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100 Years Ago in The Auk



From "The habits of the Golden Plover (*Charadrius dominicus*) in Massachusetts"
by George H. MacKay (1891, *Auk* 8: 17-24):

"... As far as my observation shows on the Island of Nantucket, the Golden Plover usually seeks land about dusk and during the first half of the night. I can recall but three occasions when they landed during daytime, and on two of those in very inconsiderable numbers. It is usual several times during the migrating period to hear them whistling as they pass low down over the town of Nantucket; but on these occasions, unless it is storming hard, they do not stop, but pass on, if the wind is fair (northeast). I have been many times disappointed on driving over the Plover ground at daylight on the following morning to find that no birds had stopped. In other words, it is a most difficult matter to 'hit the flight,' for it requires a combination of circumstances and weather which rarely happens, to enable one to obtain any number of these birds on the Atlantic coast.

In regard to the numbers of these birds formerly, and at the present time, I would say that it is extremely difficult to arrive at any correct conclusion, this arises from the fact that the migration almost always passes by, or over the Island, after dark, and our means of judging is by comparison with others of the number of flocks heard whistling as they flew overhead. It is however certain that for a number of years fewer birds have stopped on the coast than formerly, and

for a shorter period. We are, however, liable any year, when all the conditions are favorable, to have an immense landing.

To those interested in this direction I give the following result of some inquiry I made recently of two game dealers in Boston. About four years ago the shipment of Golden Plover, Eskimo Curlew, and Bartramian Sandpipers first commenced in the spring, and it has been on the increase up to date. Last spring (1890) these two firms received from Nebraska (principally), Saint Louis, and Texas (Fort Worth) *twenty barrels* of birds, one-third of which were Golden Plover, two-thirds Bartramian Sandpipers; *eight barrels* of Eskimo Curlew; *twelve barrels* of Eskimo Curlew and Golden Plover. As there are *twenty-five dozen* Curlew, and *sixty dozen* Plover each to a barrel, it will be realized what this means, if other large cities are similarly supplied. All were killed on their northern migration to their breeding grounds. Therefore while we may not be able now to answer the question: are they fewer than formerly, we shall be ably fitted to do so in a few years."

Vol. 8 (1) also included a color plate. The illustration, drawn by J. L. Ridgway, was of an adult and young male Icternus northropi in an article "The birds of Andros Island, Bahamas" by John L. Northrop.—Ed.