

Eskimo Curlew
5 Apr 1893
Burlington, Des Moines Co., IA
Paul Bartsch
Anderson 1907, DuMont 1933

Record Number: 93-CZ
Classification: A-D

SPECIMEN

University of Iowa [#16803 according to Anderson, mounted according to DuMont]

REFERENCES

Anderson 1907
DuMont 1933
DuMont, P.A. 1933. Extinct birds in Iowa collections. IBL 3:28-29.

VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, On the strength of DuMont examining the Univ. of Iowa specimen. I have not seen it (or at least identified the tag). We could try again to find the specimen. /thk

A-D, (although there is no description extant; indeed, no tangible evidence extant). /wrs

Anderson 1907
p 227

118. (266). *Numenius borealis* (Forst.). Eskimo Curlew.

The Eskimo Curlew is also a rare migrant in Iowa. It was listed by Allen (White's Geol. of Iowa, ii, 1870, 426), and John Krider says: "I found it in Iowa in May, migrating westward" (Forty Years' Notes, 1879, 68).

County records: Des Moines—Mus. No. 16803, taken at Burlington, April 5, 1893, by Paul Bartsch. Jackson—"rare transient" (Giddings). Johnson—specimens in University museum taken by Frank Bond (Nutting, Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1892). Van Buren—"spring migrant, very rare" (W. G. Savage).

Phaeopus borealis (Forster). Eskimo Curlew

Extinct in Iowa. It had been greatly reduced in numbers before 1907, when Anderson wrote of it as follows: "The Eskimo Curlew is also a rare migrant in Iowa. It was listed by Allen (White's Geol. of Iowa, ii, 1870, 426), and John Krider says: 'I found it in Iowa in May, migrating westward' (Forty Years' Notes, 1879, 68).

1933
DuMont ~~1934~~
pp 67-68

"County records: Des Moines—Mus. No. 16803, taken at Burlington, April 5, 1893, by Paul Bartsch. Jackson—"rare transient" (Giddings). Johnson—specimens in University museum taken by Frank Bond (Nutting, Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci., 1892). Van Buren—"spring migrant, very rare" (W. G. Savage)." The specimen taken by Bartsch is now mounted in the University of Iowa Museum, but those taken by Bond cannot be found. There appear to be no Iowa records of the Eskimo Curlew after 1893. The writer recorded (1931) that a pair was shot by C. H. Schroeder at Des Moines, Polk County, about 1893. These specimens were presented to the Iowa State Historical Society, but cannot now be found. Besides the Bartsch bird the only other Iowa specimen is a female, No. 10158, in the Davenport Public Museum. It was collected by S. G. Bowman, April 20, 1874, in "Northern Iowa."

Noted Robbers—Starlings.

ay and the crow have a very bad reputation of robbing other birds' nests—and they are well deserved. Which is the worse it were to say. Probably one is as bad as the other. But their methods are different.

He seems to take a pride in his demand to rob as much for amusement as for food. He will approach a nest in full view of the protests of the owner and meet with mockery, as it were. If these could be translated into words the result would be something like this: "Ha! ha! I like to hear a poor little tit like you with common drab feathers threaten the like of me! You make me laugh really. But what's the matter with you, little bird? Do you not see that I am paying you distinguished honor in deigning to select your nest for my breakfast? You must be a very little bird. Please stop that outcry and be in peace."

After hopping from limb to limb all about the nest and displaying his gay military movements to the full, he will proceed to pounce upon the eggs or young, as the case may be. Often as much of these will be scattered upon the ground as will be eaten. His whole conduct is reckless and extravagant. Nor does he exhibit the least fear or appear to be in the least degree conscious that what he is doing is wrong. When his feast is finished he will depart again, more gaily and superciliously than ever, and finally fly off with a mocking whistle while the poor little victim views the marauder's departure with despair.

Different from all this is the crow and the jay (mer of procedure). With the air of a professional marauder he tries industriously to live up to his name. He will only approach a nest in the morning or evening and his maneuvers are shy and cautious in the extreme. After hovering over the nest he will fly off a certain distance and take up a position of observation, having satisfied himself that there are no other birds about, he will fly a little nearer the nest. Here he will study the owner's movements, has taken alarm and those whom he summons to the spot. If there is nothing to apprehend in the way of attack (and, of course, usually there is not), the marauder will creep up right up to the nest, which in turn he will study while occasionally casting furtive glances about him.

At this moment is full of interest. So fierce and rapacious, there is yet a certain craven look which seems to betray a consciousness of guilt. The whole figure would seem to be that of one of those becloaked prowlers about as lurking o' nights in the byways of Spain or Italy.

At the cries of the owner of the nest, of her screams and perhaps of some sympathetic neighbor come louder and more frantic, but they have no effect upon the intruder, save for a momentary sidelong, furtive glance, he remains impassive. At length, when everything has been observed and studied and there is no danger imminent, the attack is made. This is so voracious that in a few moments all is over. Then the marauder, after having taken his bill on a branch, will betake himself to flight as silently as he came. If we follow his

lumbering flight with our eyes we will see him light upon the top of some tree at a considerable distance and there give vent to a series of strident caws. This, no doubt, is his way of expressing satisfaction over his successful foray.

I had a very pleasant experience the other evening during a walk on Staten Island. As I ascended the hill which is back of Livingston I noticed that the fine old trees which there abound were alive with starlings. The evening was calm and beautiful—a parting gift of Indian summer—and this seemed to have its influence on the birds, as they filled the air with their sweet ventriloquial notes. Among these notes I thought I detected some new ones—some not used by the starling in its old world home. It would not be surprising if this were so, for the bird is very imitative. Not only will it imitate the notes of other birds, but various rural sounds and even the human voice.

After enjoying the unexpected concert for a while I continued my walk over the hill. Returning the same way in about an hour I found the birds where I had left them. It was beginning to get dusk. Suddenly, as if at a given signal, the flock rose with a great whirring of wings and commenced a series of evolutions in the air. The grace of these was something to fill one with wonder and admiration. Rising and falling, opening and closing, wheeling and counter-wheeling—never did drilled troops perform evolutions with such perfect precision. And not a note which might serve as order or direction was uttered the while! It was really a wonderful exhibition. Almost as suddenly as the birds had arisen they descended, and when they were again among the trees they broke into a sort of subdued chorus which sounded like a thousand tinkling streams. This lasted for about ten minutes and then all was silence. F. M.

[It is commonly believed that the starling can be taught to articulate words, and this belief is an old one, just as is the kindred belief that a jackdaw or magpie can be taught to imitate human speech if its tongue is split—preferably by a silver coin. Many of us remember the touching story in Sterne's "Sentimental Journey" of the starling which kept calling from its cage: "I can't get out; I can't get out."—EDITOR.]

A Disappearing Bird.

THIRTY or forty years ago the Eskimo curlew, or "doughbird" as it was called in New England, was one of the most abundant of American birds. All early writers speak of the enormous numbers that were seen, and Coues and Packard testify to this abundance; Packard speaking of a flock a mile long and a mile wide. Yet to-day the Eskimo curlew is almost extinct. At a recent meeting of the Biological Society of Washington, W. W. Cooke read an interesting paper on this subject. He tells us that two were shot in August, 1908, at Newburyport, Mass., and that a few were reported by Dr. Grenfell on the coast of Labrador in the autumn of 1906. Two were taken at Nantucket, Mass., in August, 1898, and the last specimen from the interior of the United States was killed at Burlington, Ia., in 1893.

The migration path of the Eskimo curlew was an ellipse. Nesting on the Barren Grounds of Canada it migrated southeasterly to Labrador and Nova Scotia, and then set out straight south

on a journey of 2,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean to reach the Lesser Antilles and South America. The bird wintered on the pampas of Argentina and in spring set out on its northern journey by way of Texas and the Mississippi Valley, following a narrow belt on both sides of the meridian of 97 degrees.

The Eskimo curlew was very abundant until about 1880, and then within a period of ten years the species became almost extinct. During these ten years that portion of the Mississippi Valley through which it passed on its northern migration, was largely brought under cultivation, and there was a large population ready to destroy the traveling birds. What Mr. Cooke regards as the most potent factor in its extinction has been transformation of its winter home from sparsely settled grazing lands to great wheat fields. On these pampas the curlew spent nearly half the year and the changed conditions must have enormously affected it, for in the fourteen years from 1872 to 1892 the wheat production of Argentina increased fifty fold.

Yet it hardly seems as if this change—extraordinary as it is—should be enough to wipe out a species once so enormously abundant. Nevertheless some of the species most numerous in individuals, when they once begin to go down hill, disappear with great rapidity.

The Woods in Winter.

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn., Dec. 14.—*Editor Forest and Stream:* All the trees are now bare save a few of the black oaks which hold their leaves the year around. This gives shelter to numerous birds, and I have especially noted that the bluejays roost in them in winter. Often I have scared up a stray partridge in their leafy wastes when walking through the woods.

In the first wood that I came to I found a bluejay's nest. The jay with his blue overcoat and black band around his neck is a visitor with us the year around. And what a beautiful bird he is, undoubtedly the finest bird of the woodlands. Especially is he a welcome sight in the bleak winter woods where his harsh screams of "Jay-jay-jay" are so often heard. The nest I found was made of roots neatly woven together in a tree crotch about ten feet from the ground.

I chose the path that led to the main woods. On my way there I made the acquaintance of a pair of red squirrels that were evidently laying away a store of acorns for the winter, but upon my approach they scurried up the nearest tree and began devouring acorns. They regarded me as an intruder no doubt, for a moment later one of them grew suspicious and darted away with a string of expletives to the effect that I was out for no good. I saw several robins at the edge of the woods and wondered why they had not gone south with their kin. What splendid birds they are—brave and unafraid always. Have you ever taken notice of the robin's song? The usual call is a clear "Lit-lit-lit-lit-lit" and the song is of changing sweetness, evolved almost from a single note and goes in this manner, "Cheer-i-ly, cheer-i-ly, cheer-up." Usually the robins come in March and leave in October or November. They sometimes stay the year out.

I sauntered around in the woods for about two hours and came out with so many nests and various other things that I had to discard some of them.

ROBERT LINCOLN PAGE.

DuMont, P. A. 1933. Extinct birds in Iowa collections. IBL 3:28-29.

Extinct Birds in Iowa Collections.—It may prove of interest to the ornithologists of the state, to know where they may find specimens of the extinct North American birds such as the Passenger Pigeon, Heath Hen, Carolina and Louisiana Paroquets, and those others now nearly exterminated such as the Eskimo Curlew and Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

In the Davenport Public Museum there are three Passenger Pigeons, two of them taken in Scott County; two Paroquets without data, and two Eskimo Curlews. One of the latter was collected in Northern Iowa, by Dr. S. C. Bowman, April 20, 1874. I believe the paroquets were received from the University of Iowa Museum and were originally from the Talbot collection.

There is a mounted specimen of the Eskimo Curlew in the collection of the Museum at Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt. Pleasant. No data are available for this specimen.

In the Shaffer collection of birds, found in the Jefferson County Public Library, Fairfield, there are four Passenger Pigeons. They were probably all captured in Jefferson County before 1880. One is a juvenal, a plumage seldom seen in mounted groups.

The State Historical Museum, at Des Moines, has a pair of mounted Passenger Pigeons and a nest with two eggs. The pigeons were killed by Prof. Joseph Steppan from a flock of 18 in northern Michigan, June 14, 1887.

A mounted pair of Passenger Pigeons are in a case in the Science Building at Iowa State College, Ames. These birds, while lacking labels, were apparently part of the collection of Michigan birds which were purchased by the college, probably in the seventies. There is also a cracked specimen of the egg of the Passenger Pigeon.

In the collection of birds of the Sioux City Academy of Science, housed in the Sioux City Public Library, there is one Eskimo Curlew without data.

Oscar P. Allert has, in his collection at Giard, an Eskimo Curlew taken March 22, 1903, at Oakfield, Wisconsin.

There is a fully plumaged male Passenger Pigeon in the collection of O. M. Greenwood at Manchester. This specimen was collected by Dr. Wm. H. B. Greenwood, in Delaware County, on May 10, 1881.

In the Museum of the Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls there is a mounted pair of Passenger Pigeons. These birds were purchased about 1900, but the locality from where they were taken is not known.

There is a group of four Passenger Pigeons at the Bert Heald Bailey Museum, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, two Louisiana Paroquets which were formerly in the Talbot collection, and an Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

In the Museum of Wartburg College at Waverly, there is a mounted paroquet, but nothing could be learned of where it was secured.

The collection of the Museum of Natural History, University of Iowa, contains five mounted Passenger Pigeons; one mounted Ivory-billed Woodpecker and two others as skins, all from Florida; two mounted Heath Hens and a skin, from Martha's Vineyard, taken by J. E. Thayer in 1897; one Eskimo Curlew taken at Burlington, April 5, 1893, by Paul Bartsch; two Carolina Paroquets from Florida; and nine Louisiana Paroquets taken during 1882 in Indian Territory, by D. H. Talbot.—PHILIP A. DU MONT, Museum of Natural History, University of Iowa.