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## REMINISCENCES OF THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION\*

BY CARL FRITZ HENNING

With the awakening of spring there comes to us a strange feeling of unrest—it fills our breast with yearnings and delight—it is the hour of dreams and visions.

Already traces of that soft haze which is the glory of the spring sky have appeared, and the sunbeams are falling with a brighter and more invigorating glow—the wind reaches forth with a more delicate touch, and the element of harshness seems to be disappearing from its voice. The Cardinals are calling, and the sweet voices of the returning birds will soon be heard in fields and woods. What a wonderful setting for the coming together of the nature lovers and ornithologists of Iowa.

Pleasant memories awaken in our heart as we stand today on the threshold of Spring—here we have assembled to become better acquainted with one another, to talk about the birds and wild flowers, to plan and lay the foundation for a closer union of the ornithologists of our state, that we may carry on the work of the old Iowa Ornithological Association, whose sun set in glowing splendor a quarter of a century ago.

“A wonderful stream is the River Time  
As it blends with the ocean of years.”

Looking back we see a little band of impassioned nature students, men who loved the great out-doors, forming the old association for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with the birds of their own state.

Almost thirty years have come and gone since the first seed was sown by these pioneers—they knew that something must be done to create a sentiment for the protection of our vanishing birds. The Passenger Pigeons had made their last flight; the Wild Turkey was

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\*This paper was read, in the absence of the author, at the organization meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, at Ames, Iowa, February 28, 1923.

disappearing from his old haunts; the Ruffed Grouse could still be found in the heavy timber, but in ever lessening numbers; and the weird booming of the Pinnated Grouse was heard on the prairies. The Sandhill Cranes circled over our cities in inspiring flights, but every spring thousands of water-fowl were killed as they passed through Iowa on their way to the breeding grounds in the far north—slaughtered on their wedding day. The Quail, our pretty Bob-white of the fields and woods, was threatened with extinction. It was, therefore, apparent that something must be done to protect the birds of Iowa—the time to act had come.

On the 15th day of June, 1894, the Iowa Ornithological Association was organized. The names of the founders of the Association are endeared to the heart of every nature lover in Iowa. Their names and former addresses are:

Rudolph M. Anderson, Forest City; Carleton R. Ball, Ames; Paul Bartsch, Burlington; Wm. A. Bryan, New Sharon; John V. Crone, Marathon; H. J. Giddings, Sabula; A. P. Godley, LeGrand; Ernest Irons, Council Bluffs; Chas. R. Keyes, Mt. Vernon; J. Eugene Law, Perry; W. W. Loomis, Clermont; Wilmon Newell, Ames; F. G. Richardson, Mason City; Walter G. Savage, Hillsboro; David L. Savage, Salem; W. W. Searles, Lime Springs; Fred R. Stearns, Sac City; Chas. C. Tryon, Avoca; E. B. Webster, Cresco; Paul C. Woods, Fayette.

The *Iowa Ornithologist* was the official organ of the Iowa Ornithological Association—a splendid little quarterly magazine, filled with the song and sunshine of the birds of Iowa, and the only magazine at that time, devoted to ornithology and oölogy, in the Mississippi Valley. Perhaps some of the ornithologists assembled here today remember the “*Iowa Ornithologist*”; it was not a large magazine—usually about twenty-four pages—but it always found a warm spot in the heart of the Iowa nature lovers.

By request of President Irons, David L. Savage of Salem, Iowa, accepted the Editorship of the *Iowa Ornithologist*. In closing his address of acceptance Mr. Savage said, “It is my desire (and I will do all in my power), that the *Iowa Ornithologist* may be a Magazine that will promote a true knowledge of the Wonders of Nature, and awaken in the hearts and minds of all its readers a truer love and deeper interest in the study of Nature, enabling them to ‘look through Nature up to Nature’s God.’”

The work of the Iowa Ornithological Association was done entirely through correspondence. With the beginning of every quarter, certain work was taken up for special study. For instance during the

first three months of the Association's existence Notes and Observations were taken on the family *Fringillidae* (Finches and Sparrows) and *Mniotiltidae* (Wood Warblers). For the second quarter the families *Icteridae*, *Tyrannidae*, and *Alaudidae* were taken up for special study—and so on throughout the year. The work done in this line was very commendable.

In the year 1895 the Iowa Ornithological Association held its first election of officers. Of the thirty-six members entitled to vote, only sixteen sent in their ballots, with the following results:

Charles R. Keyes, President; Rudolph M. Anderson, Vice-President; J. Eugene Law, Secretary; David L. Savage, Editor-Treasurer.

The First Annual Congress of the Iowa Ornithological Association was held at Iowa City, August 22-23, 1895, in the Zoological Lecture Room of the Science Building. The business meeting was called to order by the President, Charles R. Keyes, of Mt. Vernon. Nine active members were present. After an interesting address by the President, letters from absent members, Paul Bartsch, A. I. Johnson, and Carl Fritz Henning were read, the two former enclosing papers.

The Treasurer's report from organization to August 22, 1895, was read. The Secretary's report having been published in the *Iowa Ornithologist*, was omitted. Discussions followed, and various resolutions were adopted. The yearly dues were raised from fifty cents to one dollar for active members. An invitation was received and accepted from the Curator of the State Historical Society asking the members of the Iowa Ornithological Association to view the collection of that society. At the public session, Prof. Schaeffer, President of the State University, delivered the address of welcome, to which President Charles R. Keyes responded. The following interesting papers were read: "Protection of Our Birds", by W. W. Loomis. "Warblers of Iowa", by Morton E. Peck. Mr. Peck mentioned thirty-six warblers in Iowa. This paper was followed by a discussion of the warblers, which closed the evening program.

At the second session, August 23, a paper on the "American Duck Hawk" was read by Geo. H. Burge. Other interesting papers were read as follows: "Birds Extinct in Iowa", by Paul Bartsch. (In the absence of the author it was read by J. H. Brown). "Relation of the American Crow to Economics", by Hiram Heaton. "Bird Laws of Iowa and Laws that Are Needed", by J. H. Brown. "Prairie Hen", by A. I. Johnson. (In the absence of the author it was read by President Keyes). "Sea Birds that Visit Iowa", by F. H. Shoemaker. "Ruffed

Grouse", by D. L. Savage. Mr. Savage also exhibited a fine life-size and color portrait of his subject. It was drawn by Wm. Savage.

After extending a vote of thanks to the authorities of the State University of Iowa, and particularly to Prof. Schaeffer for the use of their rooms, the meeting adjourned. Thus ended the First Annual Congress of the Iowa Ornithological Association, with the understanding that they would again come together at Mount Vernon in 1896.

The Second Annual Meeting of the Iowa Ornithological Association was held at Mount Vernon, Iowa, July 29-31, 1896. The Secretary's report gave the membership of the Association as 71; constituted as follows: Active, 50; Honorary, 3; Associate, 18. The honorary members of the Association were chosen for their eminence in ornithology. Any person residing outside of the State of Iowa could become an associate member after having been elected.

The Third Annual Congress of the Iowa Ornithological Association was called to convene in the Congregational Church at Manchester, Iowa. The faithful work of the ornithologists of Iowa was beginning to bear fruit. With the beginning of the year 1897 plans were formulated for extending the Association's field of activities.

Paul Bartsch was appointed Chief, Department Seasonal Variations; Carl Fritz Henning, Chief, Department Migration; J. H. Brown, Chief, Department Nidology; Wilmon Newall, Chief, Department Economic Study; and Mrs. M. A. Triem and David L. Savage, Association Lecturers.

Iowa has always been an ideal field for studying the migration of birds. Lying within the embrace of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, our state forms a part of the greatest migration pathway in all the world. In the winter of 1881-82 Prof. W. W. Cooke made an attempt to secure the assistance of the ornithologists of Iowa in studying the migration of birds, but a change of residence on the part of Mr. Cooke from Iowa to Minnesota, made it necessary to modify the original scheme, and it was decided to increase the area to be investigated to the whole Mississippi Valley, the admirable report, "Bird Migration in the Mississippi Valley", published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, being the outcome of this coöperation.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (Biological Survey), under the kindly influence of Dr. C. Hart Merriam, assisted the Iowa Ornithological Association in the systematic migration work by furnishing several hundred schedules and franked envelopes so that the notes could be made out in duplicate, and a copy forwarded to the Biological Survey free. In the eastern part of the state special attention was

given to the southern species which follow up the river bottoms, for the purpose of ascertaining definitely how far north these birds migrate, and particularly where they breed.

Every member of the Iowa Ornithological Association was putting his shoulder to the wheel, and the aid of every observing ornithologist in the state and adjoining states was solicited. The Association's method of work was the same as Prof. W. W. Cooke used in preparing his work. The work accomplished during 1897 was the most important and interesting in the life of the Association. It included many well written articles on the birds of Iowa, and best of all a real start had been made to solve some of the problems that confronted the student making observations on the movements of birds during those early days.

The Association's work for 1898 was planned along the same lines as the previous year. Arrangements were made for bringing before the people of Iowa, especially the children, the Iowa Ornithological Association Lectures on Ornithology. The plan was to present these lectures to high schools throughout the state, and also before farmers' alliances. The lectures were to be illustrated by a series of magic lantern views showing our native birds and various phases of their life history.

The future of the Iowa Ornithological Association apparently was secure. A few new members were added to the list now and then, and the old wheel-horses were beginning to feel that the Association had weathered the storm that often threatened to cast her upon financial rocks. The prospects were indeed bright for a successful career—but what a change an hour can make! On the 16th of February the U. S. Battleship "Maine" was blown up in Havana Harbor. Rumors of war between the United States and Spain were flashed over the wires—at 4:30 on the afternoon of the same day President McKinley said, "Spain has struck her first blow and war will follow."

Four days later the Twelfth U. S. Infantry, under command of Col. Andrews, passed through my home town, Boone, on their way to the front. The railway station was crowded with excited people, and little boys marched up and down the streets, the soldier boys of the future. As the train pulled out, at the sound of the bugle, the regimental band played the "Star Spangled Banner"—the Stars and Stripes waving proudly in the breeze in union with the Cuban flag.

Naturally through the excitement of war, the systematic work of the Association was neglected. All were thinking of the boys at the front. Some of the members of the Iowa Ornithological Association

were called to the colors, and by the end of the year the Association members were scattered throughout the land. The few remaining members of the Association struggled on to have the *Iowa Ornithologist* published on time. Several issues were published by Hodson Brothers of the Ames Intelligence Office. An effort was made through the influence of Senator C. J. A. Ericson to have the state publish our reports.

In February, 1900, Charles C. Tryon, one of the founders of the Iowa Ornithological Association, published the *Western Ornithologist* as a private enterprise, and the Association's reports on the bird life of Iowa were published therein. The *Western Ornithologist* was a splendid little magazine—a continuation of the *Iowa Ornithologist* in an enlarged and improved form, broadened in scope from the state of Iowa to the entire world. Along in the summer Mr. Tryon accepted a position in the U. S. Army, and was soon thereafter transferred to foreign service, either Cuba or the Philippines.

Finally the members of the Iowa Ornithological Association disbanded, but many of them won renown in various fields of research. We are all familiar with Rudolph M. Anderson's great work in the polar regions, where he in company with Stefansson discovered the "White Eskimo". A true naturalist has the spirit of genius born within him, and no amount of discouragement or misfortune, or of opposition will deter him in the fulfillment of his destiny.

In looking back through the years of time, to the days when the little band of nature lovers worked so faithfully for the welfare of the birds of Iowa, I realize more than ever that after all the *Iowa Ornithologist*, the little quarterly magazine with its pages laden with nature-love and words of cheer, was the tie that bound together the hearts of the ornithologists of Iowa a quarter of a century ago.

BOONE, IOWA.