A CRITIQUE OF BARROWS' "MICHIGAN BIRD LIFE."

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The recent appearance (July, 1912) of Barrows' book on the birds of Michigan[1] marks an important epoch in the history of Michigan ornithology, if not in that of the entire region bordering the Great Lakes. Viewed as a whole the ornithology of the several states in this region has been but superficially studied; in certainly the majority of the counties composing each state there has either been no field work by competent ornithologists, or what has been done is very inadequate when measured by present standards.

In Michigan there have been only a few careful and competent men and their work has mainly been done at a few places in the state, viz., Ann Arbor, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Lansing. The biological expeditions of the University of Michigan Museum and the Michigan Geological and Biological Survey have added considerable data for certain areas, viz., the Porcupine Mountains, Ontonagon County; Isle Royale, in northwestern Lake Superior; the south shore of Saginaw Bay, Huron County; the Brown Lake region, in Dickinson County; the Charity Islands of Saginaw Bay, and Whitefish Point, in Chippewa County, but much remains to be done, especially in the northern peninsula and the entire upper half of the lower peninsula. The breeding ranges of a number of species will undoubtedly be materially extended by studies in these sections.

The ornithology of Michigan has also suffered from the publication of records made by unreliable observers. In some instances the questionable records may be checked up by discounting them in proportion to the experience of the observers and the chances of error in identifying the species,

[1] Michigan Bird Life, by Walter Bradford Barrows. Special Bulletin of Zoölogy and Physiology of the Michigan Agricultural College. 1912.

but unfortunately this can not be done in one case. In the interests of Michigan ornithology it must be said that the local naturalists have long since learned that the records of A. B. Covert are mostly unreliable, whether or not they are represented by extant specimens.

We have one book on Michigan ornithology,[1] which appeared in 1893, but it is unfortunate, to say the least, that this work was ever published, as it is unauthoritative, carelessly compiled and marred by many errors and mis-quotations. The book was never reviewed by any one at all familiar with Michigan ornithology or ornithological conditions in the state, so that a number of the records accepted by the author have been widely quoted, with the result that the status of a number of species in the state is not rightly understood.

In view of this condition it is easy to see why Barrows' work is considered a boon by Michigan naturalists. It is all that our previous list was not. It is up-to-date, comprehensive, compiled carefully in that most of the doubtful records have been confirmed as far as possible, and well written in a form that may be used by students. With little doubt it will be the standard reference work on Michigan ornithology for years to come. With all the care with which the book has been prepared, however, several species have, in the opinion of the writer, been included upon insufficient or unreliable evidence, and these should be pointed out that they may not be accepted without proper consideration.

As will be seen from the discussion of each of these species (see below), some of the controversy over the right of certain forms to a place in the Michigan list depends upon what shall be considered as constituting a primal record. The writer believes that Brewster[2] gives the only safe and proper guide when he states, — "My early training and ex-

[1] Birds of Michigan, by Albert John Cook. Bulletin 94, Michigan Experimental Station, State Agricultural College.

[2] The Birds of the Cambridge Region of Massachusetts. By William Brewster. Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, No. IV, 1906, p. 5-6.

perience have led me to believe that — with certain exceptions about to be specified — the occurrence of birds in localities or regions lying outside their known habitats should not be regarded as definitely established until actual specimens have been taken, and afterwards determined by competent authorities. But on no authority, however good, should a mere field observation of any bird that is really difficult to identify be taken as establishing an important primal record." The fact that the species should or might occur in Michigan because it has been secured or observed in a neighboring state or waters, does not, in the writer's opinion, entitle the bird to a place in the Michigan list. It should actually have been secured in the state and the specimen examined by some competent authority before it is taken from the hypothetical list. This constitutes the only strictly safe guide, and should have been enforced in the past.

Another thing to be carefully considered is the reliability of the early records. It is not to the discredit of the early observers to say that they were not generally as carefully trained as the ornithologists of today, and that they were usually unfamiliar with the museum specimens and literature. This particularly applies to western states, for many of the now familiar western species were very rare in collections other than those of a few of the large eastern institutions. Indeed, it was not until the appearance of Baird's masterly treatise in the ninth volume of the Pacific Railway Reports (1858) that careful descriptions of many species were available. These are facts that must be considered in any comprehensive attempt to compile an accurate list of the species of a state.

If one gives due weight to the absence of actual Michigan records, the probable errors of the early ornithologists, and the unreliability of some of the later observers, thirteen of the three hundred and twenty-seven species admitted by Barrows to the Michigan ornis must be excluded until further evidence is at hand. These species are as follows:

1. *Larus hyperboreus*. Glaucous Gull.—No authentic Mich-

igan record or specimen of this species is known. It has been found on Lakes Michigan and Ontario, and probably occurs rarely on Michigan waters, but under a strict ruling the bird should be taken from the state list until a specimen is actually secured within our limits. The writer knows of no Lake Erie records.

2. *Larus franklini.* Franklin's Gull.—There is apparently no authentic record for this bird in Michigan. Barrows includes it on the strength of its occurrence in Indiana, where "it has been occasionally seen by Mr. J. W. Byrkit at Michigan City."[1] This region of sand dunes seems to be a very unlikely locality for this gull. It is not included by Woodruff in the list of species in the Chicago area,[2] a region which is close to Michigan City. Wisconsin records are mainly in the interior, as would be expected, since Franklin's Gull is more a bird of the prairies than of the larger bodies of water like Lake Michigan. Undoubtedly *Larus philadelphia* is the source of many records of Franklin's gull. I am aware of no records for Indiana, and but one early one for Ontario.[3] There is one late record for Ohio.[4]

3. *Xema sabini.* Sabine's Gull.—This bird is included as a Michigan species on the authority of A. B. Covert,[5] who states that a female was secured on the Huron River, Ann Arbor, November 17, 1880. Anyone who will consult and compare the two lists published by Covert, and his two manuscript lists, will see how vague was his knowledge of the majority of the water birds, which, taken with his total unreliability in other respects, renders this record worthless. The above bird was said to have been taken by James Bowyer, and nothing is known of it at the University of Michi-

[1] Butler, A. W. Birds of Indiana. Dept. Geol. and Nat. Resources, Ind., XXII, 1897, p. 574.

[2] Woodruff, F. M. The Birds of the Chicago Area. Chicago Acad. Sci., 1907.

[3] McIlwraith, Thomas. The Birds of Ontario, 1894, p. 49.

[4] Wilson Bulletin, XIX, March, 1907, p. 20.

[5] Covert, A. B. Birds of Washtenaw County. History of Washtenaw County, 1881, p. 192. Chicago.

gan Museum. There are but few records for the Great Lakes and these are generally unaccompanied by any convincing proof. There are no Indiana or Ontario records. In Ohio there is an old and somewhat unsatisfactory record of Winslow's at Cleveland. In northern Illinois E. W. Nelson records a bird seen and shot at, but not secured, in 1873, which was probably a mistake in identification.

4. *Sterna maxima.* Royal Tern.—This tern is included as a Michigan bird on the authority of Stewart E. White, who states that at Mackinac Island "I examined several specimens. Rather more rare than *S. tschegrava*."[1] Of *S. tschegrava* (*caspia*) he writes: "Thousands of large terns accompany the gulls in migration, but are shy. They resemble each other so much that identification on the wing is very uncertain. I repeatedly took this tern and should call it common." When one takes into consideration the fact that there are no records whatever for *Sterna maxima* for Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, or Ontario, and that the bird has a decided southern range, the above statement may certainly be taken to represent an error in identification. If the Caspian tern is called "common" and the Royal tern "rather more rare than *S. tschegrava*" the latter assuredly would be classed as a fairly abundant bird, which it is not. There is no evidence known to the writer that a Michigan specimen of the Royal tern has ever been examined by an experienced ornithologist. Mr. White, at the time of these observations, had only a limited field experience The A. O. U. Check List, 1910, does not record *Sterna maxima* as far north as the Great Lakes, and consequently does not accept this record. The species should be eliminated from consideration as a Michigan bird until confirming evidence is at hand.

5. *Sterna paradisæa.* Arctic Tern.—The Arctic tern is included by Barrows on the basis of a statement of A. B. Covert that he "secured a male bird at Monroe, Mich., April 9, 1875." The writer is not aware of the source of this record as recorded by Barrows, as the species is not included in either

[1] The Auk, 1893, p. 222.

of Covert's annotated lists[1] of the birds of lower Michigan or in his 1881 list,[2] or in the manuscript of 1878. In his latest manuscript list, 1904, Covert states: "Included in all the lists of the birds of the state yet no authentic records." It should be noticed that this writer consistently repudiates in his later lists many of his earlier records. The record is furthermore doubtful as Covert had very little experience with the *Laridæ*. The species has few, if any, satisfactory Great Lakes records. We know of none for Ohio, Indiana, or Ontario. The Wisconsin breeding records of Kumlien are apparently not accepted by the A. O. U. in the third edition of the Check-List.

6. *Sterna antillarum*. Least Tern.—There appears to be no unimpeachable record for this tern in the state, the various published records all being open to suspicion. Barrows writes: "It is included in Dr. Miles' list of 1860 on the authority of Professor Fox, who is said to have taken a specimen at Grosse Isle, Detroit River." This is a mistake as the record given by Fox[3] is "The Least Tern, *Sterna minuta*.[1]" The figure 1, he states, denotes that the records are given on the authority of Audubon in his Synopsis of the Birds of North America.

Barrows further writes, "In the manuscript notes of A. B. Covert there is a record of a male taken at Sandshore Lake, Ann Arbor, May 4, 1873, as well as three specimens (two males and one female) taken at Bayport, Huron County, October 13, 1878." None of these specimens can be located, however, and it is not impossible that they were specimens of the Black Tern, which has been repeatedly mistaken for the present species. The writer cannot determine the source of these records, as Covert does not furnish any specific dates in any of his published or manuscript lists. He does not include the species in the 1878 list, but in the Atkins manuscript

[1] Forest and Stream, 1876.

[2] Birds of Washtenaw County.

[3] Fox, Charles. The Birds of Michigan, p. 163. Place of publication unknown.

list, says: "Not uncommon during the migrations." In the 1881 list he says: "Migrant, not common." And in his latest compilation, 1904, he writes, "Recorded first in Covert's list of 1875. Dr. Gibbs, in his list of 1879, questioned the correctness of this record, but the bird has since proven to be a common summer resident at suitable localities throughout the lake regions of the state." It will be noticed that in each of these lists the statements regarding the bird are totally at variance. Careful search at the University of Michigan Museum reveals no mounted specimen labelled Michigan or any catalogue entry; there is, however, a mounted bird from Nebraska in the collection.

7. *Somateria dresseri.* Eider Duck.—The eider duck is included as a Michigan bird by Barrows as follows: "Dr. Gibbs says that W. E. Collins, of Detroit, wrote him, in 1883, that he had one specimen in his collection (a young male showing white traces), taken on the Detroit River in December, 1882." There appear to be few, if any, authentic records of this bird on the western Great Lakes, and a number of specimens labelled as this species have proved, upon examination, to be *S. spectabilis.* Collins is known to have procured the latter bird, and the above evidence is too meagre to entitle the eider duck to a place in the Michigan fauna.

8. *Branta canadensis hutchinsii.* Hutchins' Goose.—The claim of Hutchins' goose to a place in the Michigan fauna is still unproven, although it probably has been taken here. The late W. E. Collins, a taxidermist in Detroit, wrote Morris Gibbs that he "had it, taken at the St. Clair Flats." The writer recalls having examined years ago a goose formerly belonging to the old Detroit Scientific Association, labelled as this species, which was mounted by Collins. This bird was a small Canada Goose, and may have been the basis of the above record. It would be well to treat Hutchins' goose as hypothetical until a more satisfying record is available. The species seems to be a rare one in the region of the Great Lakes.

9. *Elanus leucurus.* White-tailed Kite.—Barrows writes

of this bird: "The claim of this bird to a place in the Michigan fauna rests mainly on the statement of A. B. Covert, of Ann Arbor, who says that he killed a specimen in September, 1878, on the Honey Creek marshes, four miles west of Ann Arbor, and that another was killed April 21, 1879, by C. H. Manley, in Livingston County. The latter specimen is said to be mounted and in the possession of Capt. Manley. The first specimen was for a time in the possession of Mr. Herbert Randall, of Ann Arbor, but we have not been able to examine either specimen." These records are undoubtedly erroneous, and there is no evidence at hand to support them. No other ornithologist appears to have seen or known of the existence of these specimens. The last A. O. U. Check-List does not admit this record and it should be eliminated.

10. *Ictinia mississippiensis.* Mississippi Kite.—This southern kite is included as a Michigan bird on the strength of a specimen said to have been taken many years ago and recorded by Mr. D. D. Hughes in a manuscript list of the birds of the state. No trace of this specimen can be found and no statement as to who examined it. The writer has not seen the manuscript list referred to, but the record is entirely too vague and unsatisfactory, and is not included in the A. O. U. Check-List of 1910.

11. *Sayornis sayus.* Say's Phœbe.—This bird is admitted on the authority of Charles Fox,[1] who says: "Say's Flycatcher (a) Musicapa Saya." (a) refers to the footnote, "Killed near Owasso, Shiawassee County, July, 1853." Miles, in the first biennial report, says: "*41a. *Sayornis sayus* Baird. Say's Flycatcher."[2] The note *41a refers to "*Sayornis sayus* Bd. on the authority of Rev. Charles Fox, who shot a specimen at Owosso, Shiawassee County, July, 1853. The species in the catalog marked 'a' were obtained at Grosse Ile, Wayne County, by Fox, and are given on his authority." As stated by Barrows these two records, with little doubt, refer to the same bird which was taken near

[1] The Birds of Michigan, p. 161.

[2] Miles, M., in First Bien. Rept. Geol. Surv., Michigan, 1861, p. 224.

Owosso in July, 1853, as Fox mentions no Grosse Ile bird. This record is certainly a misidentification by Fox, as it is not probable that he had ever examined actual specimens of this species. The record does not appear in Baird's work,[1] although Fox was a correspondent of the Smithsonian Institution and sent specimens there. The extent of Fox's ornithological knowledge is of course unknown, as he only issued a practically unannotated list of Michigan birds. He was locally known more as a general naturalist, and was particularly interested in herpetology. The A. O. U. does not accept his record and *Sayornis sayus* should be eliminated from all consideration as a Michigan species.

12. *Passerherbulus lecontei.* Leconte's Sparrow.—Barrows gives only one record for this species as a Michigan bird, A. B. Covert's claim that he secured a specimen at Ann Arbor. There is a mounted bird in the University of Michigan Museum (488q, date May 12, 1894), but there is grave doubt that the specimen was taken in Michigan. Covert never recorded it as one would naturally expect him to, owing to the fact that it was the first and only Michigan specimen. As Covert's records are all open to such grave suspicion it would seem best to eliminate this species from the Michigan fauna.

13. *Helmitheros vermivorus.* Worm-eating Warbler.—This is another species whose occurrence in Michigan rests on the authority of Covert. Barrows quotes a record of Covert's, from the latter's last manuscript list, "That he took a male at Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, May 21, 1878. The specimen, however, has been lost sight of." There is no record of this specimen in the University of Michigan Museum, where it might naturally be expected to be. Moreover, Covert does not include the species in his "Annotated List of the Birds and Mammals of Washtenaw County, Michigan," issued in March, 1881, and this list was supposed to be up to date. In the Atkin's manuscript list of 1878 he says: "I can regard this bird only as an accidental visitor. One specimen, a male,

[1] Pacific R. R. Rept., Vol. IX.

was taken May 12, 1875." Here again a discrepancy in dates is apparent, and the record is omitted altogether in his final published list. This record may be safely eliminated from consideration, and there appear to be no others at all sufficient to admit the species to the state list. Jerome Trombley, of Petersburg, Monroe County, a careful and keen observer, was unable to find it in a section of the state where it might naturally be expected to occur if at all.

NOTES ON THE BREEDING HABITS OF AGELAIUS PHOENICEUS.

BY NOEL L. HACKETT.

The following observations on the habits of the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius p. phœniceus*) were made during the spring of 1910 on a farm in the Missouri river bottoms about thirty-five miles south of Sioux City.

The birds came into the country along about the last of March from the twenty-fifth to the thirty-first. The males seemed to flock together and the females by themselves, but they came so close together that I could not tell whether there was any difference in the date of arrival. They came in large flocks containing several other species, such as the yellow-headed blackbird and bronzed grackle.

They were seen for about a week and then it seemed as though they had almost all disappeared from the country, but again about the first of May they appeared in small flocks of twenty-five or thirty, and took to the meadows rather than to the trees as they had done earlier in the season. They now began the process of mating, but it was impossible for me to tell much about the way this was accomplished.

However, there seemed to be a scarcity of females, and all over the meadow little flocks could be seen, consisting of four or five males and one female. On the Sunday morning following their second arrival I could not find in the whole col-