

E. B. WEBSTER, PIONEER ORNITHOLOGICAL PUBLISHER

BY FRED J. PIERCE

Birds do not change through the years; they seem never to grow older. Fifty years ago in Howard County, Iowa, Red-winged Blackbirds sang from swaying cattails in the marshes, Meadowlarks built their arched nests in the grasslands, Song Sparrows trilled gaily from the banks of the streams, Crows and Jays assailed the Great Horned Owl from the depths of the woodland—and other activities in the bird world went on much as they do today. There was the same call of the outdoors for the young person who had ears to hear it—the same thrill of discovery was offered the budding ornithologist.

A Howard County youth heard the call of the outdoors. We do not know when he became interested in birds, nor what feature of the outdoors first attracted him. Nature is only a step away from the country town resident, and if he has a spark of interest in natural history, an enthusiasm is likely to be kindled. In this youth an interest was aroused early in life. Ample fuel was provided by rambles into the country surrounding Cresco, and his fire of enthusiasm burned brightly throughout his life.

This young man was Edward Barton Webster. He was born at Cresco, Howard County, Iowa, on October 29, 1868, the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Webster. The father was a newspaper man, engaged in the publication of a pioneer Iowa newspaper, the *Cresco Republican*. Young Webster attended the Cresco schools, helped his father in the printing shop after school hours and during vacation days, and spent as much time as he could in the woods and fields in a search for birds and other objects of natural history in which he had come to take a keen delight. In his advanced 'teens he had taught himself the art of taxidermy, had made extensive nature studies and, vocationally, had learned the printing trade.

Most young bird students sooner or later desire expression through the printed page. Their observations have been intensely interesting to them, their records have seemed to be important and, therefore, to justify publication. They seek a publisher. Ornithological journals, both major and minor, have always contained proof of this. The youth of a half century ago was no different from the youth of today. Young Webster wished to express himself ornithologically. He did not send his articles away to be published. He would publish his own bird magazine! For a boy who knew the printing trade, who had access to a printing plant, and who had grown up in a publishing environment, this decision is not to be wondered at.

The late eighties had seen the rise and fall of numerous minor natural history serials, among them the *Acadian Scientist*, the *Agassiz Companion*, the *Collectors' Science Monthly*, *Field and Forest*, the *Hawkeye Observer*, the *Milwaukee Naturalist*, the *Sunny South Oologist*, and the *Young Ornithologist*. Unlike present times, when a mimeographing outfit is the chief requisite for projecting a small bird magazine, these serials had been brought out laboriously through the medium of hand-set type. Careful thought and much energy had gone into their making; but the going had been rough and the ventures had been discontinued.

Early in 1888 young Webster was ready to publish his magazine, and *The Hawkeye Ornithologist and Oologist* was born. At this time the *Auk* was four years old, the *Oologist* was the same age, while the *Wilson Bulletin* and *Bird-Lore* were not in existence. Research shows the field of natural history magazines to have been quite well crowded at that time; many journals were published in various parts of the country, and many more were to be started during the following decade. The careers of nearly all these publications were brief, though they indicated a fairly widespread interest in natural history subjects among the young people of that period. It is decidedly to the credit of E. B. Webster that his product soon attained a limited national circulation and he was able to attract a clientele of sincere young students, a number of whom developed into well known scientists and achieved distinction in later years. Begun in a country town in Iowa, by an unknown young man, the new ornithological magazine was well received from the first. It exerted a good influence in the cause it espoused and clearly justified its existence.

The first issue of *The Hawkeye Ornithologist and Oologist* appeared under date of January, 1888. We find this announcement on the editorial page: "WE'VE COMMENCED. Magazines have been published for the suppression of evil, for the diffusion of general knowledge, for the interests of fashion, for the benefit of the needy, for the good of various causes, for the advancement of business interests, for the advocacy of certain principles, for the defense of the innocent, for the justification of wrongs, for the comfort of the afflicted—this magazine is published for 50 cents per annum."

The name of F. D. Mead appears with that of Webster as co-publisher. The extent of his coöperation is not well outlined, and we do not know his age or much else about him. He dropped out of the venture with the September issue of 1888. The editorial page states that it is "A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Ornithology and Kindred



EDWARD BARTON WEBSTER, 1868-1936

Subjects, and Geology.” There is a table of subscription and advertising rates, and the address of a “General Agent” in New York City is given. It is a neat little magazine. The format is very similar to the *Oologist* of the same year. The January issue has sixteen pages of text and a rather attractive pink cover. The page size is about 6x9 inches; the type page is approximately 4½x7 inches, double-column in 8-point type with occasional display headings and a few woodcuts. It was printed on single sheets, two pages on a side, which were folded in the middle to make four pages; four of these sections stapled together with cover made up the sixteen-page issue.

The initial number contains bird articles by Oliver Davie, Wm. L. Kells, L. O. Pindar, E. G. Ward, H. W. Davis, and the editor. H. F. Hegner begins a continued article on “Home Science”, L. W. Stilwell writes of the geology of the Bad Lands of Dakota, and there are articles on egg-collecting, taxidermy, and the taking of leaf photographs. An article on the Bobolink is reprinted from *Forest and Stream*, and there is an item on the Audubon Society which had been sponsored by the same magazine not long before. Three poems round out a varied and interesting issue. An advertising page is headed by this advice: “He who by his biz would rise must either burst or advertise.” Advertisements from four states follow, and a full page is devoted to Davie’s *Egg Check List and Key to the Nests and Eggs of North American Birds*. Young Webster and Mead had purchased the entire remainder of the second edition of this book and were selling it for one dollar a copy.

The little magazine progressed steadily. The February issue had twelve text pages, the March issue had twenty-two, the April issue had sixteen. The articles were well written and contained good ornithological material. The printing was carefully handled. Considering the great amount of hand-set type required for a magazine of this size, it is remarkably free from typographical errors. No doubt the youthful editor set most of the type himself, and this work on his own magazine was much nearer his heart than the work on his father’s newspaper. Beginning in March the pages were sewed together, evidently on a sewing-machine, instead of being stapled. Occasional articles were reprinted from other publications, and we find “filler” items in the corners of many pages; letters from various parts of the country complimenting the new bird magazine from the Hawkeye State were given a few pages of space. This filler item will bring a smile: “How many sticks go to the building of a Crow’s nest? None; they are carried to it.” Three lines of type were needed to fill a column; the young compositor with a sense of humor decided that this would

do; the column was filled, he had stuck to the text, his purpose was served. The patronage of advertisers continued to be generous, and most of the issues devoted two or more of the cover pages to advertising the various things offered to nature students in those days—birds' eggs of all kinds, embalming fluid for bird specimens, books, Indian relics, fossils, caged song-birds, and nature magazines. A page of exchange notices with requests for books, postage stamps, and old coins has quite a modern ring. The advertising is nearly as interesting reading as the text pages.

In the May issue of 1888 a change was made in the size of the magazine. The type page was increased to $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The double-column arrangement was retained, but larger type was used. The margin on the sheet was widened so that the magazine was about $9 \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size. It was now necessary to print on single sheets, one page on each side, which were sewed or stapled together. The new format carried an engraving of the Snowy Owl on a greenish-blue cover, while the title of the magazine was abbreviated to "H-O-O!" and printed just below the owl as though it were an exclamation from this bird. The editorial statement now informed readers that it was "A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Ornithology, Oology, Taxidermy, Conchology, Mineralogy and Natural History." Subscription rates remained at fifty cents a year, sixty-five cents to foreign countries, and five cents a single copy. Advertising rates were "Made known on application. Send for estimate. They will pay." A second-class mailing permit was granted by the Cresco post office beginning with the June issue of 1888. The number of pages varied from eight to twelve in the new size. November and December were combined into one issue and closed the first volume with 134 pages, covers not included. The enlarged size was used until the end of 1888. Volume II (1889) was begun in the former small size, though a single-column page was used.

There is not sufficient space here to review the various bird articles that appeared in the *Hawkeye Ornithologist and Oologist*. A glance at the titles and authors will suggest the varied contents, and a partial list is given below. "Canadian Flycatchers", Wm. L. Kells; "Bird Nesting in the North of England", Walter Raine; "Carolina Wren", J. W. Jacobs; "Habits of Some American Grebes", Oliver Davie; "Notes on Some of the Passers of Fulton Co., Ky.", L. O. Pindar; "The Traill's Flycatcher", James B. Purdy; "The Bobolink", Frank L. Burns; "American Woodcock", Will C. Brownell; "Foot Movements in Birds", R. M. Gibbs, M. D.; "The King Penguin", W. H. Winkley; "The White-rumped Shrike in Western New York", Neil F.

Posson; "Nesting of the Sharp-tailed and Seaside Finches", C. S. Shick; "Nidification of the Osprey", Walter Raine; "Nesting of the White-breasted Nuthatch", J. Warren Jacobs; "Crow Nesting", Ulysses R. Perrine; "Birds of Greenbrier Co., West Va.", Thaddeus Surber (an annotated list of 121 species); "Notes from Charleston", J. Drayton Ford; "Nesting of the Maryland Yellow-throat in Southwestern Pennsylvania", J. Warren Jacobs; "Birds of Summerville, S. C.", J. D. Ford; "Nesting of the Kentucky Warbler in Southwestern Pennsylvania", J. Warren Jacobs; "My First Owl's Nest", W. C. Brownell; "The Red-Tail Hawk as a Pet", Fred Jones; "The Birds of Miner Co., Dakota", Frank A. Patton; "My First White-winged Crossbill", W. S. Johnson; "A Snipe Hunt", J. Claire Wood; "The Northern Shrike", Neil F. Posson. The editor conducted a bird migration department, and migration tables were given for Cresco, Iowa (Webster); Bernadotte, Illinois (Dr. W. S. Strode); Medina, New York (Neil F. Posson); Chicago, Illinois (W. E. Pratt); St. Paul, Minnesota (Charles Sonnen); Waynesburg, Pennsylvania (J. W. Jacobs); Jackson, Michigan (Carleton Gilbert). The departments devoted to taxidermy, geology, and other nature subjects had regular contributions in the form of long and short articles, though the theme of ornithology occupied the greater portion of the magazine.

Editor Webster was anxious that his subscribers be treated honestly by persons or firms advertising in his columns, and he kept a vigilant watch, so far as possible, over various transactions. When anyone was found guilty of unethical practices, woe to him, for he would likely find his name and his shady dealings set forth glaringly on the printed page. The editor did not always comment on these matters, but he let his subscribers say what they wished about persons who had played the game unfairly, and he evidently printed their letters verbatim! Several exposures of this sort appear in Webster's magazine, and we find a number of caustic but very sincere characterizations, such as these: "We have the name of — on our dead-head, snide list... After proving he was a liar... His promises were worthless and from our experience with him we brand him a liar and a scoundrel." "I have written him several letters since sending scalpel, to which he pays no attention. I guess I am out about \$16.00 in eggs. So you see he is an all-around cheat and scoundrel." These excerpts are taken from two different issues and are portions of letters addressed to the editor.

In the February issue of 1889 (Vol. II, No. 2) a new cover design took the place of the "H-O-O!" of the Snowy Owl. The new en-

graving shows a raptorial bird (European Buzzard taken from Coues' *Key*) sitting on a post, with shocks of grain on either side and a shield-shaped frame around the drawing. Above the shield is the title, *The Hawkeye O. and O.* Below the shield are shown three swallows in flight, a large egg, and a nest containing eggs. Openings were left in the engraving for the insertion of the publisher's name and address, subscription rates, volume number, and month. Inside the cover we find it stated that it is "The leading ornithological journal of the Western States . . . Successor to the 'Geologists' Gazette' of Elkader, Iowa. Geological Department a leading feature . . . Papers desiring to suspend can have their lists filled by us at very low rates." The hopes of the editor were high. He says: "Our support has been far better than we expected, fully ample to warrant continuance through coming years and we commence the second volume with the feeling that we can present the bird students of the Western States with more and better reading matter for the money than any other publisher."

The magazine had run through the September issue of 1889 (with a total of 84 pages for the year) when disaster struck. A fire swept through the section of Cresco where the Webster printshop was located, destroying the shop and equipment, young Webster's small museum, and his ambitions for continued publication. "The fire that destroyed that part of the town wherein I had my shop seemed at the time to be the blow that almost killed father", he wrote in later years. The task of re-establishing the newspaper business proved so great that the suspension of the *Hawkeye O. and O.* became permanent, and the Iowa bird magazine of the eighties passed out of existence. No doubt the stock of back numbers was also destroyed in the fire, which may account, in a small degree, for the excessive scarcity of complete sets of this magazine. Today the *Hawkeye O. and O.* is a rare collectors' item, for which there is considerable demand. There appear to be only a few complete sets in existence. And I have heard of perhaps a half dozen sets that lack a few issues of completeness; my own set is in this class. Webster's only further connection with ornithological printing seems to have been in 1895-96 when the Webster firm printed several issues of *The Iowa Ornithologist* for the Iowa Ornithological Association.

After the fire young Webster was engaged in the newspaper business and continued to live at Cresco until 1900. He married Miss Jessie Trumbull of Cresco. Their children were a son, Charles, and daughters Dorothy Ann, Beth, and Mae. In 1900 the Webster family moved to Port Angeles, Washington, where they lived two years. The

next two years were spent at Port Townsend, and for a time Webster published a small weekly magazine known as *Webster's Town Topics* at that place. Returning to Port Angeles in 1904, he joined with his father in purchasing a newspaper in that city. During the rest of his life he participated actively and successfully in the newspaper business in Port Angeles; for many years he published the *Evening News*, a daily, the owner of which he remained until his death. In a reminiscent vein he wrote to me of the old *Hawkeye O. and O.* in 1933: "I had a lot of fun getting it out and made a number of very good friends through the work. It was issued monthly, usually 12 pages, and, believe me, that was a task in those days of hand-set type and a 'two-pages-at-a-time' job press. I often think, when I step into the shop where there are five linotypes and six presses and a bunch of men each of whom earns as much in a day as we did in a week in the old days, that I surely was one of those that were 'born thirty years too soon'. At that, I remember I wasn't anywhere near as tired of the work as I might have been . . ." Continuing, he wrote: "I have never lost my interest in birds. As a matter of fact, I think seeing my first Purple Finch in a patch of heather on a mountain ridge, and my first Hepburn's Rosy Finch at the edge of the ice at the top of a glacier, gave me fully as much pleasure as did the Swallow-tailed Kite I collected in Iowa or the first pelicans I saw in Dakota."

Webster did not let his newspaper work in Washington interfere with the outdoor pursuits that he so much enjoyed. He was active in organization work, was a charter member of the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Society, and one of the founders of the Klahhane Club, which through his publicity and personal direction became one of the leading mountain-climbing organizations in the Pacific Northwest. The club established a headquarters lodge at the first rise above Heart o' the Hills, and fifty or sixty members were often present on week-end trips. Later, the club took over the operation of a tract on Lake Crescent, which Webster developed into beautiful Klahhane Gardens containing an abundance of mountain flowers and plants. A peak on Mount Angeles was named in his honor, and a flower, *Senecio websteri*, found only on Mount Angeles, was named for him. At the time of his death he was working on the Klahhane Museum, which he had been instrumental in establishing. The Webster tract near Mount Angeles was somewhat of a showplace and illustrated admirably the things in which its owner was most interested. There, in a small valley at the foot of the mountain, he had a natural rock garden in which he had planted over a thousand varieties of mountain and prairie

plants. A mountain stream crossed his place from a lake of six acres; at this lake he kept many species of wild ducks in summer, and it contained over five thousand trout. The first step up the mountainside began beside his door, and the scenery there was of the finest. He did much entertaining, and fortunate were those who were privileged to enjoy the hospitality at this mountain retreat. Artists used the wild ducks on his lake as living models for their drawings, botanists came there to study the abundant flora, biologists, ornithologists, and mammalogists came to accompany him on his trips. "You see," he said, "it is an easy matter for me. They have merely to drive out to my place at the foot of the mountain, five miles from the water-front to the peaks of Mount Angeles, 7,000 feet elevation, and stay overnight. In the morning the packs are put on the ponies and we take the four-mile zigzag trail to the top, when, by means of 3500-foot grass ridges connecting the various mountain tops, we can travel all summer, if we wish, and not retrace our steps."

Webster achieved a reputation as a botanist. He had a herbarium of some 2500 sheets, which represented plants from all the mountains of Washington. He also had a considerable collection of mammal skins. As a writer he was always in his element. Besides numerous articles on nature studies, he produced three books. One was "The Friendly Mountain", an intimate word-picture of Mount Angeles, another was "Fishing in the Olympics", composed of a group of fishing anecdotes, and the third was "The King of the Olympics". The last named book resulted from his serious study of elk and other mammals of the Olympic peninsula. It is an authoritative book of 225 pages and fifty illustrations, and the edition was soon sold out.

E. B. Webster died at his home at Port Angeles, Washington, on January 7, 1936, following an illness of three months. During his lifetime he made a particular effort to show others the beauties of the world of nature—first through the medium of the *Hawkeye Ornithologist and Oologist*, and later through his books, his zoological gardens and museum, and his excursions with friends. His acquaintance was an inspiration to all whom he met; his friendly teachings were invaluable aids to those who wished to learn more of nature. The accompanying photograph is very typical and shows him in one of his happiest rôles, gathering wild flowers on the summit of Mount Angeles—the friendly man on "The Friendly Mountain".

WINTHROP, IOWA.