently named by Townsend, *Otocoris alpestris insularis*. Mr. Ridgway and myself both believed this insular form to be distinct, but as the specimens I secured were in extremely worn plumage, I decided to wait the reception of better specimens before describing it as new.

Santa Cruz Island, and probably also the other islands of the group, was then inhabited by a small race of the gray fox (*Vulpes littoralis*) which not only existed in incredible numbers, but was so tame as to permit its habits to be studied at close range. Having apparently no enemies the foxes had not contracted the fear habit, and, indeed, exhibited more curiosity than fear.

June 15 we joined the main party at Los Angeles, then only a small hamlet with a population containing a large admixture of Mexicans and with little about it to suggest the metropolis of later years. The pasture in which we camped and made ready for the field is now in the heart of a populous and ever growing city.

At Los Angeles the original plan of field work was changed so as to permit a small party to return to Santa Barbara with a pack outfit, and prosecute archaeological researches in that neighborhood under the direction of Dr. H. C. Yarrow. We reached Santa Barbara June 24, and I was greatly impressed with the beauty of the place. The town was then in very primitive condition, a quaint old-fashioned Spanish settlement, with no connection with the outside world by railroad and with only two steamers weekly. Almost entirely hemmed in on three sides by lofty and picturesque mountains and sea girt on the fourth side, it possesses a climate of its own, and I afterwards came to consider it the most inviting place on the Pacific to live in, an opinion evidently shared by thousands of others who have made the place their permanent home.

Having obtained permission from the Moore Brothers we made Moore's Island our base camp, this being ten or more miles from the town. Here we were engaged till July 13 excavating the Indian burial places which abounded in the vicinity, and also in making natural history collections.

The Santa Barbara Islands and adjacent mainland were apparently thickly populated till well within historic times by kindred tribes whose chief subsistence was gained from the sea, which teemed with fish and mollusks and, in those days, with seals and sea-otters. The old cemeteries were easily found, as the natives apparently always marked their site by placing above the dead the bones of whales; and tons of Indian belongings, mostly of steatite, includ-

ing mortars, pestles, dishes and utensils of various sorts were unearthed and sent to Washington to enrich the National Museum and other museums throughout the world.

July 13, the work at Santa Barbara being finished, the party marched to Old Fort Tejon, via the Casitas pass to the Ojai and Santa Clara Valley, through San Francisquito Pass to La Liebre ranch and past Castac Lake to the Tejon. Here a month was spent in collecting in the general vicinity. Near the old fort were taken the first specimens of the Pallid Wren-tit. Subsequently specimens were secured in Walker's Basin, which was designated by Ridgway as the type locality of the form. September 4, our party merged into a larger one, and we set out for the Mount Whitney region where we stayed till into October, when we proceeded to Walker's Basin and spent about a fortnight, and then repaired to Caliente and disbanded for the season. During this trip, 700 bird skins were collected, included in 127 species.

One of the notable California birds I particularly desired to see was the California Condor, the largest of its kind, and one of the largest birds in the world, which at that time was supposed to be approaching extinction. No man's hand was raised against it, but hundreds fell victims of the poisoned meat which the sheep herders put out for the purpose of killing the bears, cougars, and coyotes which preyed upon the sheep.

Though I kept a sharp look-out for the bird, it was not until several years later (1884) that I enjoyed the sight of a live vulture. While at the San Antonio Mission, in what is now Monterey County, September 27, engaged on Indian work, I saw four individuals circling about high in air and a notable sight they were. Finding that they were still not uncommon in the region I hired a hunter to obtain specimens, and in a few days was gratified by the possession of three. Two of them I weighed and measured. One weighed twenty pounds, and had a spread of wing of eight feet, nine inches; the other weighed twenty-three pounds with a spread of nine feet one inch. Females are no doubt still larger. It is a pleasure to record that at this time of writing the condor is still extant in several of its native haunts, though apparently not so numerous as when I obtained my specimens.

#### FIELD SEASON OF 1876

The field season of 1876 was unusually short owing to the late date of our appropriation and it was not until the last of August that I began work at Carson, Nevada. After collecting in that neighborhood for about a fortnight I left for the Lake Tahoe region September 15, where I remained until November 20, going from there to Washington.

#### MEET H. G. PARKER

It was in Carson that I first met H. G. Parker, one of the early day gold hunters of California, a resident of the place who laid me under many obligations for aid in my work, not only during that season, but several subsequent seasons. Though not a scientific man, he was an ardent sportsman and an enthusiastic collector of birds (for others), and he spared neither labor nor expense in aiding the ornithological collector who chanced to visit his neighborhood. He held Robert Ridgway in high esteem and had been of service to that young ornithologist in 1867-9 during his connection with the Survey of the Fortieth Parallel under Clarence King. The shortest and surest road to "Hubb

Parker's heart was to allow him to render you some substantial service. He died in San Francisco in 1888.

#### MEET E. W. NELSON

In the fall of this same year, on my way to Washington from California, I made the acquaintance of E. W. Nelson in Chicago. He had become known to me through a record, published in the Bulletin of the Essex Institute, of the capture of specimens of the Sharp-tailed Finch near Chicago (subsequently described by Allen as *Ammodromus caudacutus* var. *nelsoni*), and an exchange of specimens had followed. This casual visit of an hour or so was to prove the beginning of another life-long friendship, and to very materially affect Nelson's subsequent career.

Soon after my return to Washington, Prof. Baird offered me a chance to go to St. Michael's, Alaska, as a signal observer, with a view of collecting and studying the fauna of the region. Though, in many ways, the offer was a tempting one, I was too much interested in my work in the western states to abandon it for a new field, but told him, in response to further questioning, that I knew exactly the man he was after. As a result Nelson accepted the offer immediately made him by Prof. Baird, and, as an employee of the Signal Service, spent nearly five years (1877-81) in the Arctic, which proved the initial step of his subsequent career as a naturalist. For the ornithological results obtained during Mr. Nelson's memorable stay in Alaska I would refer the reader to his report published as No. 3 of the Arctic Series of the Signal Service, U. S. A., and entitled "Report upon Natural History Collections made in Alaska between the years 1877 and 1881". At the time of publication, as Mr. Nelson was sojourning in the west because of ill health, at the request of the Chief Signal Officer, Gen. A. W. Greeley, and himself, I undertook the pleasant task of editing the report and seeing it through the press.

#### FIELD WORK OF 1877

In 1877 the field work again began at Carson, where I spent the time between May 12 and June 6. Leaving Carson we pursued a generally northern route till we reached old Camp Warner in southern Oregon, our field work ending October 1. About 200 specimens of birds were obtained during the season, and between six and seven hundred eggs were collected, chiefly of water birds.

While at Goose Lake, northeastern California, I obtained specimens of a remarkable little rabbit, which Coues and Allen identified as the Trowbridge's Hare (*Lepus trowbridgei*) but which later proved to be a new species, and was described by Merriam from specimens obtained by the Biological Survey in Idaho as the Idaho Rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*).

While on a visit to Cambridge this year Mr. Brewster called my attention to some hummingbirds he had received from C. A. Allen of Nicasio, California, near which place the birds had been collected, and which the collector believed to be new. Sharing in this belief Mr. Brewster generously turned the specimens over to me for further study and final disposition, and they were duly described by me as *Selasphorus alleni* in compliment to the man who had first brought the species to notice.

#### FIELD SEASON OF 1878

The field season again began at Carson, July 18, and continued till October 1, when it ended for me at the Dalles on the Columbia. From the Dalles I took the steamer down river to Portland, Oregon, and thence to San Francisco,

where I remained for a short time before returning to Washington. Two hundred and thirty-seven birds were collected during this trip and also numerous specimens in other branches of natural history. The field seasons 1877-78 were spent in the eastern portions of Nevada, California, and Oregon, and the routes travelled amounted practically to a continuous, though decidedly tortuous, line from Carson to the Dalles.

#### THE WHEELER SURVEY TERMINATED

My connection with the Wheeler Survey terminated in 1879, its work having been merged into that of the recently formed (March 3, 1879) United States Geological Survey, under Clarence King as first Director. The question of my future thus arising, I imparted to Prof. Baird my strong desire to join the National Museum staff as Assistant Curator of Ornithology, Robert Ridgway being then, as now, Curator. This he decided was impracticable owing to the low state of the funds of the Institution and to the prominence already given to the department of ornithology. He offered me, however, a position on the staff as Curator of Herpetology. As I was less interested in this branch of science, to which I already had paid some attention, than in others, I declined the offer and finally accepted the invitation of Major Powell to attach myself to the Bureau of Ethnology, then being organized, with the understanding that if the new field proved to be congenial I should make it my life work. Major Powell accepted the Directorship of the Geological Survey, Clarence King having resigned.

Thereupon for some years to come my ornithological studies ceased, the administrative and other duties that soon devolved upon me in my new position proving an ample tax upon my time, strength and such abilities as I possessed. I may add that it was Major Powell's opinion that a biologic training was a prerequisite to a successful career in anthropology, and this opinion he held to the last.

*(To be continued)*

## IMPORTANCE OF THE BLIND IN BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

By FRANK N. IRVING

WITH SIX PHOTOS

**A**S THE photography of birds usually presents a difficult problem to the beginner the suggestions set forth in the following paragraphs may prove helpful to those workers who desire to undertake something worth while in this field. Although I have been a student of ornithology for many years and have pictured and collected the nests and eggs of many species, it is but recently that I have taken up photography of the birds themselves, and I am prepared to state that there is a peculiar fascination attending this sort of work which should afford a great deal of genuine pleasure to all lovers of nature. It requires a certain amount of skill and patience to produce a series of really excellent bird photographs; but the proper course of procedure, coupled with the usual persistence of a bird hunter, will soon remove most of the obstacles.