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100 Years Ago in The Auk



From "Great Auk Notes" by Frederic A. Lucas
(1888, *Auk* 5: 278-283):

"I cannot close this paper without referring to the published figures of the Great Auk, for this bird has suffered grievously at the hands of nearly every artist (Audubon is an exception) who has been called upon to portray it.

"It is true that the artists may plead extenuating circumstances in the shape of the stuffed—it were flattery to say mounted—specimens that have served as models, most of which are from two to eight inches longer than they should be. I trust Mr. Hancock will pardon me for including his figure in this criticism, for his bird is too long, too slender, and with too pronounced a crop.

"Artists have evidently recognized the fact that the stuffed Auks are too slender, and endeavored to make amends for the shortcomings of the taxidermist, for obesity is the general trouble with figures of the Great

Auk, although the neck is usually as much too thin as the body is too stout. Could the bird have seen himself portrayed as he is even on the cover of his namesake, he might, like Wolfe, have exclaimed, 'Now I die content.'

"The question might naturally be asked what right has one who never saw the Great Auk alive to criticise him dead, and the answer is this, having just compared three mounted skeletons with one of the Razorbill: the conclusion is unavoidable that the two species resembled one another very closely in outward contour.

"As for internal structure, I must plead guilty to a belief that the two species should be included in the genus *Alca*, and with this bit of cis-Atlantic heresy bring these notes to a close."