



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CANADA

Ottawa, Canada, 16 November 1932

Mr. Philip A. DuMont
Museum of Natural History
State University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

Dear Mr. DuMont,-

Your letter of 18th October came to the office while I was away, attending the 50th annual meeting of the A. O. U., among other things, and since that time has apparently been buried under other unfinished business.

When I met you in New York several years ago you told me that you were contemplating a new work on the birds of Iowa, and I am glad to learn that you have returned to the job after the expedition to Madagascar. Even if my old list were not so many years out of date, the edition was not very large and it has been out of print for many years, and the Iowa bird students need a work that is modern and available. I sometimes think that the ornithologists who go to Africa and South America have an easier time reporting on their work than one who works on North American, because there are a hundred people in the country who are able and willing to criticize errors in American ornithology to one who knows anything about birds from foreign parts.

In getting out a new State bird book, you have some pretty high marks to equal ^{such} as Roberts' "Birds of Minnesota," Howell's "Birds of Florida," and Mrs. Bailey's "Birds of New Mexico." The cost of getting out such a work is so high that it is virtually impossible to have it financed by a publishing house, and I think all of the above mentioned works were aided by substantial gifts. It is generally understood that the present time is rather an off season for getting contributions for anything that is not absolutely essential.

However, as you say the knowledge of the subspecific forms and their distribution in the State of Iowa has been neglected. At the time I was working on the Iowa birds we had a number of subspecies described, but general collecting had not been done in many parts of the State. Where the status of a subspecies was doubtful, I submitted specimens to Robert Ridgway, who was the acknowledged dean of American ornithology at that time, and whom I knew personally.

Therefore, I think that no species or subspecies were admitted to my list that were not authentic, as far as the knowledge of subspecies or geographical races went at that time. Probably I might have obtained a few more forms by more extensive collecting, especially in the western part of the State.

At the time I did most of my work in Iowa, motor cars had not come into use, and it was not so easy to get around the country. Also, partly for the same reason, there were more birds of certain kinds. When I was a boy, my father was actively engaged in buying and selling lands, placing mortgages, etc., in several counties of northern Iowa, some of the so-called "slough-grass counties" and I often accompanied him driving along the border south of the Minnesota line. We also had riding horses, but even with horses, it is hard to get very far. Northern Iowa was certainly a paradise for water birds at that time, and land birds too. Winnebago, Hancock, Kossuth, Wright, and Cerro Gordo counties were mostly open prairie, with plenty of lakes and sloughs, and strips of heavy timber along the water courses. A large part of the country was not farmed, being owned by speculators. I can remember when driving along the northern Iowa border, seeing mostly bald prairie, while just across the line in Minnesota, the country appeared wooded, on account of planted groves on the farms. The reason was that northern Iowa land was pre-empted or sold for \$1.25 per acre about the time of the Civil War, while southern Minnesota was homesteaded and the settlers naturally went where they could get a farm for nothing. There were very few settlers in Winnebago County before the Civil War, and when my grandparents came to Winnebago in 1860, there were only seventeen voters in the county. The building of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad about 1877 brought in some settlers, but the big boom did not occur until the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railroad built a branch from Iowa Falls via Dows, Forest City and Emmetsburg, and brought land from \$8 to \$10 an acre to the great price of about \$25 per acre. The era of draining lakes and sloughs then began, followed by county ditches, etc., and that finished most of the breeding grounds of water birds; also the happy hunting grounds of the sportsmen, and still more of the market hunters. The old settlers and business men also had their own troubles about that time, and your modern Iowans can not tell me anything about depressions and panics, as most of our friends were cleaned up in the panic of '93, which really lasted from 1890 to about 1897, and by the time I went to college, I did not have much time to collect, as I was spending most of the summers in newspaper work trying to raise the money to stay in college. I used to do more or less taxidermy work for several years, and as taxidermists were scarce, I used to get in touch with most of the rarities that showed up in my part of the State. I also found that when working a man can do quite a bit of bird work between 4 and 8 a.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m., but it means burning considerable mid-night oil looking after specimens.

Now as to your work, I think that you can produce a very useful and valuable book without trying to illustrate it in colours. There are so many illustrated bird books now that it is easy to get pictures of our birds. If you can raise the funds to illustrate your book well, it will be all to the good, and it is convenient to have a handbook with text and pictures together. However, it may be just as well to make a study of the birds, and bring the state records up to date, correct the taxonomy, and map the distribution. I am very much in favour of using as many maps as possible to mark records and distribution of species. Florence Merriam Bailey's "Birds of New Mexico" has about the best distribution maps I have seen in a bird book, and shows the elevations very graphically. You will not have the mountain problem in Iowa, however. In making distribution maps, probably the best way is to have some base maps printed on good engraver's proof paper, on somewhat larger scale than you expect to print, so that additions can be made with drawing pen. When reduced the imperfections will not show as plainly as if drawn the same size in original.

I think you are quite right in going over the old records and verifying them if possible by examining the specimens. I was not able to travel all over the State and examine all the known collections, but I had some of the specimens sent in to Iowa City, particularly if the records seemed at all improbable. While working on the "Birds of Iowa," I had more or less correspondence with every ornithologist in the State whose name I could get hold of, but I do not think I have more than a very few of them left. I distinctly remember that I left practically all of the correspondence on Iowa birds, letters tied up in bundles, in a little room in northwest corner of the third floor of the old Science Building, just off the main exhibit hall. This building used to stand on the campus near end of North Clinto Street, but I believe was moved later. These letters may have been saved, and Professor Wickham may know something about it. I do not think that you would find much of value to you in the letters, as I transcribed all the bird notes of value into manuscript books. My transcripts of notes and bibliography made about three full books, $13\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$, and about 250 pages each, and I cut these down to about one-third in final draft which was published. The letters, if found, should be of interest as handwritten notes of old Iowa ornithologists.

As to my private collection, I have no complete records to show what became of it. It was mostly made in northern Iowa, with one summer's work in North Dakota, and I kept it in Forest City. I did not collect very much in Iowa City, most of my spare time being taken up with caring for such specimens as came to the museum in the flesh, mounting occasional specimens, and repairing large numbers of specimens which Professor Nutting's zoology classes tore to pieces. Now and then when I went back to Forest City, I would bring back a box or two of specimens for the University Museum, which I deposited.

Another reason why I did not collect many birds around Iowa City was because Paul Bartsch had collected energetically for several years around Iowa City and amassed what in those days we thought was a large series of the common species. We looked for "rarities" and did not kill very many birds. When I was teaching in a military school at Macon, Missouri in 1906-08, I collected a few birds and brought them all to Iowa City.

I had a great deal of trouble in my early collecting days keeping moths and dermestids out of my specimens. My cases for holding them were spool cases and one case of large drawers, about five feet high, but with cracks which made it open to the bugs. I once made the mistake of cremating about 50% of my first four or five years' collecting, on account of the feet and wings being damaged by bugs; nothing very valuable, except a few flycatchers and doubtful forms which would have been useful later. For two or three years the bugs bothered me so much that I practically gave up making skins, except such as were taken for identification purposes, while collecting eggs. I was able to keep the eggs intact, but not the bird skins. I brought a large number of my sets of eggs to the University Museum, including some good series of ducks' eggs with nests, also one fine set of Whooping Crane. I ~~hope~~ that the latter set is still in good shape, as it is probably the last set taken in the United States. If any others were collected, the collectors probably kept it quiet. I am not claiming any distinction for taking the last set of any bird, but I do not think that taking this set made any difference in the status of the bird in Iowa. There were one or two pairs of Whooping Cranes in the same area for at least two years afterwards, but at that time extensive ditching was done in the swamps around head of the Iowa River and the crane preserve was no more. The last time I was in that region, about 1921, I was told that much of that low peaty land was used for intensive sugar beet production, harvested by cheap Polish labour brought in from Wisconsin during the season. In 1921, I cleared up everything around the old home, and found that only a few specimens of my old collection of skins was good for anything. Most of them were riddled by bugs. Curiously enough, a few skins were untouched---one prairie chicken, one Krider hawk, one Harlan hawk, and a few others; probably preserved with plenty of arsenic.

I think that the sets of eggs which I deposited in the Iowa Museum all had data with them, either originals or duplicates. In going over some of my old relics, I found that I have several books of data filled out for my old egg collection. If there any of my eggs without complete data, I can send them to you to make the records complete.

I can not tell you much more about the Hudsonian Curlew which I took in Hancock County, May 25, 1895. It was the only specimen I ever saw alive in the State. I was camping with some boys in the little fringe of timber near the lake. West of the lake there was an expanse of low flat prairie with very little if any broken sod, and we walked several miles looking for nests of Canada Goose which we thought might be there. We saw only one Curlew and had a hard time stalking it on the short grass. Most of the prairie was burned over either in fall or spring and the grass was short. There was no mistake about the identity, as the bird had the light median crown stripe. I kept the bird for some time, but my recollection is that the desmestes ate away most of the membrane from the bill and part of the head feathers around base of bill, and probably the skin was discarded later.

As to Nelson's Sparrow, I distinctly remember taking them in a little slough near the bend of the Iowa River just below Coralville. I saw them there several times; once on a bird excursion with zoölogy class when we listed about 65 species seen. My old friend and fellow townsman, the late J. Eugene Law, then living at Perry, Iowa, found Nelson's Sparrow breeding at Madison, Wisconsin, and took eggs, but I do not know whether the record was ever published.

Professor B. Shimek can tell you a lot about Iowa birds. He told me once that he made a wagon trip through the crane and curlew of northern Iowa with J. W. Preston, long before my time as an ornithologist. I noticed in Roberts' "Birds of Minnesota" that he had Preston's notes on Minnesota birds, but Preston was an Iowa man and probably there were more notes on Iowa birds than on Minnesota records. Shimek told me of seeing Burrowing owls many times in Lyon County. Shimek may remember the time I poled him around Gar Lake near Okoboji the first year the Iowa biological station was there. Okoboji, at the "Narrows" connecting with Spirit Lake was the only place I ever saw the Least Bittern really common. Shimek was teaching botany at the station, and collecting fresh water mollusks as a side line.

I have nothing on the Henslow Sparrow beyond what I recorded in my list. I never took a specimen myself, but there used to be a specimen in the Bond Collection from Tiffin, Iowa, a mounted specimen if I remember correctly.

The only record of Sycamore Warbler that I have is the specimen which I saw in the collection of Mr. George H. Berry of Cedar Rapids. I went up to Cedar Rapids to see my friend, Prof. Bert Bailey, of Coe College, and he told me about Berry, and we went to Berry's house to see him. Berry was a peculiar character who lived in a shack in the suburbs of Cedar Rapids, and made a precarious living at odd jobs, hunting, trapping, etc. but he certainly knew his birds, and Bailey had confidence in him.

Bailey used to get specimens from Berry occasionally, but I did not have funds to do any purchasing from him. Bailey died several years ago, and Prof. W. F. Kubichek is in charge of the Department of Zoology in Coe College, and might know if Berry is still alive. Kubichek was formerly in the Biological Survey, and I believe he is a relative of the Wesley Kubichek who used to have a taxidermist's shop and gun shop on Dubuque Street, Iowa City. I never knew the younger Kubichek, but the old gentleman was well informed on the birds of Johnson County. A Mr. Kurata, who has been for some years artist preparator in the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology, Toronto, is a graduate of Coe College, and I think is the same Japanese boy that used to live with Professor Bailey and help him with his specimens. I think that Kurata was with Bailey on one or two expeditions to the old Eagle Lake in Hancock county (since drained). Another man in the R.O.M.Z. is Mr. L. L. Snyder, who is chief taxidermist there, and was in University of Iowa for several years. Snyder may be able to help you.

Most of the ornithologists who were working in Iowa when I was there, have moved away. Others who worked there later are Albright of the Field Museum; Alfred M. Bailey, now director of the Chicago Academy of Sciences; Ira N. Gabrielson, of Oregon.

I am interested in learning that the large collection of Canada Geese and Snow Geese which were in the Iowa collection (mostly from the D. H. Talbot collection) have gone to the Biological Survey. I studied and made careful measurements of all the Iowa specimens and some of the Nebraska specimens. I am now satisfied that the small geese which I listed as Cackling Goose, Branta minima Ridgway, specimens verified by Robert Ridgway, should now be called Branta hutchinsi (Richardson), while the somewhat larger form found in Iowa should be called B. c. leucopareia (Brandt) = the B. c. hutchinsi of previous authors. I worked these over with P. A. Taverner (See Nat. Mus. Canada, Ann. Rep. Bull. No. 67, 1931, pp. 28-40).

I am in doubt whether the Greater Snow Goose ever occurs in Iowa except as a straggler. Many of the measurements of Lesser Snow Goose specimens come well within the limits recorded for the Greater Snow Goose, but the Greater Snow is a much heavier bird than the Lesser Snow, with much larger head and thicker neck, as can be readily seen from specimens in the flesh. The Greater Snow Goose's status was worked out by F. Kennard a few years ago, and he described it as Chen atlantica, but the new A. O. U. Check List puts it as a subspecies,

Chen hyperborea atlantica KENNARD, so probably there is intergradation somewhere.

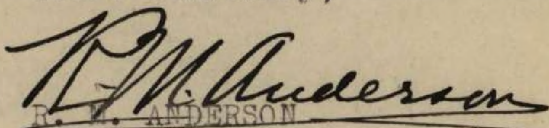
I heard Dr. Jos. Grinnell read a very interesting paper at the Quebec meeting of the A. O. U. last month, on "How Should a State List be Made Up?" Opinions differ very greatly, some wanting to include fossil species, and there are many grades between these and accidental stragglers.

Grinnell figured that within a certain number of years, if all accidental visitors were included, that the California state list would include all the forms on the A. O. U. Check List. I think however, that the "accidentals" should be listed in an appendix at least; not, however, including "escapes" of purely exotic species.

We have been short of money for the past two years, as appropriations for field work were cut, and have not done much field work, but some specimens have been coming in. I have had a little more time to work up results of previous field work, largely on mammals, although I have been doing some work on birds, particularly checking up about a dozen local lists from southern British Columbia, in preparation of a report on "Animal Life and Life Zones of Southern British Columbia." I have a book of 140 pages, illustrated, entitled "Methods of Collecting and Preserving Vertebrate Specimens", Museum Bulletin No. 69, which has been proof read and gone to printing. I have also a book on the "Mammals of Canada" in preparation, so there is plenty to keep me busy.

Please give my regards to Dill, Wickham, and Shimek when you see them. If I get any more ideas on Iowa birds I shall let you know. Wishing you success in your work, I remain

Yours sincerely,


R. W. ANDERSON
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