

## ALEXANDER WILSON.

## VI.—HIS NOMENCLATURE.

BY FRANK L. BURNS.

Dr. Coues has declared that science would lose little, but on the contrary, would gain much if every scrap of pre-Wilsonian writing about United States birds could be annihilated. It is true that foreign naturalists had been, for the most part, bigoted, misinformed or too credulous; and the few native writers unsystematic, lacking in initiative and realization of the importance of exactness. However, Wilson did not find systematic ornithology an utter chaos. Linnæus, the great compiler, and his editor Gmelin, had absorbed much from our earlier writers, particularly Catesby, and his *Systema Naturæ* provided the ground plan and skeleton, it remained to be consolidated, clothed, the gaps filled in; far too great a task in its entirety for the inexperience and brief period of Wilson, even had he the inclination for such work.

Wilson adopted, and with some exceptions, followed the system used by Dr. J. Latham in his *Index Ornithologicus*, and *General Synopsis of Birds*, which the Philadelphia library supplied him. For the use of M. Turton's version of Linnæus' *Systema Naturæ*, he was indebted to his friend Thomas Say. Mark Catesby's *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*; George Edwards' work; Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*; William Bartram's *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the extensive territories of the Muscogulges, or the Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Choctaws*; Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire*; S. Williams' *Natural and Civil History of Vermont*; and Benjamin Smith Barton's *Fragments of Natural History of Pennsylvania*; he found in Bartram's library, or elsewhere

Dr. Francis in describing Wilson's visit to New York, says that he seized the moments of leisure he had, in closely examining books on natural science, in different libraries to

which he could obtain ready access. The American Museum, which had been well fitted up, was however, his most gratifying resort. Scudder, the founder of this institute, was indeed a rough diamond, but few could surpass his enthusiasm in studying the volumes of nature, as he termed every object in natural history. Scudder remarked "I have many curiosities here, Mr. Wilson, but I myself am the greatest one in the collection."<sup>1</sup>

In this manner, Wilson obtained the slender book knowledge of birds he possessed. At the time of his death, according to a statement of his executor, his shelves contained but one ornithological work, Thomas Berwick's History of British Birds! He was no closet naturalist. He was eager for the exact truth direct from nature. Ord, with some justice, complains: "In his specific definitions he is loose and unsystematic. He does not appear to have been convinced of the necessity of precision on this head; his essential and natural characters are not discriminated; and in some instances, he confounds generic and specific characters, which the laws of methodical science do not authorize. . . . That he was not ambitious of the honor of forming new genera, appears from the circumstance, that, although he found the system of Latham's needed reformation, yet he ventured to propose but one genus, the *Curvirostra*, the characters of which are so obvious, that one is astonished that so learned an ornithologist as Latham, should have contented himself with arranging the species appertaining to it with others, the conformation, of whose bills is so dissimilar. It may be necessary to state that Crossbills have been erected into a separate genus, under the denomination of *Crucirostra*, by an author whose works Wilson had no knowledge of; and I have reason to believe that even the generic appellation of *Curvirostra* had been anticipated, by a writer on the ornithology of the northern parts of Europe. Brisson limited his genus *Loxia* to the Crossbills, and this judicious restriction appears to be now sanctioned by all naturalists of authority."

<sup>1</sup>Obituary Notice of Alexander Wilson. The Port Folio, New Series, Vol. II. Sept. 1813.

In the spring of 1804, Wilson knew scarcely an American bird. He constantly appealed to Bartram to mark the names of his species under his drawings. Soon the multiplicity of current specific names perplexed and annoyed him, and he writes to Bartram: "The more I read and reflect upon the subject, the more dissatisfied I am with the *specific* names which have been used by almost every writer. A name should, if possible, be expressive of some peculiarity in color, conformation, or habit; if it equally apply to two different species, it is certainly an improper one. Is *migratorius* an epithet peculiarly applicable to the robin? Is it not equally so to almost every species of *turdus* we have? *Europea* has been applied by Pennant to our large *sitta* or nuthatch, which is certainly a different species from the European, the latter being destitute of the black head, neck and shoulders of ours. Latham calls it *carolinensis*, but it is as much an inhabitant of Pennsylvania and New York as Carolina. The small red-bellied *sitta* is called *canadensis* by Latham, a name equally objectionably with the other. *Turdus minor* seems also improper; in short I consider this part of the business as peculiarly perplexing; and I beg to have your opinion on the matter, particularly with respect to the birds I have mentioned, whether I shall hazard a new nomenclature, or, by copying, sanction what I do not approve." Fortunately for the already overburdened synonymy, Bartram's council was doubtless for a conservative course, and ever after Wilson labored diligently to adopt names sanctioned by some one or other of his predecessors, with due regard as to fitness, but little as to priority.

Wilson evidently endeavored to establish the identity of Bartram's species whenever possible, but referred to the List less and less as his own work progressed and his knowledge increased, doubtless realizing the hopelessness of the task, with nothing but the meagre description and the failing memory of his patron to assist him in the identification. On the other hand as Coues has stated, many birds which Wilson first fully described and figured, were named by Bartram, and several of the latter's designations were simply adopted

by Wilson, who in relation to Bartram, is as the broader and clearer stream to its principal tributary affluent.<sup>1</sup> So far as the ornithological world is concerned, the originals are now mere literary curiosities, and are appended as a matter of history.

| Bartram, 1791.  | Wilson, and A. O. U. Check List.   |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Vultur atratus</i> .<br>the black vulture, or carrion<br>crow.                | { <i>Vultur atratus</i> Wils.— <i>Catharista atrata</i> (Bartr.) until 1899, when it gave way to a later name— <i>C. urubu</i> (Vieill.) Bartram being eliminated. |
| 2. <i>F[alco] niger</i> .<br>the black hawk.  | { <i>Falco niger</i> Wils. Black Hawk. A synonym of <i>Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis</i> (Gmel.) American Rough-legged Hawk.                                  |
| 3. <i>Muscitapa nunciola</i> .<br>the pewit, or black-cap flycatcher.               | { <i>Muscicapa nunciola</i> Wils. Pewit Flycatcher. Synonym of <i>Sayornis phæbe</i> (Lath.) Phæbe.  |
| 4. <i>M. rapax</i> , the lesser pewit,<br>or brown and greenish flycatcher.         | { <i>Muscicapa rapax</i> Wils. Wood Pewee. Synonym of <i>Myiochanes vicens</i> (Linn.)   |
| 5. <i>Tucar lividus</i> .<br>the cat bird or chicken bird.                          | { <i>Turdus lividus</i> Wils. Catbird. Synonym of <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i> (Linn.)  |
| 6. <i>Muscicapa cantatrix</i> .<br>the little domestic flycatcher or<br>green wren. | { <i>Muscicapa cantatrix</i> Wils. White-eyed Flycatcher. Synonym of <i>Virco griseus</i> (Bodd.) White-eyed Vireo.  |
| 7. <i>Sturnus prædatorius</i><br>the red-winged starling or corn<br>thief.          | { <i>Sturnus prædatorius</i> Wils. A synonym of <i>Agelaius phœniceus</i> (Linn.)<br>Red-winged Blackbird.   |
| 8. <i>C[arduelus] pinus</i><br>the lesser goldfinch.                                | { <i>Fringilla pinus</i> Wils.<br>Pine Finch.<br><i>Spinus pinus</i> (Wils.)<br>Pine Siskin.   |
| 9. <i>P[asser] palustris</i><br>the reed sparrow.                                   | { <i>Fringilla palustris</i> Wils.<br>Synonym of<br><i>Melospiza georgiana</i> (Lath.)<br>Swamp Sparrow.   |
| 10. <i>F[ringilla] rufa</i><br>the red, or fox-colored ground<br>or hedge sparrow.  | { <i>Fringilla rufa</i> Wils.<br>Synonym of<br><i>Passerella iliaca</i> (Merr.)<br>Fox Sparrow.  |
| 11. <i>M[otacilla] Caroliniana</i><br>the great wren of Carolina.                   | { <i>Certhia carolinensis</i> Wils.<br>Synonym of<br><i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i> (Lath.)<br>Carolina Wren.   |

<sup>1</sup> Key to North American Birds.

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|---|---|--|
| 12. <i>M. domestica</i><br>the house wren.                        | } | Named only with reference to Bartram by Wilson <i>Motacilla domestica</i> Bartr.<br>Synonym of <i>Troglodytes aedon</i> Vieill.<br>House Wren. |
| 13. <i>M. palustris</i><br>the marsh wren.                        | } | <i>Certhia palustris</i> Wils.<br><i>Telmatodytes palustris</i> (Wils.)<br>Long-billed Marsh Wren.   |
| 14. <i>Sitta varia</i><br>the black-capped, red-bellied nuthatch. | } | <i>Sitta varia</i> Wils. Synonym of <i>Sitta canadensis</i> Linn. Red-breasted Nuthatch.   |
| 15. <i>T[urdus] melodes</i><br>the wood thrush.                   | } | <i>Turdus melodes</i> Wils. A synonym of <i>Turdus mustelinus</i> Gmel. Wood Thrush.   |

Perhaps, Bartram's *N[umentius] pectore rufo*, or *Tringa rufa*, may have suggested Wilson's *Tringa rufa* Red-breasted Sandpiper; and *Ardea viriscens minor*, his *Ardea minor* Bittern; though the species are certainly not the same. Wilson failed to make use of *P[asser] agrestis*, the little field sparrow, though perhaps *C[arduces] pusillus*, the least finch, may have suggested his *Spizella pusilla* for the Field Sparrow; nor did he adopt Bartram's *M[otacilla] sylvicola*, the little red-eye'd flycatcher for that species, but transferred the specific name to the Yellow-throated Vireo; and likewise *P[arus] viridis guttore nigro*, the green black-throated flycatcher, to *Hirundo viridis*, White-bellied Swallow. *Fringilla rufa* Bartr. was changed to *F. ferruginea* and marked new in his Catalogue, Vol. VI.

Bartram would serve as an ideal patron saint for a bird protective association. He was exceedingly averse to killing anything, and writes "as long as I can get any other necessary food, I shall prefer their seraphic music in the ethereal skies, and my eyes and understanding gratified in observing their economy and social communities, in the expansive green savannas of Florida." He would not kill the deadly diamond-backed rattlesnake, if it was possible to avoid it, because at the beginning of his career as a botanist, a mountain rattler had refused to strike when he had mistaken it for a curious bit of fungus. However, accidental specimens described in the field are not always satisfactory, and sight diagnoses

seldom accurate; therefore it is small wonder he erred repeatedly. His nomenclature is a mixture of Linnæus, Edwards, Catesby and his own. Unlike Wilson, he seemed never at a loss for a name, and if he had more than one occasion to refer to a species, he seldom repeated the name he had given it, but produced another. Hence we have *Colymbus colubrinus et cauda elongata*, the snake bird of Florida=*Anhinga anhinga*, Anhinga; *Melcagris Americanus et occidentalis*=*M. gallopovo merriami*, Merriam's Turkey; *Falco aquilinus et major cauda ferregerino*, the great eagle hawk=*Buteo borealis*, Red-tailed Hawk; *F. regulis et maximus*, the great gray eagle=*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, Bald Eagle; *Strix acclamator et various*, the hooting owl=*Syrrium varium*, Barred Owl; *Caprimulgus lucifugus et rufus*, the great bull bat or chuck wills widow.=*Antrostomus carolinensis*, Chuck-wills-widow; *Garrulis australis et Motacilla trochilus*=*Icteria virens*, Yellow-breasted Chat; *Motacilla palustris et regulus atrofuscus minor*, or marsh wren=*Telmatodytes palustris*, Long-billed Marsh Wren; *Turdus melodes et minor*=*Turdus mustelinus*, Wood Thrush; and perhaps others.

Not only Wilson, but Barton, Vieillot and Audubon quarried in the ruins of his nomenclature. His list of 215 nominal species, are by no means all identifiable. He did not understand the various changes of plumage some of our birds are subject to, in one or more instances differentiated the sexes of a species, and the confusion was not lessened by the more than occasional employment of established technical terms not applicable to the species under consideration. According to Coues about half are new, and subtracting a number unquestionably derived from other sources, though misapplied, and repetition or multiplication through ignorance of variation in plumage, the number is still large and contains several unknown to Wilson. It is also evident that some one must have imposed upon "Puc Puggy" (the Flower Hunter), as he was known to the Seminoles, in the instance of the so-called *Vultur sacra*, the painted or white-tailed vulture, which he tells us fed upon roasted lizards, snakes and frogs, therefore dependent upon the occasional

firing of the Florida savannas by lightning or the Indians, It is now considered a mythical species. Dr. Allen suggesting that it originated from some facts known to Bartram in connection with the Bald Eagle and the Caracara becoming mixed in his mind with some of his ideas respecting the King Vulture of the American tropics. For over a quarter of a century, Dr. Coues fought for the recognition of some twenty of Bartram's names, but aside from his polynomial tendencies, so many of his species were impossible of positive identification, it must have been a relief to have the bird solons finally decide adversely and eliminate Bartram entirely.

Barton attempted a concordance of Bartram's list in his *Fragments of Natural History*, 1799, with no very great success. It is full of errors and conjectures in respect to the identity of Bartram's species. He was, however, a strict binomialist, and receives recognition wherever he has properly described a species. From him Wilson has undoubtedly taken his *Fringilla melodia*=*Melospiza melodia*. Barton places it with the species known to breed in Pennsylvania, and also states: "In mild winters, this bird continues in Pennsylvania, associating with the Snowbirds. Does not appear to be described." Procrastination and lack of energy most probably robbed Barton of the title of Father of American Ornithology. His lamentable lack of concentration drew forth the rather contemptuous observations from Wilson in a letter to F. A. Michaux, the French naturalist; June 6, 1812: "Dr. Barton has not yet published his *General Zoology*, which he has been announcing, from time to time, for so many years. It is much easier to say these things than to do them." Ord states that after the work was ten years in the press, it had advanced no further than *fifty-six* pages in octavo, at the death of the author. "The printed sheets I have read, not only with satisfaction, but instruction; and cannot forbear expressing my regret that an undertaking, which Dr. Barton certainly knew how to perform, and to which his learning was adequate, should have been suffered to perish in embryo."

Wilson was not well versed in Latin, in fact there are

many who considered him a very unlearned man, because he obtained most of his knowledge direct from nature. Herein lies his success. The book knowledge of his predecessors did naught but deepen the obscurities surrounding the species they sought to elucidate. The conviction that here, at last, was a man who could write plainly and convincingly, from intimate personal knowledge, did more to dispel the mysteries of the past than all the high-sounding Latin names, phrases and references; and the appearance of his work marked a new era, glorious to American Ornithology. Wilson is accredited with the following species, which he figured, described and named.

## WILSON'S AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY.

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

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| 1. <i>Anas valisineria</i><br>Canvas-back Duck                   | = <i>Marila valisineria</i> (Wils.)<br>Canvasback.                                |
| 2. <i>Tringa solitaria</i><br>Solitary Sandpiper                 | = <i>Hedodromas solitarius</i> (Wils.)<br>Solitary Sandpiper.                     |
| 3. <i>Falco mississippiensis</i><br>Mississippi Kite             | = <i>Ictinia mississippiensis</i><br>Mississippi Kite. (Wils.)                    |
| 4. <i>Falco velox</i><br>Sharp-shinned Hawk                      | = <i>Accipiter velox</i> .<br>Sharp-shinned Hawk.                                 |
| 5. <i>Falco atricapillus</i><br>Ash-colored or Black-cap<br>Hawk | = <i>Astur atricapillus</i> (Wils.)<br>American Goshawk.                          |
| 6. <i>Cuculus erythrophthalma</i><br>Black-billed Cuckoo         | = <i>Coccyzus erythrophthalmus</i><br>Black-billed Cuckoo. (Wils.)                |
| 7. <i>Caprimulgus vociferus</i><br>Whip-poor-will                | = <i>Antrostomus vociferus</i> (Wils.)<br>Whip-poor-will.                         |
| 8. <i>Corvus ossifragus</i><br>Fish Crow                         | = <i>Corvus ossifragus</i> (Wils.)<br>Fish Crow.                                  |
| 9. <i>Corvus columbianus</i><br>Clark's Crow                     | = <i>Nucifraga columbiana</i> (Wils.)<br>Clark's Nutteracker.                     |
| 10. <i>Fringilla pinus</i><br>Pine Finch.                        | = <i>Spinus pinus</i> (Wils.)<br>Pine Siskin.                                     |
| 11. <i>Fringilla savanna</i><br>Savannah Sparrow                 | = <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i><br><i>savanna</i> (Wils.)<br>Savannah Sparrow. |
| 12. <i>Fringilla maritima</i><br>Seaside Finch                   | = <i>Passerherbulus maritimus</i><br>Seaside Finch (Wils.)                        |
| 13. <i>Fringilla pusilla</i><br>Field Sparrow                    | = <i>Spizella pusilla</i> (Wils.)<br>Field Sparrow.                               |
| 14. <i>Fringilla melodia</i><br>Song Sparrow                     | = <i>Melospiza melodia</i> (Wils.)<br>Song Sparrow.                               |
| 15. <i>Tanagra ludoviciana</i><br>Louisiana Tanager              | = <i>Piranga ludoviciana</i> (Wils.)<br>Western Tanager.                          |
| 16. <i>Muscicapa solitaria</i><br>Solitary Flycatcher            | = <i>Vireo solitarius</i> (Wils.)<br>Blue-headed Vireo.                           |



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|---|---|
| 17. <i>Sylvia rubricapilla</i><br>Nashville Warbler         | = <i>Vermivora rubricapilla</i><br>Nashville Warbler. (Wils.)         |
| 18. <i>Sylvia peregrina</i><br>Tennessee Warbler            | = <i>Vermivora peregrina</i> (Wils.)<br>Tennessee Warbler.            |
| 19. <i>Sylvia magnolia</i><br>Black and Yellow Warbler      | = <i>Dendroica magnolia</i> (Wils.)<br>Magnolia Warbler.              |
| 20. <i>Sylvia cerulea</i><br>Cerulean Warbler               | = <i>Dendroica cærulea</i> (Wils.)<br>Cerulean Warbler.               |
| 21. <i>Sylvia castanea</i><br>Bay-breasted Warbler          | = <i>Dendroica castanea</i> (Wils.)<br>Bay-breasted Warbler.          |
| 22. <i>Sylvia formosa</i><br>Kentucky Warbler               | = <i>Oporornis formosa</i> (Wils.)<br>Kentucky Warbler.               |
| 23. <i>Sylvia agilis</i><br>Connecticut Warbler             | = <i>Oporornis formosa</i> (Wils.)<br>Connecticut Warbler.            |
| 24. <i>Sylvia philadelphia</i><br>Mourning Warbler          | = <i>Oporornis philadelphia</i> (Wils.)<br>Mourning Warbler.          |
| 25. <i>Muscicapa pusillo</i><br>Green black-capt Flycatcher | = <i>Wilsonia pusilla</i> (Wils.)<br>Wilson's Warbler.                |
| 26. <i>Certhia palustris</i><br>Marsh Wren                  | = <i>Telmatorhynchus palustris</i> (Wils.)<br>Long-billed Marsh Wren. |

One more species, *Charadrius wilsonia* = *Ochthodromus wilsonia*, Wilson's Plover, was figured by Wilson, but described and named by Ord. He also figured *Rallus elegans* Aud., King Rail, confusing it with *R. crepitans*, Clapper Rail; likewise *Passerculus princeps* Mayn. Ipswich Sparrow,<sup>1</sup> for a male *P. sandwichensis savanna*, Savannah Sparrow; and *Turdus ustulatus swainsonii* (Cab.) Olive-backed Thrush for *T. guttata pallasii* Hermit Thrush; though in the latter instance part of the text refers to the nesting of the Olive-backed undoubtedly, the nest and eggs are closely described, perhaps for the first time; the locality however is erroneous, Mississippi being so far south of its breeding range.

Wilson found the construction of specific terms so distasteful that he often misapplied old appellations, thereby losing the honor of naming several species he had discovered, described and figured, through preoccupation of the names.

## WILSON.

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

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|---|--|
| 1. <i>Ardea ludoviciana</i><br>Louisiana Heron      | = <i>Hydranassa tricolor ruficollis</i><br>Louisiana Heron. (Gosse), |
| 2. <i>Phalaropus lobata</i><br>Brown Phalarope      | = <i>Steganopus tricolor</i> (Vieill.)<br>Wilson's Phalarope.        |
| 3. <i>Falco pennsylvanicus</i><br>Broad-winged Hawk | = <i>Buteo platypterus</i> (Vieill.)<br>Broad-winged Hawk.           |

<sup>1</sup> Stone, Alexander Wilson and the Ipswich Sparrow, Osprey, II. 1898, p. 117.

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| 4. <i>Picus torquatus</i><br>Lewis's Woodpecker                | = <i>Asyndesmus lewisi</i> (Riley).<br>Lewis's Woodpecker.                |
| 5. <i>Muscicapa querula</i><br>Small Green, Crested Flycatcher | = <i>Empidonax virescens</i> (Vieill.)<br>Green-crested Flycatcher.       |
| 6. <i>Curvirostra americana</i><br>American Crossbill          | = <i>Loxia curvirostra minor</i><br>American Crossbill. (Brehm).          |
| 7. <i>Fringilla passerina</i><br>Yellow-winged Sparrow.        | = <i>Ammodramus savannarum australis</i> Maynard.<br>Grasshopper Sparrow. |
| 8. <i>Sylvia pinus</i><br>Pine-creeping Warbler                | = <i>Dendroica vigorsii</i> (Aud.)<br>Pine Warbler.                       |
| 9. <i>Sylvia petechia</i><br>Yellow Red-poll Warbler           | = <i>Dendroica palmarum hypochrysa</i> (Ridg.)<br>Yellow Palm Warbler.    |
| 10. <i>Muscicapa minuta</i><br>Small-headed Flycatcher         | = <i>Sylvania microcephala</i> (Ridg.)<br>Small-headed Warbler.           |
| 11. <i>Turdus mustelinus</i><br>Tawney Thrush                  | = <i>Turdus fuscescens</i> Steph.<br>Wilson's Thrush. Veery               |
| 12. <i>Turdus solitarius</i><br>Hermit Thrush                  | = <i>Turdus guttatus pallasii</i><br>Hermit Thrush. (Cab).                |

Laboring under the unusual disadvantage of lack of reference works and ignorant of the existence of such important productions as Vieillot's, for instance; Wilson increased the synonymy materially by renaming many species which were not new. The following are all antedated.

- | WILSON.   | A. O. U. CHECK LIST.   |
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| 1. <i>Sterna aranea</i> , 1814<br>Marsh Tern                  | = <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i><br>Gull-billed Tern.<br>(Hasselq.) 1762     |
| 2. <i>Sterna plumbea</i> , 1813<br>Short-tailed Tern          | = <i>Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis</i> (Gm.) 1788.<br>Black Tern.       |
| 3. <i>Anas rubidus</i> , 1814<br>Ruddy Duck                   | = <i>Erisimatura jamaicensis</i><br>Ruddy Duck. (Gm.)                      |
| 4. <i>Tringa semipalmata</i> , 1813<br>Semipalmated Sandpiper | = <i>Ereunetes pusillus</i> (Linn.)<br>Semipalmated Sandpiper. 1766.       |
| 5. <i>Tringa bartramia</i> , 1813<br>Bartram's Sandpiper      | = <i>Bartramia longicauda</i><br>(Bechst.) 1812.<br>Bartramian Sandpiper.  |
| 6. <i>Numenius longirostris</i> , 1814<br>Long-billed Curlew  | = <i>Numenius americanus</i> , Bechst.<br>Long-billed Curlew. 1812         |
| 7. <i>Picus querulus</i> , 1810<br>Red-cockaded Woodpecker    | = <i>Dryobates borealis</i> (Vieill.)<br>Red-cockaded Woodpecker.<br>1807. |
| 8. <i>Hirundo viridis</i> , 1812<br>White-bellied Swallow     | = <i>Iridoprocne bicolor</i> (Vieill.)<br>Tree Swallow. 1807.              |
| 9. <i>Lanius carolinensis</i> , 1811<br>Loggerhead Shrike     | = <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> ,<br>Linn. 1766.                              |

|     |   | Loggerhead Shrike.   |
|-----|---|--|
| 10. | <i>Fringilla socialis</i> , 1810<br>Chipping Sparrow            | = <i>Spizella passerina</i> (Bechst.)<br>Chipping Sparrow. 1798.       |
| 11. | <i>Fringilla palustris</i> , 1811<br>Swamp Sparrow              | = <i>Melospiza georgiana</i> (Lath.)<br>Swamp Sparrow. 1790.           |
| 12. | <i>Muscicapa melodia</i> , 1812<br>Warbling Flycatcher          | = <i>Vireosylva gilva</i> (Veill.)<br>Warbling Vireo. 1807.            |
| 13. | <i>Muscicapa sylvicola</i> , 1808<br>Yellow-throated Flycatcher | = <i>Lanivireo flavifrons</i> (Veill.)<br>Yellow-throated Vireo. 1807. |
| 14. | <i>Muscicapa cantatrix</i> , 1810<br>White-eyed Flycatcher      | = <i>Vireo griseus</i> (Bodd.) 1783.<br>White-eyed Vireo. 1788.        |
| 15. | <i>Sylvia maritima</i> , 1812<br>Cape May Warbler               | = <i>Dendroica tigrina</i> (Gmel.)<br>Cape May Warbler. 1788.          |
| 16. | <i>Sylvia minuta</i> 1811<br>Prairie Warbler                    | = <i>Dendroica discolor</i> (Veill.)<br>Prairie Warbler. 1807          |
| 17. | <i>Turdus aquaticus</i> , 1811<br>Water Thrush                  | = <i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i><br>Water-Thrush. (Gmel.) 1788.         |
| 18. | <i>Motacilla domestica</i> , 1808<br>House Wren                 | = <i>Troglodytes aedon</i> (Veill.)<br>House Wren. 1807                |

One of Wilson's Scotch biographers has attempted to prove that he was well acquainted with the British ornithology before emigrating to America. This cannot be so, or he would have differentiated some of the many species and subspecies he pronounced identical with those of the Old World. America produced no ornithologist until the time of John Cassin, who was equally acquainted with the birds of both hemispheres; or in the restricted sense which might apply to Wilson were his biographer correct, before the time of Bonaparte. Yet had Wilson taken to heart the patriotic belief of Thomas Jefferson, imparted to him in a letter of April 7, 1805, he could not have gone so far wrong but that he would have increased his own record for new species, or rather new names, by one-half. Jefferson said: "I am of the opinion there is not in our continent a single bird or quadruped which is not sufficiently unlike all the members of its family there to be considered as specifically different." Those figured and described with the supposition that they were identical with the Old World species, equal in number the distinctively American species accredited to his name. The references to European writers are of course misapplied.

## WILSON.

1. *Sterna minuta* Linn.  
Lesser Tern

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

- = *Sterna antillarum* (Less.)  
Least Tern. 1847

## WILSON.

2. *Procellaria pelagica* Linn.  
Stormy Petrel
3. *Mergus merganser* Linn.  
Goosander
4. *Anas ferina* Linn.  
Red-headed Duck
5. *Anas clangula* Linn.  
Golden Eye
6. *Anas mollissima* Linn.  
Eider Duck
7. *Anas niger* Linn.  
Scoter Duck
8. *Anas fusca* Linn.  
Velvet Duck
9. *Scalopax gallinago* Linn.  
Snipe.
10. *Tringa pusilla* Linn.  
Little Sandpiper
11. *Tringa alpina* Linn.  
Red-backed Sandpiper
12. *Tringa hiaticula* (Lath.)  
Ring Plover
13. *Tringa hiaticula* Lath.  
Ringed Plover
14. *Hematopus ostralegus* Gm.  
Pied Oystercatcher
15. *Falco peregrinus* Gm.  
Great-footed Hawk
16. *Strix flammea* Linn.  
White, or Barn Owl
17. *Strix otis* Linn.  
Long-eared Owl
18. *Corvus picus* Linn.  
Magpie
19. *Corvus corax* Linn.  
Raven
20. *Corvus corone* Linn.  
Crow.
21. *Sylvia troglodytes?* Linn.  
Winter Wren
22. *Certhia familiaris* Linn.  
Brown Creeper
23. *Sylvia regulus* Linn.  
Golden-crowned Wren

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

- = *Oceanites oceanicus* (Kuhl.)  
Wilson's Petrel. 1820
- = *Merganser americanus* (Cass.)  
American Merganser. 1853.
- = *Aythya americana* (Eyton)  
Redhead. 1833
- = *Clangula clangula americana*,  
Faxton, 1885,  
American Golden-eye.
- = *Somateria mollissima borealis*  
C. L. Brehm, 1830.  
Northern Eider.
- = *Oidemia americana* (Sw. and  
Rich.) 1831.  
American Scoter.
- = *Oidemia deglandi*, Bp. 1850.  
White-winged Scoter.
- = *Gallinago delicata* (Ord.) 1825.  
Wilson's Snipe.
- = *Pisobia minutilla*  
(Vieill.) 1819.  
Least Sandpiper.
- = *Pelidna alpina sakhalina*  
(Vieill.) 1861.  
Red-backed Sandpiper.
- = *Egialitis semipalmata* Bp.  
Semipalmated Plover. 1825.
- = *Egialitis meloda* (Ord) 1824.  
Piping Plover.
- = *Hematopus palliatus* Temm.  
American Oystercatcher. 1820
- = *Falco peregrinus anatum*  
Duck Hawk. (Bp.) 1838.
- = *Aluco pratincola* (Bp.) 1838.  
American Barn Owl.
- = *Asio wilsonianus* (Less.)  
1831.  
American Long-eared Owl.
- = *Pica pica hudsonia* (Sab.)  
American Magpie. 1823.
- = *Corvus corax principalis*,  
Western Raven. Ridgw. 1887
- = *Corvus brachyrhynchos*,  
C. L. Brehm, 1822.  
American Crow.
- = *Nannus hiemalis* (Vieill.)  
Winter Wren. 1819
- = *Certhia familiaris americana*  
Brown Creeper. Bp. 1838.
- = *Regulus satrapa* Licht 1823.  
Golden-crowned Kinglet.

The following would have been antedated even had Wilson

separated them from the Old World species, which he did not do:

| WILSON.                                   | A. O. U. CHECK LIST.  |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Anas fuligula</i> Linn.             | = <i>Amythya collaris</i> (Donov.)<br>1809.                       |
| Tufted Duck                               | Ring-necked Duck.   |
| 2. <i>Anas hyperborca</i> Pall.           | = <i>Chen hyperborca nivalis</i><br>(Forst.) 1772.                |
| Snow Goose                                | Greater Snow Goose.   |
| 3. <i>Ardea nycticorax</i> Linn.          | = <i>Nycticorax nycticorax navius</i><br>(Bodd.) 1783.            |
| Night Heron or Qua-bird                   | Black-crowned Night Heron.  |
| 4. <i>Falco lagopus</i> Brunn.            | = <i>Archibuteo lagopus sanctijohannis</i> (Gm.) 1788.            |
| Rough-legged Hawk                         | American Rough-legged Hawk.                                       |
| 5. <i>Falco haliastur</i> Briss.          | = <i>Pandion haliastur carolinensis</i><br>Gm., 1788.             |
| Fish Hawk, or Osprey                      | American Osprey.  |
| 6. <i>Strix hudsonia</i> Gm.              | = <i>Surnia ulula caparoch</i> (Mull.)<br>American Hawk Owl. 1776 |
| Hawk Owl                                  | = <i>Lanius borealis</i> Vieill., 1807.                           |
| 7. <i>Lanius excubitor</i> Linn.          | Northern Shrike.  |
| Great American Shrike, or<br>Butcherbird. |   |

The variations in plumage, particularly in the many species included in the families of *Scolopacidae*, Snipes, Sandpipers, etc.; *Falconidae*, Vultures, Hawks, Eagles, etc.; *Mniotiltidae*, Wood Warblers; and *Turdidae*, Thrushes, etc.; due to age, sex, season or dichromatism, were imperfectly understood at that time; therefore Wilson multiplied many of the species, not always without suspicion however.

| WILSON.                                  | A. O. U. CHECK LIST.                          |
|--|---|
| <i>Tringa rufa</i> Wils., Ad.            |   |
| Red-breasted Sandpiper                   | = <i>Tringa canutus</i> , Linn.               |
| <i>Tringa cinerea</i> Brunn              | Knot.   |
| Ash-colored Sandpiper                    |   |
| <i>Tringa alpina</i> Linn.               | = <i>Pelidna alpina sakhalina</i><br>(Vieil.) |
| Red-backed Sandpiper                     | Red-breasted Sandpiper.                       |
| <i>Tringa cinclus</i> Wils., Im.         |   |
| The Purre                                |   |
| <i>Charadrius calidris</i> Linn., Winter |   |
| Sanderling Plover                        | = <i>Calidris arenaria</i> (Linn.)            |
| <i>Charadrius rubidus</i> Gm., Summer    | Sanderling.                                   |
| Ruddy Plover                             |   |

## WILSON.

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Falco vclow</i> Wils., Ad.<br>Sharp-shinned Hawk                           | = <i>Accipiter vclow</i> (Wils.)<br>Sharp-shinned Hawk.                               |
| <i>Falco pennsylvanicus</i> Wils. Im.<br>Slate-colored Hawk.                  |   |
| <i>Falco borealis</i> Gm. Ad.<br>Red-tailed Hawk                              | = <i>Buteo borealis</i> (Gm.)<br>Red-tailed Hawk.                                     |
| <i>Falco leucurus</i> Gm. Im.<br>American Buzzard or White-<br>breasted Hawk. |   |
| <i>Falco hyemalis</i> Gm. Im.<br>Winter Falcon                                | = <i>Buteo lineatus</i> (Gm.)<br>Red-shouldered Hawk.                                 |
| <i>Falco lineatus</i> Gm. Ad.<br>Red-shouldered Hawk                          |   |
| <i>Falco lagopus</i> Brunn.<br>Rough-legged Falcon                            | = <i>Archibuteo lagopus sanctijo-<br/>hannis</i> (Gm.)<br>American Rough-legged Hawk. |
| <i>Falco niger</i><br>Black Hawk  |   |
| <i>Falco leucocapitalis</i> Briss. Ad.<br>White-headed or Bald Eagle          | = <i>Haliaeetus leucocapitalis</i><br>Bald Eagle. (Linn.)                             |
| <i>Falco ossifragus</i> Gm. Im.<br>Sea Eagle                                  |   |
| <i>Strix nevia</i> Gm. Grey phase<br>Mottled Owl                              | = <i>Otus asio</i> (Linn.)<br>Screech Owl.  |
| <i>Strix asio</i> , Red phase<br>Red Owl                                      |   |
| <i>Sylvia canadensis</i> Lath. Ad.<br>Black-throated Blue Warbler             | = <i>Dendroica cerulescens</i> (Gmel.)<br>Black-throated Blue Warbler.                |
| <i>Sylvia pusilla</i> Wils. Im.<br>Pine Swamp Warbler                         |   |
| <i>Sylvia cerulea</i> Wils. Ad.<br>Cerulean Warbler                           | = <i>Dendroica cerulea</i> (Wils.)<br>Cerulean Warbler.                               |
| <i>Sylvia rara</i> Wils. Female, Im.<br>Blue-green Warbler                    |   |
| <i>Sylvia castanea</i> Wils. Ad.<br>Bay-breasted Warbler                      | = <i>Dendroica castanea</i> (Wils.)<br>Bay-breasted Warbler.                          |
| <i>Sylvia autumnalis</i> Wils. Im.<br>Autumnal Warbler                        |   |
| <i>Sylvia blackburnia</i> . Gm. Ad.<br>Blackburnian Warbler                   |   |
| <i>Sylvia parus</i> , Wils. Female and<br>im.<br>Hemlock Warbler.             | = <i>Dendroica fusca</i><br>(P. L. S. Muller.)<br>Blackburnian Warbler.               |
| <i>Sylvia virens</i> Gmel. Ad.<br>Black-throated Green Warbler                | = <i>Dendroica virens</i> (Gmel.)<br>Black-throated Green Warbler.                    |
| <i>Sylvia montana</i> Wils. Im.<br>Blue Mountain Warbler                      |   |

Wilson erroneously referred *Numenius hudsonicus* Lath. Hudsonian Curlew to *Scolopax (Numenius) borealis* Forst. Eskimo Curlew, an entirely different species; and an imma-

ture *Aquila chrysaetos* (Linn.) Golden Eagle, to *Falco fulvus* Linn. Ring-tail Eagle, which is a synonym of the former. In his index of the land birds, published in the preface of Volume VI, and covering the first seven volumes, *Falco niger* is recognized as a variety of *F. lagopus* (= *Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis* (Gmel.) American Rough-legged Hawk); also *Loxia rosea* Wils. corrected to *Loxia* (*Zamelodia*) *ludoviciana* Linn. Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

It is also to be observed that Wilson repeatedly bestowed upon two separate species, knowing them to be distinct, the same title; but this occurred during the last two or three years of his life when he was nearly engulfed in work, worry and ill health. Had he lived, he would undoubtedly have corrected many of his errors in the final index. Ord's attempts in this direction in a later "reprint" became confused with the original edition and caused some trouble later on. *Charadrius hiaticula* and *Tringa hiaticula* are undoubtedly homonyms, not only because they apply to distinct species of the same genus, but from the fact that both Bonaparte and Ord agree in the belief that *Tringa* was a typographical error.

## WILSON.

## A. O. U. CHECK LIST.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> , Linn.<br>Ringed Plover, pl. 37, fig. 3, v,<br>1812       | = <i>Ægialitis meloda</i> (Ord.)<br>Piping Plover.                     |
| <i>Tringa hiaticula</i> (Linn.)<br>Ring Plover, pl. 59, fig. 3, viii,<br>1813          | = <i>Ægialitis semipalmata</i> (Bp.)<br>Semipalmated Plover.           |
| <i>Rallus virginianus</i> , Linn.<br>Rail, pl. 48, fig. 1, vi, 1812                    | = <i>Prozana carolina</i> (Linn.)<br>Sora.                             |
| <i>Rallus virginianus</i> , Linn.<br>Virginia Rail, pl. 62, fig. 1, vii,<br>1813       | = <i>Rallus virginianus</i> , Linn.<br>Virginia Rail.                  |
| <i>Falco pennsylvanicus</i> , Wils.<br>Slate-colored Hawk, pl. 46, fig. 1,<br>vi, 1812 | = <i>Accipiter velox</i> (Wils.)<br>Sharp-shinned Hawk.                |
| <i>Falco pennsylvanicus</i> , Wils.<br>Broad-winged Hawk, pl. 54, fig.<br>1, vi, 1812  | = <i>Buteo platypterus</i> (Vieill.)<br>Broad-winged Hawk.             |
| <i>Sylvia pusilla</i><br>Blue Yellow-backed Warbler, pl.<br>28, f. 3, iii, 1811        | = <i>Compothlypis americana</i><br>(Linn.)<br>Parula Warbler.          |
| <i>Sylvia pusilla</i><br>Pine Swamp Warbler, pl. 43, f.<br>4, v, 1813                  | = <i>Dendroica cerulescens</i> (Gmel.)<br>Black-throated Blue Warbler. |

Wilson's Black-capped Warbler received the name of *Muscicapa pusilla* also; in fact *pusilla*, *minuta*, *carolinensis*, *melodia*, *rufa*, and a few others, seem to have been favorite specific terms with him. *Sylvia minuta* Prairie Warbler, was antedated by *Dendroica discolor* (Vieill.); and *Muscicapa minuta* (another Warbler presumably), preoccupied. Mislead by Bartram, the Snowbird (Slate-colored Junco) which he called *Fringilla nivalis*, had been for a time confused with *Emberiza (Plectrophanax) nivalis* Snow Bunting, but the former was changed to *F. hudsonia* in the index, Vol. VI. Wilson's specific names were mainly descriptive, and for that reason it is regrettable that more of them are not available. Personal appellation though not a novelty, had not come into vogue until the time of Bonaparte and Audubon. One can admire the sturdy independence of Wilson in this respect. One species only, which he confidently thought new, did he name in honor of a friend and patron of science; *Tringa bartramia* Bartram's Sandpiper, and this proves to be antedated one year by Bechstein's *T. longicauda*; Lesson, however, in 1831 has placed it in a separate genus, which he calls *Bartramia*, hence we have after all, *Bartramia longicauda* Bartramian Sandpiper.

Wilson's lack of enthusiasm in the construction and application of technical names, lead Bonaparte to publish his Observations on the Nomenclature of Wilson's Ornithology,<sup>1</sup> in which eight species are renamed, three in honor of the author, none of which stand; *Falco wilsoni* (= *Buteo platypterus*), *Sylvia wilsonii* (= *Sylvania* (?) *microcephala*) and *Turdus wilsonii* (= *Turdus fuscescens*). Of this paper, which was read by the author in installments at the Academy meetings, Coues has commented as follows: "A critical commentary on 227 of Wilson's species, *seriatim*, and as such, one of the most notable and in some respects the most important of early American papers." And again: "This valuable critical commentary introduced a new feature—decided change in nomenclature from the sifting and rectification of

<sup>1</sup> Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila. III-V, 1824-25.



synonymy. It is here that questions of synonymy—today the bane and drudgery of the working naturalist—first acquire prominence in the history of our special subject. There had been very little of it before, and Wilson himself, the least 'bookish' of men, gave it scarcely any attention."<sup>2</sup>

In his paper Bonaparte remarks: "Wilson, though one of the most acute and accurate of Ornithologists, one who has rendered the greatest services to science, by describing, in his attractive style, the manners and habits of American birds, and who has corrected so many errors of former writers, has nevertheless, unavoidably committed some himself, principally of nomenclature, which are, in a great measure, attributable to a want of the necessary books and opportunities of comparison. So far, therefore, from being censurable for these errors, we are surprised that he has not committed more. . . . I do not consider myself censurable for the frequent repetition of the name of this great ornithologist, as applied to species in different genera; it is a tribute of respect which I conceive justly due to one who has done so much for the benefit of my favorite science."

It is scarcely within the province of a biographer to follow the tortuous channels of thought and research, whereby Bonaparte and Ord attempted the correction of Wilson's errors in nomenclature; nor is it surprising that so few of the terms as then constructed, are in use today. Wilson erroneously placed the Whooping Crane with the Heron; the Chimney Swift with the Swallow; the American Redstart, Hooded, Canadian, Black-capped and Small-headed Warblers, the Vireo and the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, with the Flycatchers; the Bluebird, the Kinglets, House and Winter Wren, with the Wood Warblers; the Yellow-breasted Chat with the Manakins; the Black and White Warbler, Carolina and Long-billed Marsh Wrens, with the Creepers; and the Oven-bird and Water-thrush with the Thrushes. In most instances he followed his predecessors, or at least one of

<sup>2</sup> Bibliographical Appendix, *Birds of the Colorado Valley*, 1878, p. 608.

them, in error; *Pipra polyglotta*, however, was an unhappy classification exclusively his own, about on a par with some previous works, where the Chat has been variously placed with the Flycatchers, Tanagers or Chatterers. On the other hand he straightened out the tangle, in which European writers had involved the two Eastern Orioles; Bonaparte has declared that no species of birds had occasioned so many errors, and so great a multiplication of nominal species. His knowledge of the Sparrows and Warblers was really wonderfully full for that time. Unquestionably, Dr. Shufeldt did not intend to create a wrong impression when he wrote: "In summing it up then, it will be seen that Wilson knew of but thirty species of birds that belong to the family *Fringillidae*, while in our Check List of 1895 the same family is represented by no fewer than eighty-nine species and seventy-four subspecies—163 birds in all."<sup>1</sup> One of our best authorities has found that there are only thirty-six forms recognized today in the section of the country covered by Wilson.

According to Coues, Wilson gave faithful descriptions of about 280 species, and colored illustrations of most of them, —78 indicated as new according to his Bibliographical list; Ord calculated 278 species, following Wilson's catalogue, 56 being new; Bonaparte places the total number at 270 species; and Baird, 257 species, not including *Melano gallopavo* Wild Turkey, and *Gracula barita* Boat-tailed Grackle, mentioned in the index of volume vi. The whole number of birds figured is 320. Actual number of species both figured and described is 262, making a total of 268 species made known by their figure or description, or both; excluding the three species figured but not separately distinguished, 39 were new; and adding to this number the 23 species and subspecies which he probably described sufficiently to differentiate from the European, though he did not give them new names, gives a total of 62 newly described species and subspecies. When one realizes that Europe had been drawing

<sup>1</sup> American Sparrows and Their Kin, Shooting and Fishing, XXI, 1897, pp. 307-308.

from the region of his researches for many years, it will be seen that this is a wonderful showing in comparison to the really small grand total; and more extraordinary still, all of his birds are identifiable at the present time, except a single species. His English names have always been popular, and the majority of them are very appropriate, acceptable with occasional modifications through all these years, without fixed rule or reason.

But the correct delineation of several hundred species of birds nor the exposition of a few score of nondescripts, do not begin to express the services of Alexander Wilson to American Ornithology. His work was far more than a mere descriptive and illustrated catalogue of the birds he had found. He ennobled science and literature without sacrificing that charming simplicity of expression which reached and educated the people as few works of like nature have done. Ornithology cannot begin to measure his services in creating the proper sentiment in this country. "No other work on American ornithology has been so much talked and written about as this; and the time for comment on its character is long gone by. The 'melancholy poet-naturalist' occupies a place as changeless as the hills, and wholly peculiar. He stands toward American ornithologists in a position corresponding somewhat to that which is occupied in England by White of Selbourne, in Germany by Bechstein, and I will add, among anglers by Izack Walton."<sup>1</sup>

In later complimentary honors, Wilson has not fared so badly. One genus, *Wilsonia* Bonaparte, was created in 1838, and has been recently revived. Of the thirteen or more specific terms named in honor of Wilson, two survive—*Ochthodromus wilsonia* (Ord) Wilson's Plover, and *Asio wilsonianus* (Lesson) American Long-eared Owl. In the vernacular names he has fared still better:—Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Wilson's Phalarope *Steganopus tricolor*, Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*, Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*, and Wilson's Thrush *Turdus fuscescens*.

<sup>1</sup> Coues, Birds of Colorado Valley, p. 600.

Additional evidence of the thoroughness of the Ornithologist can be found in his constant reference in his work to carefully numbered specimens placed in Peale's museum. Without the facilities or inclination for personal hoarding, he had every right to suppose that the birds he looked upon as his types, would be carefully preserved for a practically indefinite period in the public museums of his adopted city or country; that they were not is neither creditable to Philadelphia or the country at large.