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EXAMPLES OF RECENT AMERICAN BIRD ART

WITH TWENTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS

By HARRY HARRIS

IDLE as it may be for the layman to attempt an understanding of modern art's sweeping dismissal of bird portraiture to the realm of non-art, it were well for the ornithologist to know that his taste for pictures has been compared to a cow's taste for grass; "they both know what they like!" The art critic's logic thus implied need in no way discourage or influence the bird student's enthusiastic appreciation and respect for the exquisite rendering of bird life by certain members of the small group of artists now working in the North American avifauna. In his loyal ministering to truth the bird artist is of necessity compelled to ignore the atavic and morbid tendencies so obvious in much current artistic expression, and build to those established ideals that have actuated nearly all zoological artists in their struggles to satisfy the demands of science as well as of art.

In this connection it is refreshing and illuminating to consider a guiding principle in the life of Joseph Wolf (1820-1899). Considered by many competent judges to occupy so eminent a position among the animal painters of all time as to stand utterly alone, this master was ever influenced in his interpretations by the certain knowledge that "we see distinctly only what we know thoroughly". In the light of this authority the art critic's dictum that the bird artist knows too much about birds to translate his subject in terms of true art becomes illogical if not absurd. If the ornithologist be bovine in his taste for pictures he is at least satisfied by those qualities in them that only the ornithologist-artist is equipped to render, and, as Dr. Frank M. Chapman has recently pointed out, "born artists are rare enough, but born ornithologists are even rarer". If beauty and truth are to be expunged from the definition of art, it is certain that naturalists will be last to accept the new order.

The highly commendable efforts of the American Ornithologists' Union to bring ornithological science and art into closer relationship and understanding by showing collections of bird paintings and drawings at several of its recent Stated Meetings has unquestionably done much to stimulate public taste for this highly decorative and instructive class of art. With the same purpose in view, and with the aim of providing the greatest possible entertainment and pleasure for expected visitors at its First Annual Meeting early this year, the Cooper Ornithological Club invited artists known to be working with North American birds to contribute to the first exhibition of their original work ever assembled on the Pacific Coast. Their generous response far exceeded the hopes and expectations of interested members, and resulted in a display of surpassing distinction. The cooperation of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art made it possible adequately and properly to hang the nearly three hundred pictures in three large well-lighted galleries of the Museum, where, owing

to an ever increasing public interest, they were kept in place for nearly two months instead of the three weeks originally planned. It has been thought that those readers of *THE CONDOR* unable to attend the salon might care to know something of the work exhibited.

An impression of the high standard of excellence of the collection can best be conveyed by reproductions of several of the pictures themselves, since the present writer is unqualified to do a technical critique of the show, or to analyze the work of any one artist, seeing that he could be guided only by an intense feeling for bird art in general and a few frank prejudices in particular. Therefore let the reader view the illustrations given here through *THE CONDOR*'s generosity and form his own conclusions.

Unable to send paintings or drawings, Mr. Frank W. Benson, of Boston and Salem, Massachusetts, was represented by eleven of his well-known etchings and dry-



Fig. 51. GENERAL VIEW OF PORTION OF BIRD ART EXHIBIT, LOS ANGELES MUSEUM, APRIL, 1926.

points, selected to show his treatment of as many different species as possible. The work of this internationally famous artist certainly needs no word of introduction. Mr. Frank Bond, of Washington, D. C., known for his original method of rendering the metallic sheen and luster on hummingbirds and other tropical species, sent six of his immaculate water colors showing this effective and natural quality. The line of seven great water colors by Mr. Rex I. Brasher, of Kent, Connecticut, made a stunning show along nearly the entire length of a long gallery wall, and was the source of much favorable and enthusiastic comment. Major Allan Brooks, of Okanagan Landing, British Columbia, known to the entire ornithological world as a leader in his field, contributed six late examples of his work, exhibiting a very high degree of pictorial quality. The faultless draughting of form and posture, the judicious selection and use of color, and the masterful composition of this artist, together with his profound and intimate knowledge of the bird and mammal in nature, all combine to render him most fit to carry on the Wolfian tradition. That his pictures are replete in all those qualities that denote works of fine art, the reader may judge from the two reproduc-

tions given herewith, and that they well illustrate the truth of knowing thoroughly in order to see distinctly, the field naturalist and working scientist are best qualified to judge.

Mr. Charles Livingston Bull, busy wild life artist, of Oradell, New Jersey, was able to loan but two of his vigorous and distinctive drawings. Everyone is familiar with Mr. Bull's pleasing style, and there are many of us who have read in popular magazines and elsewhere stories that would have escaped us but for the urge of his compelling illustrations. Mr. Henry C. Denslow, of Hartford, Connecticut, veteran of numerous museums, is one of the artists whose original work had been entirely unknown to most Cooper Club members, and we were fortunate in being able to hang a choice selection of his delicately executed water colors illustrating a large series of the song birds, together with a few of the larger species. Among others of the fraternity who gave us the pleasure of a first view of their art were Mr. Edward von S.



Fig. 52. ANOTHER GALLERY DEVOTED TO THE BIRD ART EXHIBIT AT THE LOS ANGELES MUSEUM.

Dingle, of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina; Mr. Ottmar F. von Fuehrer, now of Gainesville, Florida, and Mr. Roger T. Peterson, of Jamestown, New York. Mr. Dingle's studies are mainly of the species native to the swamps and shores of his southern home region, and appropriately convey their environmental atmosphere. The exotic pieces of Mr. von Fuehrer are from the practiced hand of an artist who has enjoyed superior opportunities in European training in both art and science. Mr. Peterson is only yet acquiring his technique, but his drawing shows great promise, and he should be encouraged to continue focusing his talent on zoological subjects.

Mr. Louis Agassiz Fuertes, Ithaca, New York, bird portraitist supreme, and perhaps best known to the American public of all specialists in this field, astonished patrons of the exhibition by the quality of his craftsmanship. It is indeed fortunate for ornithology that this artist has held to absolute freedom in developing his own method of expressing his fine appreciation and feeling for bird beauty, thus preventing his approach from being prejudiced or hampered by academic training. That he was early saved to science by the acumen and sound judgment of his mentors is cause for



Fig. 53. PRAIRIE FALCON: Louis Agassiz Fuertes.



Fig. 54. THE END OF THE TRAIL: Allan Brooks.

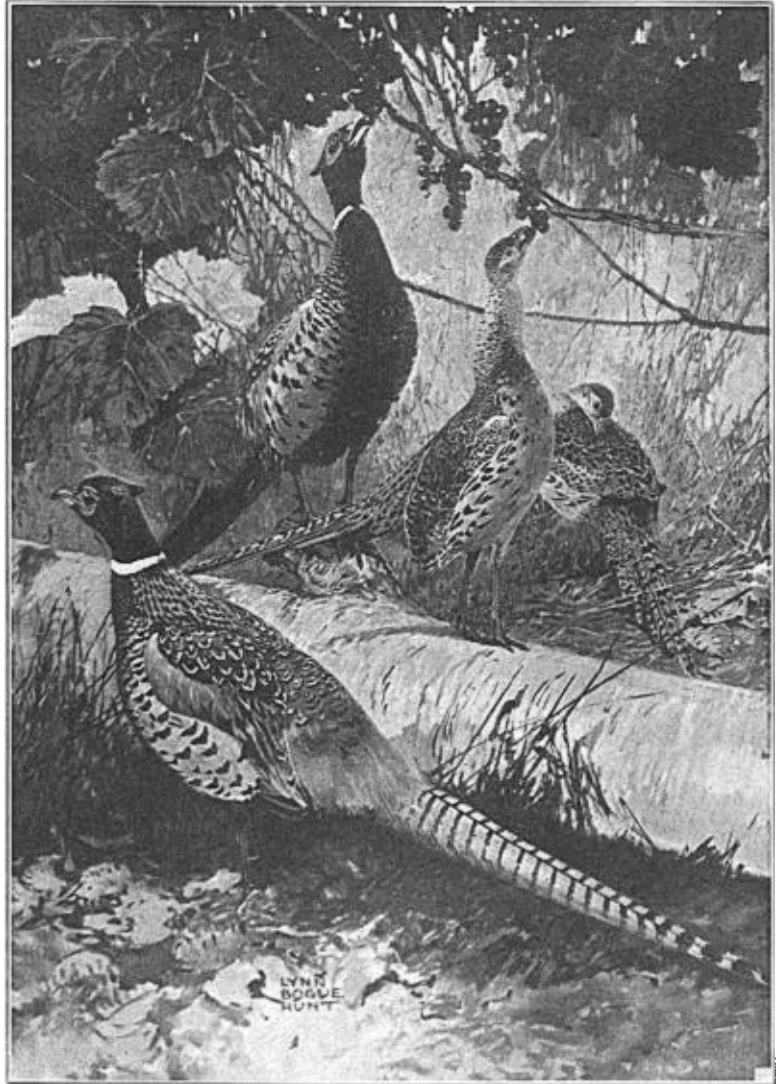
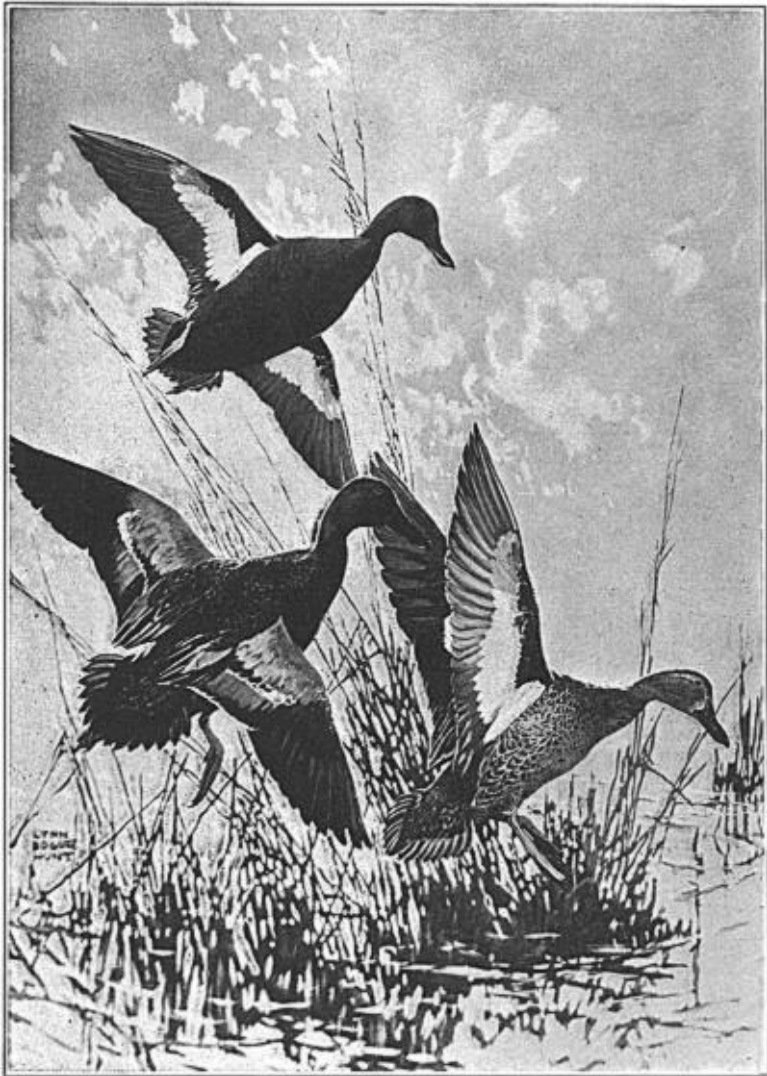


FIG. 55. CINNAMON TRAIL: LYNN BOGUE HUNT.

FIG. 56. RING-NECKED PHEASANTS AND WILD GRAPES: LYNN BOGUE HUNT.



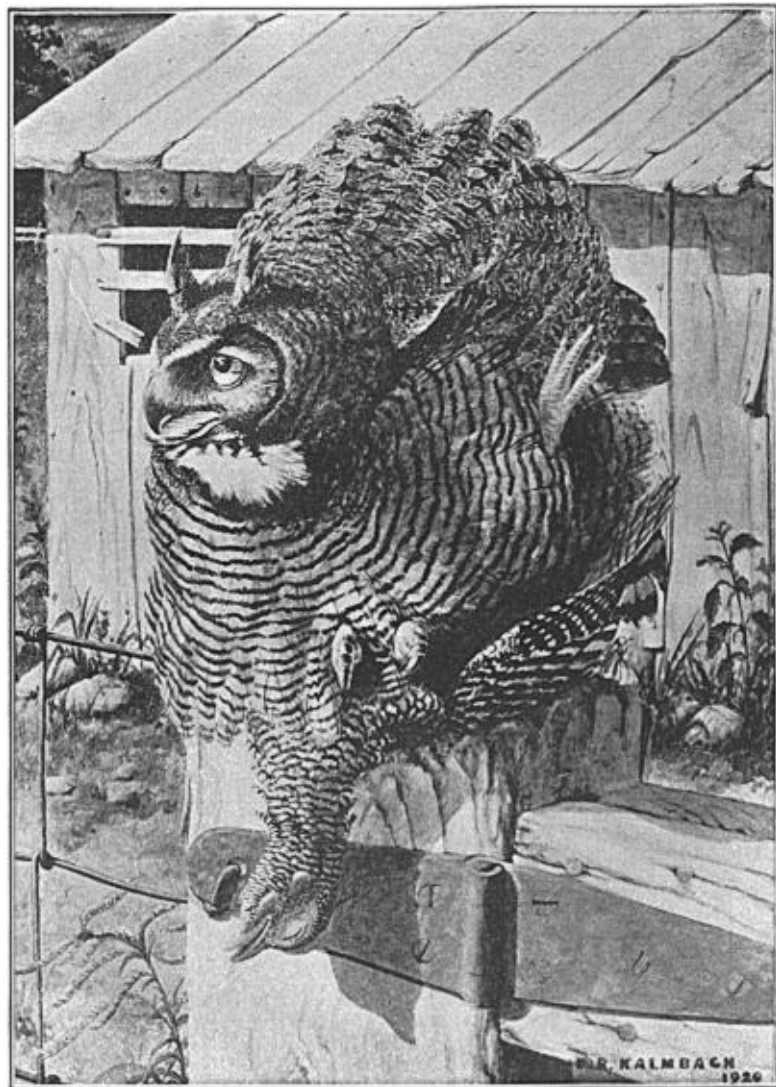


Fig. 60. GREAT HORNED OWL: Edwin R. Kalmbach.

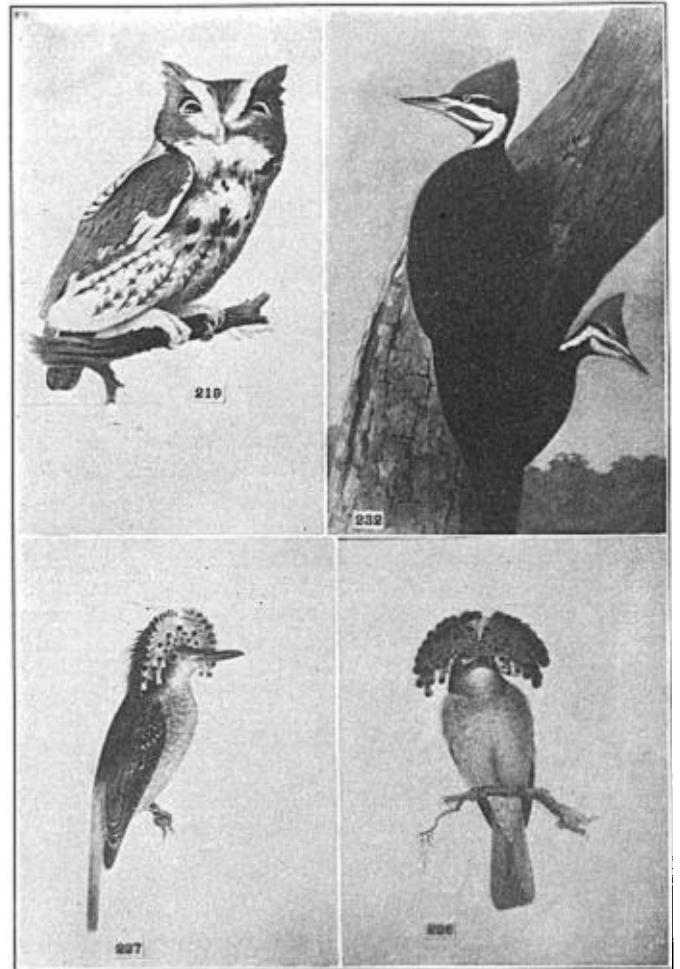


Fig. 62. WATER-COLOR DRAWINGS: Robert Ridgway.

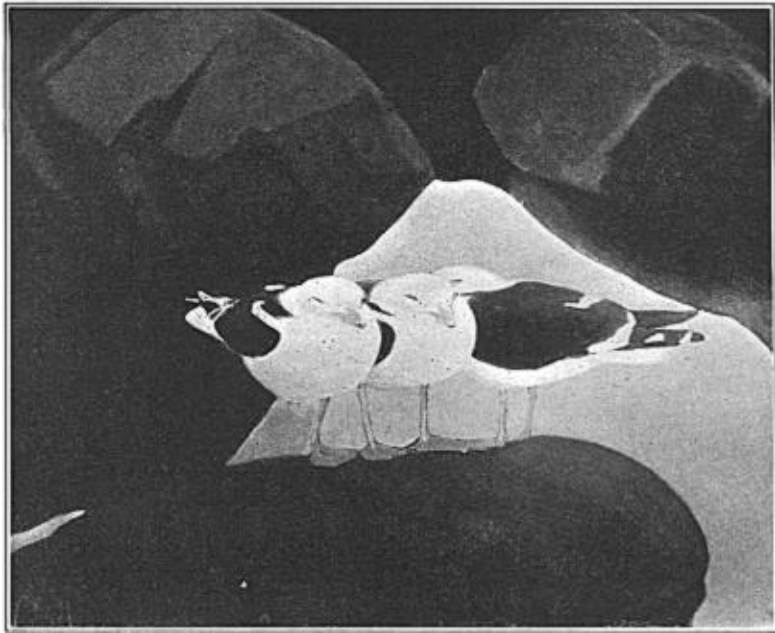


Fig. 63. GULLS RESTING: Frank Hennessey.

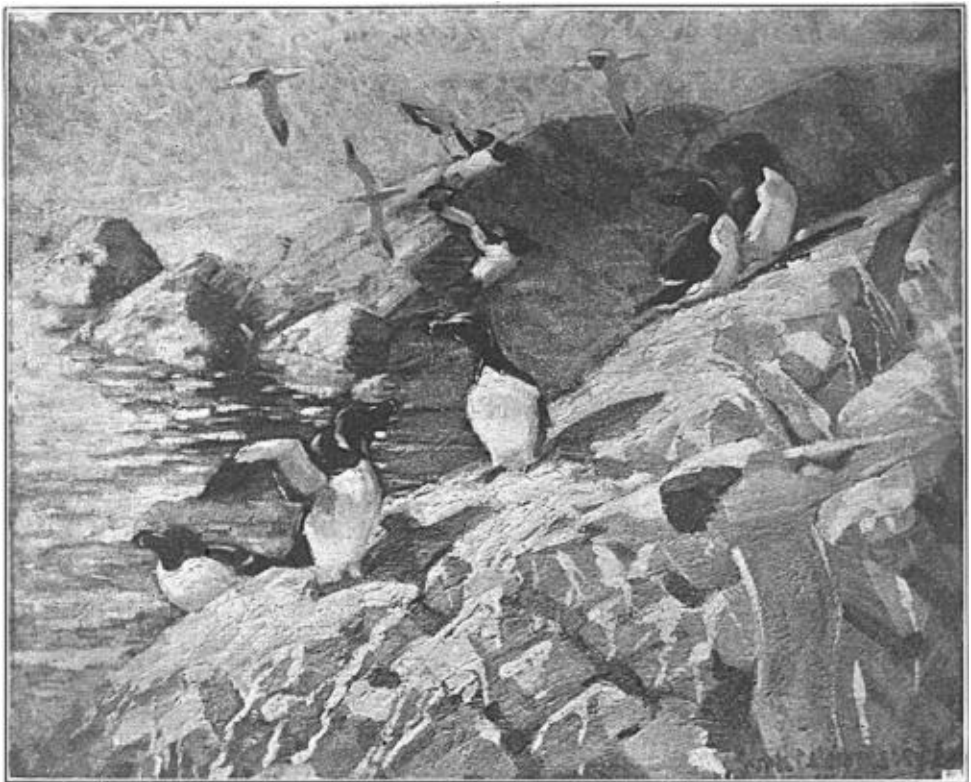


Fig. 64. RAZOR-BILLED AUKS AND GANNETS: Frank Hennessey.



Fig. 65. CONDORS: Will Simmons.

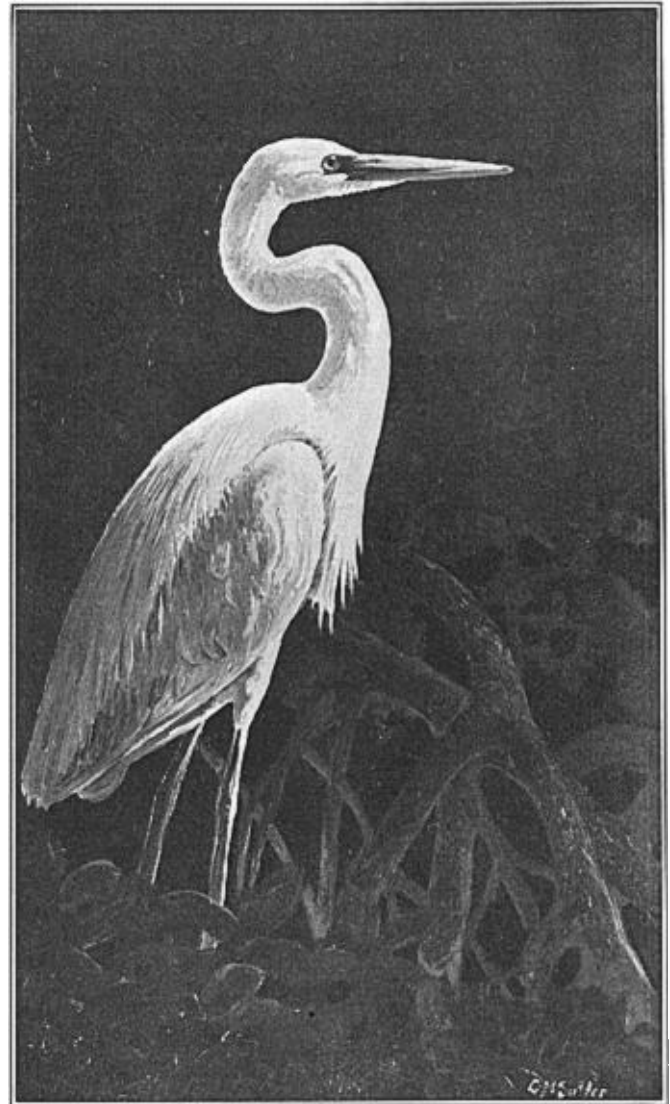




Fig. 67. TREE SPARROWS: Edmund J. Sawyer.

the thanks of all bird lovers, for here is a painter after the hearts of them all. His *Prairie Falcon*, graciously done especially for this exhibition, is so instinct with truth, character, action and *expression* that the very acme of avian portraiture has been reached in it. A black and white reproduction can not of course do justice to the original.

The nine canvases by Mr. Frank Hennessey, of Ottawa, Canada, done in the broad manner of the finished technician, added a distinctive atmosphere of quality to the whole display. That here is at least one worker interpreting bird life to the satisfaction of art juries is indicated by the admission of his oils to exhibitions of

general scope on both sides of the Atlantic. In his temperas, much smaller in size, Mr. Hennesey treats his model more as a portrait than as accessory to his composition.

Mr. R. Bruce Horsfall, of Washington, D. C., whose pen and brush have won him the attention and regard of all lovers of wild life, was represented by a fine group of his large water colors, together with two oil paintings of heroic size. One of the latter, reproduced here, was particularly appropriate for the occasion and aroused much interest and comment owing to both its subject and the fine manner of handling. The high quality of Mr. Horsfall's art surprised not a few who were familiar only with some of his earlier published plates. Mr. Lynn Bogue Hunt, of New York, generously allowed five of his inimitable paintings to be shown. The forceful and dramatic appeal of Mr. Hunt's pictures, together with their faithful portraiture and



Fig. 68. FLORIDA BROWN PELICANS: Karl Plath.

immensely satisfying composition, rendered his display particularly striking, and contributed much to the public's enthusiastic reaction to the salon. Mr. Francis L. Jaques, also of New York, was able to contribute but a single example of his exceptional ability to interpret nature and birds. The felicity of his expression may be seen in the accompanying illustration, the original oil being in close values of colorful gray.

One of the surprises of the show proved to be the group of small water colors by Mr. Edwin R. Kalmbach, of the Biological Survey, Washington, D. C. The fidelity of Mr. Kalmbach's likenesses and the finish of his execution justly entitle him to recognition as a bird portraitist of the first rank. Fortunate indeed is it that he has not been influenced by the vagaries of modern expression. The delicate and misty water colors of Mr. Jay D. Knap, of New York, interpret his reactions to the hunting

of water fowl, and he has rendered with individual artistry those moments of suspense so familiar to votaries of this sport. Mr. Charles R. Knight, another New Yorker, was represented by the huge canvas owned by the Los Angeles Museum and displayed in the La Brea Fossil Room of this institution. The group of immense extinct Vultures (*Teratornis*) embodied in this panoramic composition has been restored in Mr. Knight's well-known and satisfying manner. The luminous paintings of Mr. Irving Manoir, of the Laguna Beach, California, art colony, are examples of the very appro-

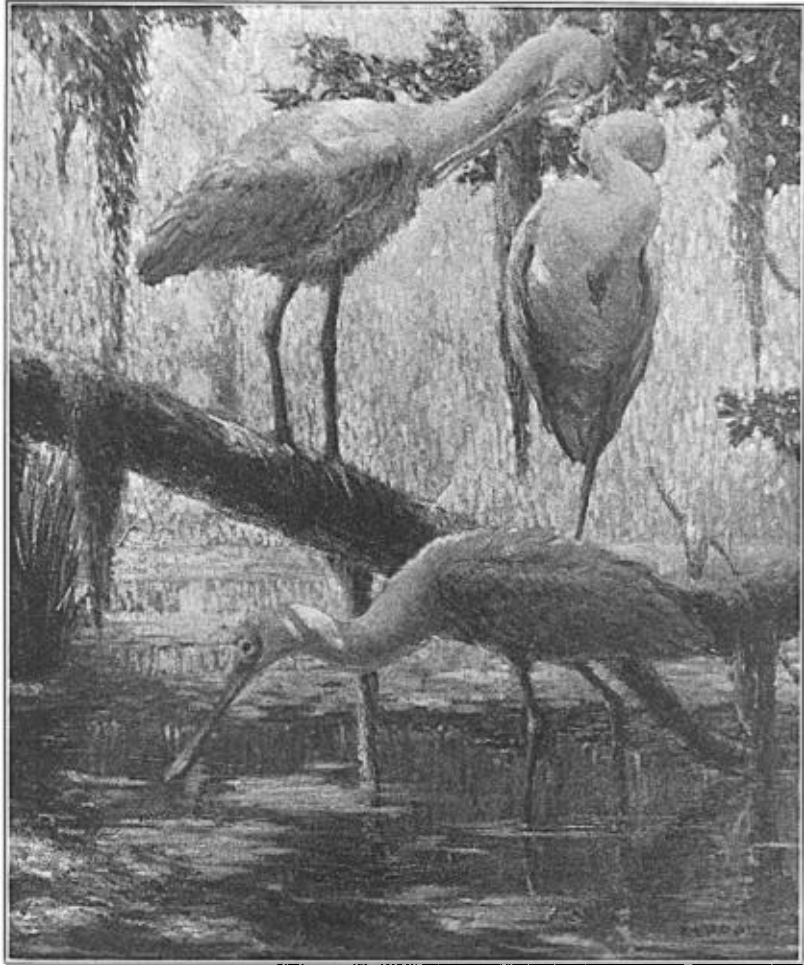


Fig. 69. ROSEATE SPOONBILLS: Earl L. Poole.

priate use of the bird for purely decorative ends. In admiration of his rendering of color, form and feather, and in respect for his quite evident knowledge of structure, the ornithologist is tempted, though of course without justification, to overlook this artist's occasional liberty with nature.

The water color sketches of Mr. O. J. Murie, another Survey artist, of Washington, D. C., denote the exactitude and precision demanded by science, and among his studies, made on the spot in the field, are faithful and permanent records of facts previously unknown. The large oil paintings of Mr. Karl Plath, of Chicago, show

an appreciation and enthusiasm for the gorgeously plumaged species so dear to the heart of the colorist, and account for his maintaining a large private aviary dedicated to his models. Mr. Plath's section naturally attracted much public attention. Mr. Earl L. Poole, of Reading, Pennsylvania, an artist of wide versatility and finished technique, loaned a goodly showing of his pieces. In his *Roseate Spoonbills*, a large oil, the artist has attained a remarkable atmospheric expression. The fine effect of his coloring is of course lost in the monotone of the illustration.

An encouraging and significant result of the exhibition has been the arousing of a long dormant feeling for avian delineation in the veteran scientific illustrator Mr. John L. Ridgway, of Glendale, California. The years of service devoted to ornithology by this useful and distinguished member of his craft will be recalled by ornithophiles, though much of his public work was unsigned, and no bird plate has appeared over his name in many years. It is pleasant to recall here his unsurpassed drawings of eggs for Bendire's "Life Histories". To realize that these plates have never been equalled in any country it is only necessary to compare them with the best continental and British examples of oological illustration (including the justly famous German lithographs that find their best expression in the work of Georg Krause); and that this field will never see their like again seems quite certain. It is a much appreciated



Fig. 70. SPRUCE GROUSE: Chas. Livingston Bull.

privilege to be able to show here the reproduction of a bird picture painted by Mr. Ridgway since the exhibition; the first, with one exception, done by him in fifteen years, and his first attempt in the medium of guash, or opaque water color.

The section devoted to the paintings, drawings and sketches of Mr. E. J. Sawyer, of Yellowstone Park, Wyoming, made a pleasing display, and was especially appreciated by those visitors who have long been familiar with his highly useful published work. The paintings and etchings of Mr. Will Simmons, of New Milford, Connecticut, clearly indicate his artistic heritage, as well as his scientific schooling, and that he is at home in an unusual number of mediums makes him particularly valuable to ornithology. The two oils exhibited by Mr. George M. Sutton, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, by their striking contrasts and sheer beauty did not fail to arrest the attention and praise of everyone. His superb *Great White Heron*, shown here, illustrates admirably the decorative value of the bird, and also shows the great and rapid strides this artist has recently made in the development of his expression. Mrs. Helen Damrosch Tee-Van, of New York, an experienced scientific delineator, contributed two water color portraits of exotic species showing an exquisite handling of pattern and color details of plumage.

Greatly desiring to add to the exhibition material of historic interest that might appropriately balance and complement the aesthetic appeal of the pictures, Mr. Robert Ridgway very graciously allowed us the temporary custody of a collection of treasures culled from his files and portfolios. The items included drawings, sketches, water color paintings, lithographic proofs, important letters from Professor Baird and Clarence King, memorandum books and field notes, all bearing on little known phases of the career of this modest savant, and testifying to the genius that will forever mark one of the most important and fruitful periods of activity in American science. Space here will not permit of the treatment this collection warrants; but that it constitutes a graphic and chronologic record of the early progress and growth of the mind that made possible the Ridgway Epoch of American ornithology bespeaks its superlative interest and importance.

The Cooper Club wishes again to express to the workers mentioned its warm thanks and keen appreciation for the pleasure and profit derived through their generous coöperation in making the Club's First Annual Meeting such a landmark in the history of ornithological development on the Pacific Coast.

Eagle Rock, California, July 11, 1926.

HOW THE BIRD CENSUS SOLVES SOME PROBLEMS IN DISTRIBUTION

By MAY THACHER COOKE

LIFE is never static but always shifting, and bird life is no exception. One of the problems confronting ornithologists is to learn the nature, extent, and rapidity of the changes taking place in the distribution of birds. Censuses of breeding birds have been found an excellent means to this end, in fact about the only one yet devised that will furnish definite statistics on which to base deductions regarding numerical changes in various species.

Persons working on problems of the distribution of birds feel the need of definite numerical statistics for former years. Memory of past abundance, usually impression rather than accurate count, is a poor basis for scientific work, particularly since recollection of numbers frequently magnifies the facts. Lack of the material desired should make ornithologists of today only more willing to collect it for the benefit of those who come after them; for the work must be done *now*, not left until some future time. Numerical data relating to birds continue to increase in value the farther we get from the conditions to which they relate.

To get the best results, bird-census studies should be conducted on a large scale. It is hardly possible for one person or a small group of persons to carry on investigations over a sufficiently large section of the country to obtain results from which entirely satisfactory generalizations can be made, and it is, therefore, almost imperative that such work should be done on a coöperative basis. Some persons feel that bird-census work is not worth while because the entire field can not be covered. While much of the information on this subject is often tantalizingly fragmentary, yet even such material has been found of value and much better than nothing at all.

The most definite figures for purposes of comparison, from which to learn what fluctuations in the numerical distribution and in the relative abundance of the species take place from year to year, or over longer periods, seem to be obtainable from bird