

was a female in winter plumage but undergoing molt. It had considerable subcutaneous fat. The fieldwork was sponsored by the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, project No. 1647.

LITERATURE CITED

- BURLEIGH, T. D. 1958. Georgia birds. Norman, Univ. Oklahoma Press.
 SPRUNT, A., JR. 1954. Florida bird life. New York, Coward-McCann, Inc.
 SPRUNT, A., JR. 1963. Addendum to Florida bird-life (1954). New York, Coward-McCann, Inc.
 WEBSTER, F. S., JR. 1969. Regional report (south Texas region). *Amer. Birds* 23: 495-498.
 WEBSTER, F. S., JR. 1970. Regional report (south Texas region). *Amer. Birds* 24: 518-521, 622-624.
 WEBSTER, F. S., JR. 1971. Regional report (south Texas region). *Amer. Birds* 25: 768-771.
 WEBSTER, F. S., JR. 1972. Regional report (south Texas region). *Amer. Birds* 26: 627-629.

ROBERT B. HAMILTON and ROBERT E. NOBLE, *School of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803*. Accepted 9 Jul. 74.

Ashton Blackburne's place in American ornithology.—Ashton Blackburne was an important early collector of birds in the New York City region at the time of the Revolutionary War. His contributions to American ornithology were graciously acknowledged by Thomas Pennant (1785, 1: leaf A2) in "Arctic zoology." He disclosed how Blackburne's specimens came into his hands, and pointed out their importance to him:

"To the rich museum of American Birds, preserved by Mrs. Anna Blackburn, of *Orford*, near *Warrington*, I am indebted for the opportunity of describing almost every one known in the provinces of *Jersey*, *New York*, and *Connecticut*. They were sent over to that lady by her brother the late Mr. *Ashton* Blackburn; who added to the skill and zeal of a sportsman, the most pertinent remarks on the specimens he collected for his worthy and philosophical sister."

Mrs. Allen (1951) implied that Ashton Blackburne was one of Pennant's collectors in North America, but the statement above affirms that their connection was less direct.

McAtee (1963) determined the number of birds from New York that Pennant described from Ashton Blackburne's specimens amounted to "no fewer than 101." The number is still higher when the birds from adjacent areas are included. This brief biographical sketch of a neglected naturalist also attempts to identify those species and subspecies that have maintained their priority and are cited in the A.O.U. Check-list (1957).

The Blackburne family has been referred to occasionally in the popular literature, but much of the information about them has been recopied from earlier sources (cf. Pennant 1774). The amount of material I found in a rather extensive search is sparse and contains frequent inaccuracies.

Ashton Blackburne was the fifth son of John Blackburne (1693-1786), a well-known and highly respected horticulturist of Orford Hall, near Warrington, in

Lancashire, England. John Blackburne was famous for his extensive gardens of exotic plants. Ashton's sister Anna Blackburne (1726–1793) shared their father's passion for botany, but later turned her efforts toward collecting other objects of nature. Eventually she established an impressive museum at "Fairfield," her residence also near Warrington. Her collection formed an important source of reference specimens used by some of her notable contemporaries: J. R. Forster, C. Linné, P. S. Pallas, Thomas Pennant, and possibly John Latham, all of whom held her in high regard as a naturalist. As an expression of his appreciation for the loan of her North American specimens, Pennant named the Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) in her honor (Wystrach 1974). Ashton's older brothers remained settled as gentlemen in the Liverpool-Warrington area, but he seems to have been an adventurer and emigrated to America. His main mission evidently was to supply his sister's cabinet with items from the New World.

Efforts to find a record of Ashton Blackburne's birth have been fruitless, but it was probably around 1730. His mother was Katharine Ashton, the daughter of the Reverend William Ashton (or Assheton), Rector of Prestwich, Lancashire. Her sister, Dorothy Ashton, was the mother of Sir Ashton Lever (1729–1788), a pioneer in the development of natural history museums (Ripley 1969). Nothing substantial has been found about Ashton Blackburne's early life and education, but the quality of his account of the Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), quoted verbatim in "Arctic zoology" (Pennant 1785, 2: 324–326), seems sufficient evidence that he had acquired an education befitting a squire's son.

In her first letter to Linné (Hulth 1922: 284–285), dated 29 June 1771, Anna indicated that Ashton had already been actively collecting in America for some time:

"Having a Bro^r. who lives near new York in north America, who annually enriches my Cabinet with the productions of that Country, if it wou'd be agreeable to you I wou'd send you a few Birds & insects, which I believe are not in your Sys. Nat^{ae}. & which he kill'd within 50 miles of that place."

Anna Blackburne and the Swedish taxonomist exchanged only a few letters, and it is doubtful that he described any birds from her specimens because of the illness that inactivated him in 1774. Gmelin (1788) subsequently gave technical names to those Blackburne birds that had been described initially and given vernacular names by Pennant (1785) and by Latham in "A general synopsis of birds" (1781).

Very few records are extant of the activities and fate of Anna Blackburne's brother in America. McAtee (1952) reported that he lived on Long Island, possibly in the Hempstead area, and collected birds in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. How far and how frequently he strayed from that locale has not been determined, but in his account of the Passenger Pigeon, he indicates travel to "Niagara" and British garrisons.

In her second letter to Linné (Hulth 1922: 286–287), dated 14 October 1771, Anna suggests that Ashton may have been seriously ill at that time:

"My Colection of dry'd birds is pritty num[erous]. My cabinet is not destitute of shells, Insects, fish & Fossils, & if my brother lives will increase fast."

Coupled with that last remark, the circumstance of his death is speculative. Rylands (1881) gives the following account in "Hale Hall:":

"Asheton Blackburne died in America in 1787, and was buried at the Episcopal Chapel at Nouwalk, 60 miles from New York. The church had been lately re-

built, and was the first that was consecrated by the first bishop sent out from England to America."

"Nouwalk" is Norwalk, Connecticut, and the church is St. Paul's, but documentation of Mr. Blackburne's death or burial is no longer extant because the church records were destroyed during the Revolutionary War. If he resided on Long Island and died in Norwalk, he was far from home when he met his end, suggesting that it was unexpected. The year 1787 appears to be an error; it seems more likely that he died nearer to 1780. One piece of evidence is Pennant's reference to the "late Ashton Blackburn" in his acknowledgement in "Arctic zoology." Further support for an earlier date is found in an obituary notice for Ashton's father published in 1787 (Aiken 1787). This author comments that Anna's brother had "died in that country [North America] several years ago." Thus his life span was approximately 50 years.

The birds of the A.O.U. Check-list believed to have been originally described from specimens Ashton Blackburne procured were selected from among the 29 given Linnaean names by Gmelin and based on birds published earlier by Pennant and/or Latham. Examination of their original descriptions in "Arctic zoology" and "A general synopsis of birds" identified those species and subspecies that were described from specimens collected in the New York environs and obtained from the Blackburne Museum. They numbered 16: American Wigeon (*Anas americana*), Labrador Duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*), Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris crepitans*), Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*), American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*), Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*), Eastern Screech Owl (*Otus asio naevius*), Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*), Northern White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus noveboracensis*), Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacuta*), and Vesper Sparrow (*Poocetes gramineus*). Perhaps the Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) should also be included. It appears to have been described independently by Pennant and Latham, although Pennant reported that his specimen came from New York by way of Anna Blackburne's collection.

Accounts of all 17 birds are given in both works. In most instances the descriptions are essentially the same and are generally in the style of Pennant. In all but three cases, the same trivial names are used, and, except for the American Wigeon and the Clapper Rail, they differ from those of the A.O.U. Check-list. Thus it appears that much of Latham's information regarding these species came directly from Pennant and the Blackburne specimens. To put Ashton Blackburne's contributions into perspective compare his 16, or possibly 17, eastern species and subspecies still on the Check-list, with Audubon's 22 and Wilson's 26.

I am indebted to the staff members of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University for the use of the early ornithology books cited, and to Carl-Otto von Sydow of Universitets Biblioteket, Uppsala, for permission to quote from the Anna Blackburne-Linné correspondence.

LITERATURE CITED

- AIKEN, J. 1787. Obituary of John Blackburne. *Gent. Mag.* 57 part 1: 204.
 ALLEN, E. G. 1951. The history of American ornithology before Audubon. *Trans. Amer. Phil. Soc.* 41: 492-493.

- AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1957. Check-list of North American birds, fifth ed. Baltimore, Amer. Ornithol. Union.
- GMELIN, J. M. 1788. Syst. nat.; cf. A.O.U. check-list for specific citations.
- HULTH, J. M. (Ed.). 1922. Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné Afd 2, Del. 1.
- LATHAM, J. 1781. A general synopsis of birds. London, Benj. White.
- MCATEE, W. L. 1952. Thomas Pennant. Nature Mag. 45: 98, 108.
- MCATEE, W. L. 1963. The North American birds of Thomas Pennant. J. Soc. Bibliogr. Nat. Hist. 4: 100-124.
- PENNANT, T. 1774. A tour in Scotland and voyage to the Hebrides. London, John Monk.
- PENNANT, T. 1785. Arctic zoology. London, Henry Hughs.
- RIPLEY, S. D. 1969. The sacred grove, essays on museums. New York, Simon and Shuster.
- RYLANDS, J. P. 1881. Hale Hall, with notes on the family of Ireland Blackburne. Liverpool, private printing.
- WYSTRACH, V. P. 1974. A note on the naming of the Blackburnian warbler. J. Soc. Bibliogr. Nat. Hist. 7: 89-91.
- V. P. WYSTRACH, 20 Westfield Road, Wilton, Connecticut 06897. Accepted 15 Jul. 74.

Nest-searching behavior in the Brown-headed Cowbird.—This note describes three distinct types of nest-searching behavior that we noted during field studies of Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) at Kingston, Ontario, from 1970 to 1973.

Successful brood parasitism initially requires that parasites be able to locate numerous host nests. Freidmann (1929, The cowbirds, Springfield, Illinois, C. C. Thomas, p. 187) described one technique that the cowbird uses to find host nests: "The cowbird ordinarily finds the nests it victimizes by watching the birds build. Frequently I have noted cowbirds perched almost motionless for an hour or so watching vireos, warblers, and sparrows carrying nesting material." Hann (1941, Wilson Bull. 53: 211) and Payne (1973, Condor 75: 80) also described silent watching of nest-building activities as a commonly used nest-searching behavior. We witnessed silent observation of nest building in our study on several occasions in open grassland-juniper scrub (*Juniperus communis*). A female cowbird was seen watching a Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) building its nest on 15 May 1971; another watched while a Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) was lining its nest on 18 May 1971; and on four separate occasions, we saw cowbirds watching Chipping Sparrows (*S. passerina*) build nests. The female cowbird watched its prospective hosts from the tops of shrubs and trees 15 to 25 feet from the nests, for periods of time ranging from 9 to 21 min, and then silently left the nest vicinity. In every case the hosts were later parasitized.

On three occasions in June 1973, female cowbirds were noted using a variation of the silent observation technique to search for nests in forested habitats. The lone females walked silently over the forest floor and looked about. They were not feeding, and they progressed slowly but steadily in a definite direction, sometimes stopping to watch the movements of birds in the forest canopy.

A very unusual type of cowbird behavior occurred on the afternoon of 3 June