

A LAST WORD ON THE PASSENGER PIGEON.

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THE question with which we started out two years ago was: Has scientifically adequate search of North America been made for *Ectopistes migratorius*? The answer then was that such a search had not been made. A year ago the fact that no nestings had been discovered and that not a single feather of evidence had been sent in seemed practically to prove that the species was extinct. However, since no definite time limits had been set for the rewards, and since a number of apparently encouraging reports had been received, we were impelled to continue the investigation.

During the season of 1911 satisfactory and practically general publicity had been secured through the educational, agricultural and sporting press. Professor Lockhead has also continued his coöperation for Canada through this season. The final result is: No nestings reported, and there are no undecided cases and no disputes. The slate is clean. None of the rewards were claimed, and, as announced in all published, official statements, all offers of reward terminated Oct. 31.

Many false reports were received, but all except four of these were settled by correspondence. In nearly every such case my informant would describe two eggs or squabs in the nest. It was only necessary to forward a reprint with the late Professor Whitman's emphatic statement that the Passenger Pigeon never laid but one egg — containing also cuts from the excellent photographs recently furnished by the American Museum of Natural History of the eggs and adults of both Pigeon and Mourning Dove — to induce the people to acknowledge that their birds were Doves.

One case, investigated by myself early in May, is deserving of permanent record. My informants reported a flock of ten pairs or more nesting in a grove of evergreen trees, thirty to thirty-five feet from the ground. They could not be induced to tell how many eggs or squabs were in the nests. I found the evergreen trees to be three clumps of large Norway spruces in a farm door-yard. The house stood on a slight elevation in a valley, devoid for the

most part of trees. The case was evidently one of crowding a number of pairs of Mourning Doves into a small, preferred island of nesting sites. Reasons for unusual elevation were also patent. A number of cats were in evidence and the lower branches of the spruce trees drooped so badly that the birds were forced to choose the higher branches. I circled the place and found practically all the Doves, and climbed the trees and examined a number of the nests. There was no evidence of any Pigeons mingled with the Doves in the locality. This report came from Pleasant Valley, New York.

The three other reports which required inspection were investigated by Professor I. N. Mitchell of Milwaukee, who generously donated his time in making the trips. His first journey was to, possibly, the most likely spot on the continent — northeastern Wisconsin. The informant, Mr. Ben Fagg, had seen Pigeons in or near a large black ash swamp. With Mr. Mitchell he attempted to relocate the birds, but the region proved too difficult and the hunt was abandoned. Mr. Fagg insisted on paying the \$5 forfeit, and it was received, but with the understanding that it would be returned, if he could show us Pigeons there later. A portion of Mr. Fagg's letter is cited below in another connection.

In response to insistent reports — informant had lived in Michigan all his life, knew the birds intimately, had located a flock of from 300 to 500, a number of which came to his barnyard daily for salt, etc. etc.— Mr. Mitchell twice visited this man in southwestern Michigan, but could find absolutely nothing but a few Mourning Doves in the neighborhood. The man offered to forfeit not only \$5 but \$10, if he was mistaken in the birds, but when the time came to pay he "*did n't have the money.*"

This concludes all there is to say on the search for nesting Pigeons during the season. My best acknowledgments are due to Colonel Anthony R. Kuser and all those who followed his lead in continuing their offers of rewards for the past season. With the plan as projected two years ago there is no fault to find. It has worked admirably in awakening the country to the problem, and this awakening can, and doubtless will, be utilized in saving other species which are in present danger. It might be in order to suggest in this connection that a committee be appointed which

shall, in coöperation with the Biological Survey, be requested to prepare for discussion at each annual meeting an authoritative statement concerning the American species which are in danger of extermination. Is it not high time that the American Ornithologists' Union take a strong, leading part in presenting to the country problems in this important field?

A number of reports, a few of them seemingly of great probability, indicate that straggling single Pigeons and even small flocks have been sighted during 1911.

Professor J. H. Moore writes from Chicago, July 14, 1911.

"I have seen this bird on two different mornings since July 4, and have taken out grains and other foods and put them near where the bird was seen. I have, however not seen it for several days now. This bird was also observed by another gentleman of Chicago to whom I told the exact location of the bird — a man who has seen thousands of them wild. There is no doubt of the identity of the bird, as I studied it very carefully the second time I saw it." (From letter forwarded by W. C. McAtee.)

Cottage Grove, Wis.

Mr. John E. Mellish reports that he studied for an hour, during a rain, a "large bird" which came from the south about 10 A. M., Apr. 13. It later flew north. He examined it at a distance of 60 feet with a 3 inch telescope with a power of fifty diameters, which revealed every marking distinctly. There was "not a single speck of dark under the ear or on the side of the head in any place." (From a letter forwarded by Prof. I. N. Mitchell, whose acquaintance with Mr. Mellish leaves him in no doubt that he saw a passenger pigeon.)

Paul J. Sisson, Seneca Falls, N. Y. writes, Sept. 12, 1911.

"I saw a single male passenger pigeon on Sept. 9 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, in an apple tree in our orchard. . . . The bird flew direct south."

Mr. James Finch, of Albion Michigan, under date of June 1, 1911, describes what he believes to have been a nesting roost of a flock of nearly 500 Pigeons "in a piece of woods by the river" on his farm. This refers to season of 1910. He writes:

"We did not notice the birds until sometime in July, and soon after harvest we noticed them flying from the river and woods to a wheat stubble about half mile away. 50 or 60 years ago pigeons were very plenty on the same fields. They came then in flocks and all together and these birds came in a flock and went away all at once. Their departure was about the middle of September. They acted so much like the old wild pigeons

that we took for granted that they were the old pigeons. . . . The boys on the farm killed a few and had them in the pot before I knew it. I never heard of mourning doves going in such large flocks, 800 to 1,000. (This was in the fall when there were many young pigeons.) I presume the birds will be back here next season and I assure you we will investigate them."

James Finch (83 years old).

There is no reason to suppose that this widely migratory species would return to any particular locality to nest, and I have not heard from Mr. Finch again. I was unable to secure any feathers by which to identify the birds which were killed.

From another letter dated Apr. 3, 1911: Arcadia, Ind.

"On March 28th last about 100 passenger pigeons were seen to pass over my father and I about 50 feet above our heads. My father having seen them by the thousands several years ago can firmly swear that they were passenger pigeons. They came from the southwest and were last seen flying northeast. (The time was given in a subsequent letter as 3 P. M.)

"We live in Hamilton Co. about 28 miles north of Indianapolis."

(signed) Harry Noble.

The following is quoted from a copy of a letter forwarded to me by Dr. A. K. Fisher.

Davidson, Mich., May 30, 1911.

"It may be of interest to you to know that I saw a flight of between 50 and 100 wild pigeons — the so called passenger pigeon — *E. migratoris*, I think you scientists name them.

I was in the Northeast corner of Burton Township, Genesee County, Michigan, at the time. A small boy with me cried out "O see the geese, no ducks." I looked up and there they were, less than 300 feet over head, in the irregular constantly shifting formation, I remember so well. I saw millions of them when a boy, tens of thousands of flocks and shot not a few. There can be no mistaking them. They flew swiftly, almost due north while over head, but shifting westward at short intervals and disappeared flying almost due northwest.

I have not seen one before in more than forty years as nearly as I can recall."

(Signed) Ernest Hollenbeck.

Mr. Ben Fagg finds the Pigeons after he failed to show them to Mr. Mitchell and writes him as follows:

Algoma, Wis., Sept. 23, 1911.

Prof. I. N. Mitchell,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Dear Professor: Pardon for delay in reply to your letter of Aug. 14. Had relinquished my position on the Record for the sole purpose of looking

after the pigeons and waited until I had something satisfactory to write you. Following is the result of my observations and experiences.

Could not get a glimpse of the birds until last week, when they came out of the deep woods, in small flocks to feed in the fields as usual just before migrating. In the meantime I had gathered all the data possible from people who had seen them during the past two years.

As rewards are about to expire and there was danger of the search being given up entirely, I carried a shotgun with me to wound and capture or kill one just to prove absolutely that they make their summer home in this locality.

At about 8 o'clock on the morning of the 23d inst., while in the same locality that you and I visited and at the spot where I had seen that young one, I saw a full-grown male pigeon strutting along upon the road, in plain view and within easy shooting distance. It was such a fine bird I did not shoot but stood gazing at it until it flew away. Am satisfied that in the immediate vicinity is to be found the nesting place. Later in the day I saw a small flock whizzing across the fields, but although I chased nearly all forenoon, I could not get near them.

(Mr. Fagg then gives a list of several persons who have seen the pigeons during this season and last.)

"At Gregor, a couple of weeks ago a passenger pigeon was shot and killed. It was cooked and eaten before the diners discovered what a rare bird they had partaken of. From description obtained, I am sure that the bird was a true *Ectopistes migratorius* Linn. . . . By the time that they return in the spring proper measures should have been taken for their protection. Altho the nests have not been discovered, there is ample proof that they summer in this big swamp and vicinity."

Very truly yours,

Benn Fagg.

A final letter contributed by Mr. Chapman is interesting as indicating how many Pigeons a man in a most likely locality has claimed to have observed during the past 19 years.

Mr. Frank M. Chapman, Editor Bird Lore.

Dear Sir:

In the last issue of Bird Lore I noticed two items in regard to the extinction of the wild pigeon. I saw one wild pigeon at Gulliver, Schoolcraft Co., Michigan about 1892. Again at the same place, one came into my yard, where I watched it from a distance of a few feet for several minutes; the time being May, 1903. At Newberry, Luce Co., Michigan I saw one wild pigeon on each of the days Oct. 13 and Oct. 24, 1909, I saw a small flock June 9, 1910 at Newberry. On two other occasions I have seen birds which may have been and probably were pigeons but owing to unfavorable conditions of observation I am unable to identify the birds with certainty.

Yours truly,

Ralph Beebe, Newberry, Mich.

Jan. 9, 1911.

Do such letters constitute sufficient warrant for continuing the investigation a third season? The correspondence for the season will not be complete until, probably, Jan. 1. If decisive evidence does come in, that the species still survives anywhere it may determine future action.

The nightmare of the whole situation has been that the last survivors of this great species were being ignorantly shot off. Our two years' active search has developed considerable verbal, but no tangible, evidence for this. The latest in this line is the following — which has been given wide publicity (not by me) in the daily press as definite proof that Passenger Pigeons are still being shot. The remains of another Mourning Dove came in from Maine the day after.

Dr. C. F. Hodge,

Dear Sir:

One day recently, while out hunting, I shot a bird and had it mounted by one of our leading taxidermists. It proved to be a "Passenger Pigeon" (*Ectopistes migratorius*). I think it is a young bird as it has dark spots on the back. Please reply giving me some more information concerning this bird.

Yours truly,

Dwight P. Cushman, Hebron, Me.

Oct. 30, 1911.

I did reply, sending leaflets with photographs and underscored boldly in red ink the comparative lengths of the Pigeon and Mourning Dove. I also enclosed the Audubon Association's colored plates of the two birds, and I said:

"If, after examining your bird in the light of the material I am sending you with this, you are still sure that the specimen is a Passenger Pigeon, I would be glad to pay express both ways for a look at it and for the privilege of keeping it a few days to show to the American Ornithologists' Union, which is meeting in Philadelphia soon."

An early express brought a little box with a little stuffed Mourning Dove in it. It went back by return express to Hebron, Maine, express \$.70.

My expenses for the season have been \$99.70. The balance of \$.30 is suggestive. Of this amount Col. Anthony R. Kuser and family voluntarily contributed \$80.

Since writing the above report it has been decided to continue the rewards another season, i. e. until October 31, 1912, as follows:

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$1000) REWARD

For first information, exclusive and confidential, of the location of a nesting pair or colony of Passenger Pigeons, anywhere in North America; when properly confirmed and if found by confirming party with parent birds and eggs or young undisturbed:

Colonel Anthony R. Kuser will pay a reward of \$300.

John E. Thayer will pay a reward of \$700.

For first nesting discovered thereafter in the following States will be paid by:

John Burroughs, New York	\$100.
A. B. F. Kinney, Massachusetts	100.
Anonymous, Massachusetts, for 2d find	100.
Allan B. Miller, for 1st nesting found in Worcester Co., Mass.	20.
Edward Avis, Connecticut	100.
Harry S. Hathaway, Rhode Island	100.
Worthington Society, New Jersey	100.
John Dryden Kuser, for 2d nesting found in New Jersey	10.
Henry W. Shoemaker, Penna. \$200. (adds \$25, if nest is protected)	225.
W. B. Mershon, Michigan	100.
R. W. Mathews, Minnesota	100.
Ruthven Deane, Illinois	50.
John E. Thayer, Me., N. H., Vt., Ont., Wis., \$100 each	500.
John Lewis Childs, for first three nestings not entitled to any of the above rewards, \$200 each	600.

The purpose of these offers is to secure an intelligent search of the American continent for breeding Pigeons in the hope that, if found, the species may be saved from extermination.

All above rewards are offered solely and only for information of location of undisturbed nestings. We do not desire possession of any birds, alive or dead, but are working solely to save the free, Wild Pigeon.

As soon as a pigeon nesting is surely identified write the undersigned, who will arrange for confirming party and for payment of the reward. All rewards not claimed by Oct. 31, 1912, will be withdrawn.

Signed, C. F. HODGE,
Clark University, Worcester, Mass.