

# THE WILSON BULLETIN

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF ORNITHOLOGY

Published by the Wilson Ornithological Club

---

Vol. 57

JUNE 1945

No. 2

---

## BIRD PORTRAITS BY PETER RINDISBACHER

BY A. W. SCHORGER

RECENTLY Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, asked me to identify a water color sketch of a bird by Peter Rindisbacher. The drawing, in the possession of the Society, is now reproduced for the first time (Plate 8). Careful examination of the portrait has convinced me that it represents a Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) although it is lighter than any individual I have seen of that species and has interesting points of resemblance with Wilson's Snipe (*Capella delicata*). For example, the pose of the pictured bird, unlike any pose I have observed in the Dowitcher, is very characteristic of Wilson's Snipe when suspicious or belligerent. Further, the original drawing shows on the back of the bird dark brown markings characteristic of the Snipe but lacking in all the Dowitcher specimens I have so far examined. However, other characters, particularly the absence of the white edge on the outermost primary (which is so noticeable in Wilson's Snipe), seem to bear out the identification of the bird as a Dowitcher.

On the front of the drawing is written in an unknown hand, "Pattashgas of the Wisconsin"; on the back appears in German script, "Padaschgaas," followed by "Chippeway." The German script is evidently in the artist's hand.

Recorders of the Indian languages spelled the words phonetically so that literal agreement between authors is not to be expected. Cooke<sup>1</sup> does not include Dowitcher in his list of bird names; he gives *pa-dash'-ka-an'-ja* as the name of Wilson's Snipe in the Chippewa tongue, and *kitchipadashkaanja*, "big snipe," as the name of the Woodcock, Bishop Baraga<sup>2</sup> gives: snipe, *padashkaanji*; woodcock, *padash-kaaaji*; curlew, *patashkanje*. He also omits the Dowitcher.

What is known of the life and works of Rindisbacher is due largely to Grace Lee Nute.<sup>3</sup> He was born in 1806 in Upper Emmenthal, Canton of Berne, Switzerland. In 1821, the Rindisbachers emigrated to America, landed at York Factory, Hudson Bay, and after a gruelling trip arrived at Lord Selkirk's colony at Pembina on the lower Red River. Discouraged by the great flood of 1826, they started southward, arriving at Fever River, Jo Daviess County, Illinois, in November of



**DOWITCHER**

*Limnodromus griseus*

Sketch in water color drawn by Peter Rindisbacher, 1829 or earlier. What remains of the original (now 5 x 6½ inches in size) is shown here in its entirety; unfortunately the tip of the Dowitcher's bill was at some time removed by trimming.

Reproduced by courtesy of Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

that year. The following spring they moved to the lead region of south-western Wisconsin, where they remained about three years. Peter Rindisbacher then went to Saint Louis, where he died on August 13, 1834, aged 28 years. The death notice described him as a miniature and landscape painter. Prior to 1829, when Rindisbacher went to Saint Louis, most of his drawings related to Indians and their activities.

Some history of the sketch reproduced here has been given by Alice Smith.<sup>4</sup> She reports that while Lyman C. Draper was superintendent of the Wisconsin Historical Society, he broadcast a request for paintings and other contributions; on July 25, 1854, Caleb Atwater of Circleville, Ohio, wrote Draper that he was sending "4 drawings of my favorites, natives of your region of the country." Among them was the "Pattashgas of the Wisconsin." Atwater had attended the Treaty at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, in 1829.<sup>5</sup> While there he acquired these drawings, among others, from Rindisbacher. Miss Smith informs me that Atwater, on starting back to Ohio in his wagon, took the artist part way to Saint Louis.

Three pictures by Rindisbacher which are of interest to ornithologists appeared in the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*:

"Grouse." Vol. 3 (1832):589;

"Wilson's Pinnated Grouse." Vol. 4 (1833):605;

"Wild Turkey Trap." Vol. 5 (1834): 108.

The "Grouse" is the Prairie Sharp-tailed Grouse, *Pedioecetes phasianellus campestris*, the second illustration of *campestris* to appear, it having been preceded by that of Bonaparte in 1828; the "Wilson's Pinnated Grouse" is the Greater Prairie Chicken, *Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*.

The determination of the locality in which the drawings were made was an interesting problem. The text accompanying the "Grouse" lithograph is signed "R." It might be possible to obtain further information on the author by examination of the early volumes of the magazine, but these were not available to me. "R" states that the drawing was sent to the editor by Mr. Rindisbacher. The text accompanying the "Wilson's Pinnated Grouse" is not signed; since it did not contain any new information on the grouse, it was probably prepared by the editor. The introductory sentence reads: "For the drawing of the 'Pinnated Grouse,' . . . we are indebted . . . to Major Mason and Lieut. Holmes, of the army of the United States; at whose instance Mr. Rindisbacher had the kindness to make the sketch for the American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine." Capt. Richard B. Mason was with the 1st Infantry and was stationed in Louisiana in 1828, when he was transferred to Fort Crawford, Prairie du Chien, and he was at this station in 1833 when he was promoted to Major of Dragoons. Lt. Reuben Holmes<sup>6</sup> was stationed at Jefferson Barracks, Saint Louis, for most of the period between April 1827 and early 1832. Both officers participated in the Black Hawk War in 1832.<sup>7</sup> It seems altogether probable

that Major Mason had met Rindisbacher after coming to Prairie du Chien, while Lieutenant Holmes knew him at Saint Louis and induced him to publish the drawing of the Sharp-tailed Grouse. Since it is very unlikely that specimens of this bird would be available in Saint Louis, it is probable that the sketch of the Sharp-tail (as well as that of the Prairie Chicken) was made in southwestern Wisconsin prior to Rindisbacher's departure.

In a recently published paper<sup>8</sup> on the early history of these two species of grouse in Wisconsin, I established the southern limit of the Sharp-tailed Grouse at Chicago (lat. 42°N) and the northern limit of the Prairie Chicken at Green Bay, Wisconsin (lat. 44° 30'N). "R" states that the Sharp-tail "is not seen below the 42° of north latitude," that the Prairie Chicken ranges below 42°; and that "between 42° and 43°, is common ground." He may have been living at Prairie du Chien (lat. 43°), in which case he would have observed no Prairie Chickens for some distance northward since the terrain was entirely unsuitable for them. "R" very evidently resided in the "common ground," for he mentions seeing a large mixed pack of the two species between latitude 42° and 43°; and says that if possible, the following fall, he would send the editor live specimens of the two species so that he could determine whether they could be crossed.

## REFERENCES

1. W. W. COOKE. Bird nomenclature of the Chippewa Indians. *Auk* 1 (1884): 242.
2. BISHOP [FRIEDRICH] BARAGA. A dictionary of the Otchipwe language. Montreal (1878).
3. GRACE LEE NUTE. Peter Rindisbacher, Artist. *Minn. Hist.* 14 (1933):283-287; Rindisbacher's Minnesota Water Colors. *Minn. Hist.* 20 (1939):54-57, 2 pls.
4. ALICE SMITH. Peter Rindisbacher: A Communication. *Minn. Hist.* 20 (1939): 173-175, 2 pls.
5. CALEB ATWATER. Remarks made on a tour to Prairie du Chien; thence to Washington City, in 1829. Columbus (1831):3.
6. *Wis. Hist. Soc. Coll.* 12 (1892):257, 287-288. [R. G. Thwaites, the editor of this volume, is in error (p. 287, note 4) in identifying the "Lieut. Holmes", mentioned in the published letter, as Theophilus H. Holmes, who was in the South and Southwest during the entire period under consideration.—See Gen. G. W. Cullum. Biographical register of the officers and graduates of the U.S. Military Academy. Boston (1891). vol. 1, p. 446.]
7. FRANK E. STEVENS. The Black Hawk War. Chicago (1903):120, 189, 204, 225.
8. A. W. SCHORGER. The Prairie Chicken and Sharp-tailed Grouse in early Wisconsin. *Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci.* 35 (1944):1-59.

168 NORTH PROSPECT AVENUE, MADISON 5, WISCONSIN