

ORNITHOLOGICAL REMINISCENCES OF MID-VICTORIAN
WASHINGTON

BY MORRIS M. GREEN

These notes are written by one, who, in his teens, was an underling in the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy, in its pioneer days in our national capital, in the eighties of our last century. At that time, the A. O. U. and its organ, the *Auk*, were quite young, as were also the Biological Society and the Cosmos Club of Washington. There were many chances for an observer to catch thrilling glimpses of the great and future greats of American ornithology, as they dashed in and out of the capital, like birds of passage themselves.

Elliott Coues, a most *distingué* man, with patriarchal beard, flashing eyes, and a frock coat, was passing from the stage. America's far west was then unexplored, hence positions as surgeons in frontier army posts were much appreciated by ambitious pioneers in zoology. Coues, Shufeldt, Merrill, Mearns, all army surgeons, radiated from Washington to make history in the west. Likewise went Captain Bendire, U. S. A., with a charming Teutonic brogue and a bald head that offered no hope to scalping Apaches in Arizona.

Colonel N. S. Goss, tall and straight as a lodgepole pine, occasionally breezed east from the Kansas plains to ensure that things were not "all quiet on the Potomac." Henry W. Henshaw, from western excursions of the U. S. Geological Survey, brought many feathered treasures back to Washington. In the quaint old Smithsonian building Robert Ridgway worked as quietly and as wisely, with brother John as an artistic aid, as the Barn Owls in the tower.

From Boston came William Brewster, the beau ideal of the gentleman and scholar in science; also Charles B. Cory, like an exuberant school boy, off on a joyous lark.

Washington and its suburbs were then unspoiled by the "machine age". Rock Creek was primitive and it was legal for a young collector to carry a pocket shotgun in his sleeve and dead warblers in the crown of a derby hat.

Dr. A. K. Fisher was making a fine collection of local birds, when not dissecting hawks' stomachs. The advertisement—"Body by Fisher"—so often seen today in magazines, suggests, to me, not a machine, but a beautifully molded study skin of a bird, wrapped to produce most life-like curves, by Dr. Fisher.

The patriarchs in Washington, then, were talking of a promising novice in New York, named Frank M. Chapman. In Washington, a high school student, C. W. Richmond, by name, was making wistful calls at the Smithsonian and the Agricultural Department, seeking precious light.

Leaving Washington to enter Cornell University, in 1890, my life there promised to be as tranquil as the trill of a field sparrow on a summer day.

But at Ithaca, a professor's son, whose initials were L. A. F., asked me to give him confidential instruction in skinning birds and obtaining bird books, because his father did not desire him to be a naturalist! So runs the world away!

ARDMORE, PA.

A MENSURAL STUDY OF A COLLECTION OF GRUS CANADENSIS FROM IOWA AND NEBRASKA

BY PHILIP A. DU MONT

In view of the fact that the measurements, as recorded for *Grus canadensis canadensis* (Linnaeus) and *Grus canadensis tabida* (Peters) by most authors, show a rather marked degree of differentiation, it seems advisable to place on record the results of a study of twenty-eight specimens contained in the collection of the Museum of Natural History, University of Iowa. I believe these measurements indicate more nearly the slight differences between these forms, as found in specimens taken through the Missouri River Valley region during migration. This intergradation, therefore, confirms the opinion of Oberholser¹ and Hartert², who accorded them subspecific rank.

Grinnell³ took a series of measurements of museum material totaling 107 specimens almost impartially divided between *canadensis* and *tabida*. The outstanding result of this scrutiny was the complete intergradation of the two races. He found that a plot of wing dimensions showed less division than did that of the tarsus.

In the determination of this material at hand, I have used the factors of wing length and extent of exposed culmen, and, at least for this area, these seem to suffice as subspecific characters.

While the measurements of wing, exposed culmen, culmen from nostril, depth of culmen at base, and length of middle toe (without

¹*Auk*, XXXVIII, 1921, pp. 80-82.

²*Vog. Pal. Faun.* 3, 1921, p. 1818.

³*Univ. Calif. Bull. Dept. Sci.*, Vol. 15, 1925, pp. 318-320.