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JAMES HEPBURN, A LITTLE KNOWN CALIFORNIAN ORNITHOLOGIST

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IN the course of some recent house cleaning in a storeroom in the Department of Agriculture of the University of California, there were unearthed two old manuscript note books pertaining to birds, which have since come into my hands. Their rescue was effected by Prof. T. F. Tavernetti, of the Department of Agriculture, who turned the books over to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, where they now are. The history of these note books is unknown; there is no information as to when or how they came into the possession of the University.

One of the two books (8½ inches by 5½ inches in size) is a catalogue of birds collected, many of them in California, the specimens numbered serially from 1 to 1436, and covering the period from May 6, 1852, to January 17, 1868. The other book (8 by 6¾ inches) contains a series of written accounts of various species of birds and is evidently based upon the collection listed in the catalogue. In neither volume is there any signature of the author, nor any other direct suggestion as to who the writer could be. The names of many individuals are mentioned, mostly in acknowledgment of aid in securing specimens, but it apparently never occurred to the owner of the books to put his own name on record. Both volumes are in an excellent state of preservation. They are strongly bound, the paper is white and unstained, and for the most part the ink is clear and unfaded.

It is, of course, a matter of considerable interest to us, working in present day ornithology in California, to know who it was who was making extensive collections of birds, with carefully written observations upon the species, in this state so long ago. The most promising clue to the problem, next to the period at which the work had been done, was to be found in the list of localities visited. These were all on the Pacific Coast, ranging from Los Angeles to Sitka, and with the bulk of the collecting centering about San Francisco and Victoria. The names of various old-time Californian ornithologists suggested themselves, such as Cooper, Gambel, Heermann, and others, but of all these men enough was known of their travels to be an assurance that none of them had followed the itinerary covered in this notebook.

In the original description of *Leucosticte littoralis* Baird (Trans. Chicago Acad. Sci., I, i, 1869, p. 318), the bird then and since known as the Hepburn Rosy Finch, a statement occurs that came into my mind as soon as I had glanced over the notebooks, as perhaps supplying the solution of the question. This is a reference to the collector of the specimen which was afterwards selected as the type of this form, taken at Fort Simpson "by Mr. Hepburn, an eminent English naturalist, long time resident at San Francisco and Victoria."

The next step was to consult certain old government publications which contained lists of specimens of birds, and a pertinent entry was found in a "Catalogue of the aquatic and fish-eating birds exhibited by the United States National Museum" [at the Great International Fisheries Exhibition, London, 1883], by Robert Ridgway. Under *Aphriza virgata* (p. 146) a specimen is listed as follows: "♀ juv. San Francisco, California, September 11, 1856; J. Hepburn." In the notebook, a specimen of Surf-bird is listed under exactly corresponding data, and it is, furthermore, annotated as "Sent S. I." This, in itself, seems conclusive evidence as to the author of the notebooks.

Through the assistance of Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. T. S. Palmer, of the Biological Survey, and Mr. J. H. Riley, of the United States National Museum, I have been able to gather a little information as to the relations of Hepburn to the Smithsonian Institution and to collect further corroborative evidence regarding his ownership of the notebooks in question. Hepburn was in correspondence with Baird, who was then Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and he sent to Washington many specimens of birds. Mr. Riley has supplied me with a list of birds received from Hepburn, compiled from the records of the National Museum (the birds themselves in many cases are not to be found; of some there is record of their disposal elsewhere), and for the most part the data pertaining to these specimens agree so closely with corresponding entries in the notebooks as to remove any possible doubt as to Hepburn being author of these records.

Dr. Wetmore kindly sent me a letter written to Baird by Hepburn, from San Francisco, September 19, 1859. This was a disappointing exhibit, in a way, for the sprawling, careless writing of this epistle bears at first glance no resemblance to the usually neat and closely written pages of the notebooks. However, careful inspection of the latter discloses different types of writing in different places. The same letters, or combinations of letters, are formed in widely different ways on different pages. Altogether, I receive the impression that the writer is holding himself in and forcing himself to write carefully. In places, especially in the book containing general accounts of the species, there are lapses into an extremely hasty scrawl. I am no handwriting expert and can not give a positive statement that letter and notebooks were written by the same hand. They are very unlike at first glance, but I believe may have been the product of the same writer. At any rate, however the notebooks were written, there can be no doubt that they pertain to the Hepburn collection.

His system of numbering specimens is complicated by the fact that when a skin left his hands the corresponding number in the notebook was then regarded as vacant, to be filled by a later taken specimen. I was at first startled by an entry, doubtless due to this system, of a Hammond Flycatcher on a page headed 1854, four years before the species was discovered.

The following scanty biographical notes concerning Hepburn were supplied me by Dr. T. S. Palmer: "James Hepburn was born in Scotland in 1811 and died in Victoria, B. C., April 16, 1869. He was educated as a barrister but emigrated to the Pacific coast where he resided at San Francisco and Victoria. He collected seeds of conifers for some English horticultural society and also, I believe, made collections of shells and some other natural history specimens, including the type of the bird named in his honor."

I have been able to find but one published contribution from Hepburn's pen. In the *Ibis* for 1869 (pp. 126-127), the same volume that contains a notice of his death, there is a brief "communication" regarding the identity of a "booming swallow", ascribed to North America by another writer. Editorial comment that instead of a swallow the bird was probably a snipe, called forth Hepburn's statement (undoubtedly

correct) that the travellers' "booming swallow" was really the Nighthawk (*Chordeiles virginianus*). Although he published nothing himself, his ability to write is demonstrated in one of his notebooks, which, in fact, has the appearance of being prepared as preliminary to a book on western American birds. As regards his ability as a collector and observer, we have the following statement from an excellent judge, Robert Brown, as given in the preface to his "Synopsis of the Birds of Vancouver Island" (Ibis, 1868, p. 416): "I received much assistance from my friend Mr. James Hepburn, a gentleman who has spent many years in collecting the birds of the North Pacific, and whose knowledge is only equalled by his liberality in imparting it to his less fortunate brother naturalist. His princely (for no other term will designate it) collection is now in San Francisco, and I trust that he will by-and-by favour us with an extended account of North-Pacific ornithology; but in the meantime this synopsis, which owes all that is most original in it to his notes, may stand as a contribution to zoogeography, which can alone proceed on a sure basis by the collection of local faunas."

Some time after proving to my own satisfaction, in the round-about way outlined above, that Hepburn was the author of the notebooks here described, it was drawn to my attention that he is quoted over and over again, and at some length, in Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway's "A History of North American Birds" (1874). Comparison of the published quotations with notebook entries discloses such agreement of facts stated, and even of wording, as to make it seem likely that this very notebook was in the hands of one of the authors of the work cited. For example, in the account of the White-bellied Swallow (*loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 347) there is an account, seven or eight lines in length, describing a nest placed on the yard-arm of a ship, and this description, with hardly the change of a word, appears also in the notebook account of that species.

What became of Hepburn's collection I do not know. His notebook catalogue contains 1436 entries, and, due to his peculiar system, some numbers represent several specimens each. A few skins went to the Smithsonian Institution, and there are entries of some that went elsewhere, notably a good many to "Sir W. Jardine", but it would seem that the bulk of his collection was intact at the time of his death.

Perhaps the main interest attaching to the notebooks is the opportunity of tracing Hepburn's travels in the west. The first entry in his catalogue is dated at Martinez, California, May 6, 1852. During each of the following eight years, until July 21, 1860, there are numerous entries from Californian localities, implying continuous residence at or near San Francisco, though there are gaps of time long enough to have permitted of short trips as far as Victoria. Localities mentioned include Benicia, Oakland, Pulgas Ranch (San Mateo County), Twelve-mile House (San Jose Road), San Mateo, Pacific Beach, Sausalito, Half Moon Bay, Santa Clara, and San Bruno, in the San Francisco Bay region. There were also trips to the Sierras, such as to Grass Valley, to Bear River, Placer County, and to the "Pine Tree Mines", Mariposa County.

On November 5, 1860, is the first entry from British Columbia, at Nanaimo. He remained in the colony until July 20, 1861, collecting at points near Victoria (Esquimalt, San Juan Island, and Saanich), and on the west coast, at Somass, Alberni Canal, and at Barclay Sound. June 5 to 16 was devoted to a trip to Smith's Island, Bird Rock, and Williamson's Rock, Washington Territory. From August 12 to October 15 he was at, or near, Fort Colville, Washington Territory. November 28 found him back in California, where he remained until March, 1862.

In April he returned to Victoria, and we find entries from various points thereabout: from Bird Rock and Smith's Island, Washington Territory, early in June; Barrier Island, Haro Straits, June 25; and about Victoria until July 20. From

August 28 to September 8, five specimens are listed from the "Russian Possessions", at Sitka. Then, September 26 to 27 he was at Fort Simpson, and October 8 to 26 in the vicinity of Fort Rupert, at the north end of Vancouver Island. December 17 he was back in Victoria.

During 1863 he seems to have been at or near Victoria, with one trip to Fort Rupert, most of the time until at least the middle of December. There is a single California record interpolated, of a Virginia Rail collected at Twelve-mile House, San Jose Road, April 22, which may indicate a hurried trip to San Francisco. At least such a trip would not conflict with the notebook entries. December 31, he was at San Francisco once more.

Early in 1864 there are numerous entries from the San Francisco Bay region up to April 2. The scene of activities then shifts again to British Columbia. Collecting was carried on about Victoria during May, June, and July. Then, abruptly, we find him in the interior of the mainland, at Lac La Hache, September 6-9, at Soda Creek, September 13, at Richfield, September 20-23, and at Alexandria, October 1. The next entry is from near Victoria, November 1, and there are others from there until December 31.

In 1865, entries begin in the San Francisco Bay region March 27 and continue there until the end of June. He was in Victoria again October 1-3, and back to San Francisco by November 13. In 1866, we find two pages of entries from Los Angeles, comprising a series of "marsh blackbirds" shot March 21-23. He was again in San Francisco in April, and continuously until the latter part of August. On December 10 he was in Victoria. In 1867, he was in Victoria throughout the year save for trips to islands off the coast of Washington in June and again in the fall (October 22 to November 3). The last entry in the notebook is for January 17, 1868, but this fills the book, and entries may have been continued in another volume.

There are, naturally, many items of decided interest in these notebooks, far too many for repetition here. One or two such may, however, be cited as examples.

Hepburn made two trips to the Farallon Islands, June 10 to 16, 1854, and again June 19 to July 5, 1859. On the first trip not many entries were made, but on the second trip fifty-seven specimens were catalogued, not at all a bad showing, considering that they were all water birds. They are, with one exception, species that are known to be abundant on the islands at the present time. The exception is the Rhinoceros Auklet (*Cerorhinca monocerata*), called by Hepburn the Horned Guillemot. This is of especial interest in view of the facts regarding the previous occurrence of this species on the Farallones recently brought to light by Grinnell (Condor, vol. 28, 1926, pp. 37-40). Seven specimens are listed in his catalogue, six young birds and one adult. They are all entered as "taken from the nest", and from the manner of entry (two young each from nests nos. 1 and 2, and the adult and two young from nest no. 3) the inference is drawn that he found two young constituting a brood in this species. On June 29, 1865, there are entries of two Brandt Cormorants from the Farallones, but they are annotated as killed by "one of the men". It seems likely that they were brought from the Farallones to Hepburn in San Francisco, and that he himself was not on the islands at that time.

One of the notebooks contains an important comment upon an occurrence of the Burrowing Owl on Vancouver Island, as follows: "On arriving at Fort Rupert in 1863, I found a few birds which had been shot there and left for me by my friend Mr. Moffatt, among which was an owl unquestionably the *A. hypugaea* I was not previously aware that any burrowing owls had ever been seen in Vancouver Island." This specimen, if it was preserved, is not entered in his catalogue. It is mentioned in Cooper's Ornithology of California (1870, p. 438, note).

It was disappointing to me to find no reference in Hepburn's notes to the specimen of Rosy Finch supposed to have been taken by him at Fort Simpson, and serving as the type of *Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*. Incidentally, it may be said that Fort Simpson, at sea level, is a curious place for this bird to have been found, save perhaps in midwinter. I doubt if it is anything but rare there even at that season, and Hepburn was at Fort Simpson in September.

Judging from some of his written accounts of different species of birds, it may be said that Hepburn possessed more than ordinary ability in describing what he had observed, so that in his failure finally to publish any of the results of his studies of western birds we have been deprived of what would have been a valuable and eminently readable contribution to our knowledge of the ornithology of the Pacific coast in early days.

There may be people in England or Scotland who have knowledge of Hepburn's personal career, and also of what became of his collection, but in this country, heretofore, the attachment of his name to a species of bird and a few scattered references in literature were all that saved it from oblivion.

Dickens' story of the Haunted Man centers largely about the sentiment inscribed below the painting of the founder of the institution in which the story is laid, "Lord, keep my memory green." It is a sentiment that appeals to everyone; it is what we all wish. That a man like Hepburn should die, leaving so little trace of the excellent work he evidently was carrying on, was a most lamentable ending. For years past I had wondered about this man, this "eminent English naturalist, long time resident at San Francisco and Victoria", who vanished so completely, so far as American ornithology is concerned, and it seemed a peculiar piece of luck, to me, that his notebooks should have fallen into my hands. I feel grateful to have been the means, in some measure, to aid in keeping green the memory of a man who assuredly deserves such remembrance but who has been well-nigh forgotten by the bird lovers who came after him.

Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, March 22, 1926.