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100 Years Ago in The Auk



From "Notes and News" (1888, *Auk* 5: 223):

"The subject of the voluntary interlocking of the primaries in soaring birds (see *Jan. Auk*, pp. 126, 127) came up again for discussion at the meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences, held Jan. 9 last, and formed the special topic of the evening. The discussion was opened by a paper by Mr. J. A. Allen, entitled 'On the Flight of Birds, with special reference to recent alleged discoveries in the Mechanism of the Wing,' in which he answered certain criticisms made at the previous meeting of the Academy, reflecting on the motives and animus of the ornithologists, and then took up the structure of birds in relation to flight, describing at some length the bones and muscles involved, and the arrangement and structure of the feathers. The alleged 'new muscles' were shown to have been well known for over a century, and by means of a freshly-killed *Buteo borealis* it was demonstrated that the tips of the primaries, when the wing is fully extended, as in soaring, do not even touch each other, but are separated by a considerable

space, and that consequently overlapping at the tip, or 'interlocking,' is simply impossible. It was shown that the wing must be partly closed before the tips of the primaries can be brought near enough to overlap, and that if they should overlap—which they can do only in the partly closed state of the wing—they would fail entirely to aid in relieving muscular strain in keeping the wing distended. In short, it was shown that the 'interlocking' claimed was not only an impossibility, but was wholly unnecessary as a provision for relieving muscular tension in flight. Yet the advocate of the new discovery refused to be convinced, and stated that if any one expected him to 'back down' they would find themselves 'mistaken in their man,' or words emphatically to this effect. Those interested in the original paper and in the discussion which followed it will find the subject quite fully reported in the Academy's 'Transactions' (Vol. VII, giving reports of the meetings for November and December, 1887, and January, 1888)."