

## OTHER EARLY RECORDS OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON.

BY ALBERT HAZEN WRIGHT.

SINCE the appearance of the first article,<sup>1</sup> under a similar caption, the author has felt we should strive to assemble all the material extant concerning this extinct or near-extinct species. A systematic endeavor has been made to peruse most of the North American historical sources (county and town histories omitted) which would presumably yield notes concerning this form. No doubt this supplement will be far from complete from the biological point of view, but this and its predecessor are meant to be side-lights to the customary ornithologic literature from which we have not drawn. Of the period after 1860, many older ornithologists can speak from personal experience far better than the writer, hence the omission of such material.

If the laudable quest for survivors of the species prove not forlorn, we trust our boasted humanity will hold the protection of this beautiful bird to be a most sacred trust,—an attitude rarely taken in the day of its abundance. Immediate desires and absolute thoughtlessness reigned supreme so that cases like the temporary insanity of J. B. Booth, the actor, and the extreme solicitation of Thomas L. McKenney, the traveller, were unfortunately held up to ridicule rather than admiration.

In the first instance, Booth while acting in Louisville (Jan. 4, 1834), wrote James Freeman Clarke<sup>2</sup> asking if he could help him to find “a place of interment for his friend (s) in the church-yard.” Clarke went immediately to Booth. Upon inquiries concerning his friend, the actor apparently changed the subject and proceeded to read Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner,’ following this with remarks on Shelley’s argument against the use of animal food. Then, he argued his point by “texts selected skillfully here and there from Genesis to Revelation.” At last he inquired if Clarke “Would . . . like to look at the remains?” And, imagine Clarke’s surprise

---

<sup>1</sup> Auk, Vol. XXVII, October, 1910, pp. 428–443.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, James Freeman. *Memorial and Biographical Sketches.* Boston, 1878, pp. 263–276.



when he beheld, "spread out upon a large sheet," "about a bushel of wild pigeons." "In a day or two," Booth "actually purchased a lot in the cemetery, two or three miles below the city, had a coffin made, hired a hearse and carriage, and had gone through all the solemnity of a regular funeral." "During the week immense quantities of the wild pigeon [Passenger Pigeon, *Columba migratoria*] had been flying over the city, in their way to and from a roost in the neighborhood. These birds had been slaughtered by myriads, and were for sale by the bushel at the corners of every street in the city. Although all the birds which could be killed by man made the smallest impression on the vast multitude contained in one of these flocks,—computed by Wilson to consist sometimes of more than twenty-two hundred millions,—yet to Booth the destruction seemed wasteful, wanton, and, from his point of view, was a willful and barbarous murder."

The other incident happened August 14, 1826, while McKenney was crossing Lake Superior in a storm. He describes it as follows:<sup>1</sup> "At six o'clock, and when about three-fourths of the way across, the lake growing white with foam, and the steersman calling for help to keep the canoe from being blown round side to the sea, which is generally afforded by two or three of the voyageurs striking their paddles down by the side of the canoe, and the bowsman working his the contrary way, a bird was seen coming across the lake, feeble in its efforts, and directing its course towards our canoes. It passed Mr. Holliday's, and on getting in a line with mine, turned and followed it. It appeared to make one last effort, and with its feet foremost, lit on the end of the upper yard, when instantly one of the voyageurs raised his paddle saying, 'mangé-mangé,' and in the act of giving the bird the meditated stroke, I caught his arm, and prevented it. I then ordered the steersman to untie the rope, which, passing through the top of the mast, was tied near him, when the sail was lowered, and the bird taken and handed to me. It was too feeble to fly. Its heart beat as if it would break. I took some water from the lake with my hand, into my mouth, put the bill of the little wanderer there, and it drank as much as would have filled a table spoon—then

<sup>1</sup> McKenney, Thomas L. *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, etc.* Baltimore, 1827, pp. 352, 353.



breaking up some crackers, I fed it. My next difficulty was to fall upon some plan for taking it home. It seemed to have sought my protection, and nothing shall cause me to abandon it. On looking around me, the mocoek that the Indian woman gave me struck my sight. It was the only thing in the canoe in which it was possible to put it. So I have given it a lodgment in that. It is a wild pigeon, nearly full grown, and is perhaps the only survivor of a flock from Canada. Thousands of them perish in crossing every season, and I am told they are often seen on the lake shore fastened together by their feet, looking like ropes of onions. The lake, in the direction in which this one came, must be at least sixty miles across.

"This is a member of the dove family, and the 'travelled dove' of the voyage. Is it a messenger of peace? — Why did it pass one canoe, and turn and follow another? — Why come to me? — None of these questions can be answered. But of one thing this poor pigeon is sure — and that is, of my *protection*; and though only a pigeon, it came to me in distress, and if it be its pleasure, we will never part." In a footnote the writer adds: "This pigeon, called by the Chippeways *Me-me*, and by which name, it is called, is yet with its preserver — tame, and in all respects domesticated. It knows its name, and will come when called."

This collection of records is classified according to regions, and the notes are arranged chronologically under each.

### *Canada.*

The first country to be considered is naturally Canada, the former home of the breeding pigeon. The account begins with 'The First Relation of Jaques Carthier of S. Malo, 1534' in which<sup>1</sup> "stockdoves" are recorded at Cape Kildare. In 1535-36, on the second voyage up the St. Lawrence, he finds: "There are also many sorts of birds, as . . . Turtles, wilde Pigeons, . . ." In the same region, in 1542, John Alphonse of Xanctoigne, chief pilot to Roberval, notes<sup>2</sup> "Fowle . . . in abundance, as . . . turtle doves, . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Original Narratives of Early American History. Early English and French Voyages. New York, 1906, pp. 17, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Hakluyt, Richard. The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation. Glasgow, 1903-5. Extra Series, Hakluyt Society, Vol. VIII, p. 282.



About forty years later (1583), Sir George Peckham in his report of the discoveries of Sir Humfrey Gilbert in Newfoundland, mentions<sup>1</sup> "Stocke dooves" as one "Of [the] Birds." In a narrative of the same expedition, Captain Edward Haies records<sup>2</sup> "rough footed like doves, which our men after one flight did kill with cudgels, they were so fat and unable to flie." In 1607 Marke Lescarbot, in speaking of Ile Saint Croix, not far from Port Royal, says:<sup>3</sup> "We made there also good Pasties of Turtle Doves, which are very plentiful in the Woods, but the grasse is there so high that one could not find them when they were killed and fallen in the ground." In the 'Third Voyage of Sieur de Champlain, in the year 1611,' at the Falls of St. Louis:<sup>4</sup> "Once on St. Barnabas's day, Sieur du Parc, having gone hunting with two others, killed nine [stags]. They had also a very large number of pigeons." In 1623<sup>5</sup> "Pigeon" is mentioned as one of the many sorts of birds all along the Nova Scotian coast. The last note of this century is by Sagard Theodat who says,<sup>6</sup> "There are . . . an infinite number of Turtle-doves, which they call Orittey, which feed in part on acorns which they readily go at whole, and in part on other things."

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, we have three notes, the first of which comes in 1770 when Wynne says that the<sup>7</sup> "Canadians have variety of game, . . . vast flights of wild pigeons, . . . ." The second record is one made by Madame De Riedesel, who writes as follows:<sup>8</sup> "On passing a wood, I was suddenly roused from my reveries, by something that seemed like a cloud before our carriage, until I discovered that it was a flight of wild pigeons, of which there are such an abundance in Canada, that they are for many weeks the exclusive food of the inhabitants, who

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Prince Society Publications, Vol. XXXI, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Purchas, Samuel. *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*. Glasgow, 1905-7. Hakluyt Society, Extra Series, Vol. XVIII, p. 282.

<sup>4</sup> Prince Soc. Publ., Vol. XIII, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>5</sup> Purchas, Samuel, *Ibid.*, Vol. XIX, p. 399.

<sup>6</sup> Sagard Theodat, G. *Le Grand Voyage du Pays des Hurons, 1632*, Second Partie. Chapter I, p. 303.

<sup>7</sup> Wynne, J. H. *A General History of the British Empire in America*: 2 vols., London, 1770, Vol. II, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> De Riedesel, Madame. *Letters and Memoirs Relating to the War of American Independence, etc.* (orig. edit., 1800). Translated by M. de Wallenstein, New York, 1827, pp. 126, 127.



shoot them with fowling-pieces, loaded with the smallest shot. Upon perceiving a flock, the Canadian hunter shouts, which makes the pigeons start all at once, so that by shooting at random, sometimes two or three hundred are wounded, and afterwards knocked down with sticks. The hunters sell a part, and keep the remainder for their own use; and these birds furnish soups and fricassees, which are usually dressed with a cream sauce and small onions [chives]. During the shooting season, pigeons are on every table." (June 16, 1777.) The third and last note<sup>1</sup> is a mere notice of a pigeon which flew by Mackenzie when in the Slave Lake region.

In the nineteenth century the record begins the very first year, 1800, when Harmon the North West fur trader mentions<sup>2</sup> the pigeons in two or three instances. On May 9, 1800, while at Au Chat he observes: "We arrived this morning, at this place, where the North West Company have a small establishment; and I have passed the afternoon, in shooting pigeons." August 2, 1800, the Mouth of the River Winipick: "The after part of the day, I spent in shooting pigeons, which I found to be numerous, as at this season, red raspberries, and other kinds of fruit, are ripe, and exist here in abundance." In the following year, May 2, at Montagne Aiseau (or Bird Mountain) he says, "Of fowls, we have . . . pigeons . . . ." Six years later, in 1807, George Heriot describes the species as follows:<sup>3</sup> "The wood-pigeons are so multitudinous, that at certain seasons they obscure the atmosphere in parts of the country which are not much settled, and are frequently knocked down in great numbers, by means of long poles. Their flight is so rapid, that when two columns, moving in opposite directions at the same height in the atmosphere, encounter each other, many of them fall to the ground, stunned by the rude shock communicated by this sudden collision. Shot, if fired as they approach, will seldom

---

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, Alexander. *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793.* London, 1801, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, Daniel Williams. *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America, between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Latitude, extending from Montreal to the Pacific, etc.* New York, edit. 1903, pp. 4, 22, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Heriot, George. *Travels through the Canadas, etc.* London, 1807, pp. 517, 518.



make any impression on them; the only certain method of bringing them to the ground is by firing immediately after they pass. A considerable of the produce of the cultivated lands was some years ago devoured by these birds, and wherever they rested, they appeared to cover, like leaves, a great part of the trees of the forest."

From 1800 to 1810 Alexander Henry made several notes on the pigeon, particularly in western Canada. When near Winnipeg August 19, 1800:<sup>1</sup> "Pigeons were in great numbers; the trees were every moment covered with them, and the continual firing of our people did not appear to diminish their numbers." On April 22, 1801, he saw "Pigeons flying N. in great numbers." Shortly after, May 19, at Rat River, he killed a pigeon. At Pembina River Post, May 4, 1804, were "Extraordinary numbers of wild pigeons; I never before saw so many." When he approached Isle de la Traverse, August 21, 1808, "Pigeons were plentiful on our arrival, but they instantly left." Two days later, at Pine Island, he says, "We shot. . . . some pigeons, of which we saw great numbers." Lastly, August 31, 1810, at New White Earth House, he finds "Pigeons are passing N. to S. in immense flocks, particularly in the morning and evening."

About the same time Hugh Gray, in a letter from Quebec, writes:<sup>2</sup> "During the summer the woods of Canada abound with birds of a great variety of sorts and sizes, . . . . Some of these pass the whole summer in Canada; others, such as the pigeons, are only found at certain seasons, as they pass from the southern to the more northerly parts of the American continent and vice versa."

In 1820, Sansom, in Lower Canada, also found these<sup>3</sup> "wild-pigeons, in inconceivable abundance." In 1832 Joseph Bouchette, in his 'The British Dominions in North America,' etc., 2 vols., London, 1832 (Vol. II, p. 145), found that pigeons furnished objects for the sportsman in New Brunswick, as did Godley when at Kingston (August); he says, that the pigeons are<sup>4</sup> "important objects of an American chasse."

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry, Alexander, and Thompson, David, *The Manuscript Journals of, 1799-1814.* Edited by Elliott Coues. 3 vols., New York, 1897. Vol. I, pp. 46, 176, 183, 243; Vol. II, 467, 469, 622.

<sup>2</sup> Gray, Hugh. *Letters from Canada, written during a residence there in the Years 1806, 1807, and 1808; etc.* London, 1809, pp. 245, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Sansom, Joseph. *Travels in Lower Canada, etc.* London, 1820, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Godley, John Robert. *Letters from America.* 2 vols., London, 1844. Vol. I, p. 126.



In 1848 (July 27) Paul Kane, when in the Winnipeg region,<sup>1</sup> "found immense flocks of wild pigeons, and killed a good supply." Ten years later, in the same region, Henry Y. Hind noted<sup>2</sup> (June 10, 1858): "In a wheat field opposite St. James' Church were several pigeon traps, constructed of nets 20 feet long by 15 broad, stretched upon a frame; one side was propped up by a pole 8 feet long, so that when the birds passed under the net to pick up the grain strewed beneath, a man or boy concealed by the fence withdrew the prop by a string attached to it, and the falling net sometimes succeeded in entrapping a score or more of pigeons at one fall. Near the net some dead trees are placed for the pigeons to perch on, and sometimes stuffed birds are used as decoys to attract passing flocks." In three other instances the expedition found these birds. When west of Blue Hills, June 30, 1858, "Vast numbers of pigeons were flying in a north-westerly direction, . . ." At Qu'Appelle River, July, 1858, "pigeons were calmly and listlessly perched on the dense trees, having eaten plentifully of their favorite fruits"; and finally, between the South and Main branches of the Saskatchewan, they recorded the pigeon August 5, 1858.

In his 'Maple Leaves,' etc. (Quebec, 1863-5), J. M. LeMoine says (p. 96): "Wild pigeon shooting, especially in western Canada, yields an abundant harvest. The passenger pigeon still resorts to the Niagara district in such quantities that Audubon's graphic description of the flights of wild pigeons in Kentucky ceases to appear overdrawn. Until 1854, there existed in the woods back of Chateauguay, at a place called the Five Points, a pigeon roost; the devastation caused by this countless host in the wheat fields became very great, but in presence of the incessant attacks of man, a general pigeon stampede took place — the roost is now deserted."

In 1869 Wm. Canniff writes of this species as follows:<sup>3</sup> "Sheriff Sherwood, . . . remarks: 'I recollect seeing pigeons flying in such numbers that they almost darkened the sky, and so low often as to be knocked down with poles; I saw, where a near neighbor

---

<sup>1</sup> Kane, Paul. *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America from Canada to Vancouver's Island and Oregon, etc.* London, 1859, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> Hind, Henry Y. *Northwest Territory. Report on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition.* Toronto, 1859, pp. 39, 40, 43, 61, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Canniff, Wm. *History of the Settlement of Upper Canada (Ontario, etc.).* Toronto, 1869, p. 201.



killed thirty at one shot, I almost saw the shot, and saw the pigeons after they were shot.'” This same year Coffin, when in the Red River country, says that one day,<sup>1</sup> “While pitching our tents, a flock of pigeons flew past, and down in the woods along the bank of the river we could hear their cooing. Those who had shot-guns went to the hunt.”

The last notice of the pigeon to be given is an extended account by Geikie, who writes:<sup>2</sup> “The flocks of pigeons that come in the early spring are wonderful. They fly together in bodies of many thousands, perching, as close as they can settle, on the trees when they alight, or covering the ground over large spaces when feeding. The first tidings of their approach is the signal for every available gun to be brought into requisition, at once to procure a supply of fresh food, and to protect the crops on the fields, which the pigeons would utterly destroy if they were allowed. It is singular how little sense, or perhaps fear, such usually timid birds have when collected together in numbers. I have heard of one man who was out shooting them, and had crept close to one flock, when their leaders took a fancy to fly directly over him, almost close to the ground, to his no small terror. Thousands brushed past him so close as to make him alarmed for his eyes; and the stream still kept pouring on after he had discharged his barrels, right and left, into it, until nothing remained but to throw himself on his face till the whole had flown over him. They do not, however, come to any part of Canada with which I am acquainted in such amazing numbers as are said by Wilson and Audubon to visit the western United States.

“A curious fact respecting them is that they have fixed roosting-places, from which no disturbance appears able to drive them, and to these they resort night by night, however far they may have to fly to obtain food on the returning day . . . .

“I myself have killed thirteen at a shot, fired at a venture into a flock; and my sister Margaret killed two one day by simply throwing up a stick she had in her hand as they swept past at a point where we had told her to stand, in order to frighten them

---

<sup>1</sup> Coffin, Charles Carleton. *The Seat of Empire.* Boston, 1870, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Geikie, John C. *Adventures in Canada; or Life in the Woods.* Philadelphia, pp. 212-216.



into the open ground, that we might have a better chance of shooting them. I have seen bagfuls of them that had been killed by no more formidable weapons than poles swung right and left at them as they flew close past. The rate at which they fly is wonderful, and has been computed at about a mile a minute, at which rate they keep on for hours together, darting forward with rapid beats of their wings very much as our ordinary pigeons do."

### *New England.*

In New England, Champlain seems to be the first (July 12, 1604) to record the Wild Pigeon. Of an Island Harbor in latitude 43° 25' near Cape Porpoise, he says:<sup>1</sup> "There are in these islands so many red currants that one sees for the most part nothing else, and an infinite number of pigeons, of which we took a great quantity." The year following, 1605, James Rosier wrote<sup>2</sup> 'A True Relation of the Voyage of Captaine George Waymouth' where, in his "A Briefe Note of what Profits we saw the Country yeeld in the small time of our stay there," he enumerates "Turtle-doves."

In 1622, Captain John Smith reports,<sup>3</sup> "*great flocks of Turkies, . . . Pigeons,*" etc. The same year, we have another note which says:<sup>4</sup> "The country aboundeth with diversity of wild fowl, as . . . many doves, especially when strawberries are ripe." A few years later, March 12, 1631, Gov. Dudley, in a "Letter to the Countess of Lincoln," thinks of the vast flights as omens. He writes as follows:<sup>5</sup> "Upon the eighth of *March*, from after it was fair day light, until about eight of the clock in the forenoon, there flew over all the towns in our plantations, so many flocks of doves, each flock containing many thousands, and some so many, that they obscured the light, that it passeth credit, if but the truth should be written; and the thing was the more strange, because I scarce

<sup>1</sup> Champlain, *Sieur de, Voyages of. Voyage in the year 1604.* The Publications of the Prince Society, Vol. XII, 1878, Boston, pp. 68, 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Original Narratives of Early American History*, Vol. II, New York, 1906, p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Capt. John, *Works of, 1608-1631.* Edited by Edward Arber. New England Trials, London, 2nd edition, p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> *A Brief Relation of the Discovery and Plantation of New England.* London, 1622. Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Second Series, IX, 1822, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., VIII, 1802, p. 45.



remember to have seen ten doves since I came into the country: they were all turtles, as appeared by divers of them we killed flying, somewhat bigger than those of *Europe*, and they flew from the north-east, to the south-west; but what it portends, I know not."

In 1634 we find the first extended notice of the pigeons of New England. Wood describes them at some length:<sup>1</sup> "The Pigeon of that Countrey, is something different from our Dove-house Pigeons in *England*, being more like Turtles, of the same colour; but they have long tayles like a Magpie: And they seeme not so bigge, because they carry not so many feathers on their backes as our *English* Doves, yet are they as bigge in body. These Birds come into the Countrey, to goe to North parts in the beginning of our Spring, at which time (if I may be counted worthy, to be believed in a thing that is not so strange as true) I have seene them fly as if the Ayerie regiment had beene Pigeons; seeing neyther beginning nor ending, length, or breadth of these Millions of Millions. The shouting of people, the ratling of Gunnes, and pelting of small shotte could not drive them out of their course, but so they continued for foure or five houres together: yet it must not be concluded, that it is thus often; for it is but at the beginning of the Spring, and at *Michaelmas*, when they retorne backe to the Southward; yet are there some all the yeare long, which are easily attayned by such as looke after them. Many of them build amongst the Pine-trees, thirty miles to the North-east of our plantations; joyning nest to nest, and tree to tree by their nests, so that the Sunne never sees the ground in that place, from whence the *Indians* fetch whole loades of them."

In the well known 'New English Canaan' (Amsterdam, 1637), by Thomas Morton, he in his general survey of the country says it<sup>2</sup> "Contained . . . Millions of Turtledoves one the greene boughes, which sate pecking of the full ripe pleasant grapes that were supported by the lusty trees, whose fruitfull load did cause the armes to bend." Six years later (1643), Roger Williams's 'Key into the Language of America' appeared in London.<sup>3</sup> Of the "Wuskowhan-

<sup>1</sup> Wood, William. *New Englands Prospect*. London, 1634. Prince Society Publications, Vol. I, 1865, p. 31, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Prince Soc. Publications, Vol. XIV, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Colls. R. I. Hist. Soc., Vol. I, p. 87; also Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., First Series, Vol. III, p. 220.



nanaûkit; Pigeon Countrie" he writes: "In that place these fowle breed abundantly, and by reason of their delicate food, especially in Strawberrie time, when they pick up whole large Fields of the old grounds of the Natives, they are a delicate fowle, and because of their abundance, and the facility of killing them, they are and may be plentifully fed on."

In the early history of the Plymouth Colony, the pigeons became at times a menace, as Winthrop shows. Of the years 1643 and 1648 he particularly speaks.<sup>1</sup> "The immediate causes of this scarcity [of corn] were the cold and wet summer, especially in the time of the first harvest [in 1643]; also, the pigeons came in such flocks (above 10,000 in one flock), that beat down, and eat up a very great quantity of all sorts of English grain: . . ."

"This month [August, 1648], when our first harvest was near had in, the pigeons came again all over the country, but did no harm, (harvest being just in) but proved a great blessing, it being incredible what multitudes of them were killed daily. It was ordinary for one man to kill eight or ten dozen in half a day, yea five or six dozen at one shoot, and some seven or eight. Thus the Lord showed us, that he could make the same creature, which formerly had been a great chastisement, now to become a great blessing."

Barber, much later (1841), practically repeats the same as follows:<sup>2</sup> "The very wet weather of 1642 produced a dearth of corn in Boston in the spring of 1643, myriads of pigeons appeared the same season and did much injury. It is an old observation in America, that pigeons are uncommonly numerous in the spring of sickly years."

In 1648 we have our first metrical observation where the author begins of summer as follows:<sup>3</sup>

"Bespread with Roses Sommer 'gins take place with hasty speed,  
Whose parching heate Strawberries coole doth moderation breed.  
Ayre darkening sholes of pigeons picke their berries sweet and good."

<sup>1</sup> Winthrop, John. *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*. Edited by James Savage. 2 vols., Boston, 1825, 1826. Vol. II, pp. 94, 331, 332.

<sup>2</sup> Barber, J. W. *The History and Antiquities of New England, New York and New Jersey, etc.* Worcester, 1841, p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> *Good News from New-England: etc.* London, 1648. Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Fourth Series, Vol. I, 1852, p. 202.



The final note in the seventeenth century comes in 1680 when Hubbard says <sup>1</sup> that the "pigeons, (that come in multitudes every summer, almost like the quayles that fell round the campe of Israel in the wilderness,) . . . by nature's instinct, or by conduct of Divine Providence, have found the way into these endes of the earth, . . ."

In the eighteenth century the first record is December 11, 1707, when Samuel Sewall, in his Diary (1674-1729), observes that <sup>2</sup> "Yesterday I was told of a vast number of Pigeons in the Woods this Moneth. Capt. Mills at his Sister's Wedding says he saw an incredible Number at Woodstock last Friday."

A considerable period intervenes before we come to the records of Revs. Smith and Deane who, at Portland, Me., kept Diaries from 1722-1787. Their entries follow: <sup>3</sup>

"1733. *August* Pigeons very plenty. We kill more than we can eat."

"1744, August 20. I don't remember that pigeons were ever so plenty as now."

"1744 August 28 Gunning after pidgeons, which increase in plenty. I brought home ten dozen in my chaise."

"1752 Sept. 2. I rode with . . . to Marblehead (Windham) a pigeoning; we got near ten dozen."

"1759 Sept. 1. Abundance of pigeons."

In 1741 Oldmixon in his 'The British Empire in America,' etc. (2nd edition, Vol. I, London, 1741, p. 186) merely states that "Vast Flights of Pigeons come and go at certain Seasons of the Year." But he is followed in 1755 by Douglass who gives a more detailed account.<sup>4</sup> "The common food is mostly already mentioned, to these we may add . . . wild (g) pigeons, . . ." In the footnote (g) he adds: "*Palumbus migratorius* Catesby, *Palumbus torquatus* Aldrovand. The wild pigeon, pigeon of passage, or ring

---

<sup>1</sup> Hubbard, William. General History of New England, 1680. Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Second Series, Vol. V, 1817, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Fifth Series, Vol. VI, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Rev. Thomas, and Deane, Rev. Samuel. Journals of the. By Wm. Willis, Portland, Me., 1849, pp. 266, 269, 114, 149, 273.

<sup>4</sup> Douglass, William. A Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North-America. 2 vols., Boston, 1755. Vol. I, pp. 125, 126; Vol. II, pp. 217, 218.



dove. These are plenty at certain seasons, all over America, and of great benefit in feeding the poor. The French call them *ramier*, the Dutch call them *ringle duif*, *wilde duif*, *boom duif*."

"Wild pigeons, *palumbus torquatus migratorius*, see Vol. 1, p. 126, in their passage northward, begin to appear in New-England end of February and beginning of March, but not in large numbers, because they travel more inland for the benefit of last autumn berries of several sorts in the wilderness; they return in their passage southward, in larger quantities, end of August; and some years since have been sold at 4d. currency per dozen; they at that season keep towards the plantations for the benefit of their harvest. They are of great advantage in their seasons towards victualling our plantations; the country people feed some of them (they are caught alive in nets or snares) for sometime with Indian corn, and brought to market, and are good delicate eating; cuming seed or its oil, are found by experience the best lure to induce the pigeons to their nets. The spring flights 1751 were very large, like thunder shower clouds, but soon over."

In 1770, J. H. Wynne, in his 'General History of the British Empire in America' (2 vols., London: Vol. I, p. 41), says: "New England produces a great variety of fowls; such as . . . pigeons . . ." Among the feathered tribe of Connecticut Peters, in 1782, notes <sup>1</sup> "innumerable flocks of pigeons, which fly south in autumn;"

In 'The History of New Hampshire' (Boston, 1792), the famous historian Jeremy Belknap (Vol. III, pp. 171, 172) speaks of the "Wild Pigeon, *Columba migratoria*." "Wild pigeons come in the spring, from the southward, in great flocks, and breed in our woods, during the summer months. They choose the thickest parts of the forest, for the situation of their nests . . . In the journal of *Richard Hazzen*, who surveyed the Province line, in 1741, there is this remark; 'for three miles together, the pigeons nests were so thick, that five hundred might have been told on the beech trees at one time; and could they have been counted on the hemlocks, as well, I doubt not but five thousand, at one turn around.' This was on the western side of the Connecticut river, and eastward of

---

<sup>1</sup> Peters, Rev. Samuel. A General History of Connecticut. 2nd edition, London, 1782, p. 255.



Deerfield river. Since the clearing of the woods, the number of pigeons is diminished."

Shortly afterwards (1794) Williams gives a very good statement of this species. He begins thus:<sup>1</sup>

"Wild Pigeon, *Columba migratoria* Time of appearance, March 20. Departure, Oct. 10.

"In the Wild Pigeon, the multiplying power of nature acts with great force and vigour. The male and female always pair: They sit alternately upon the eggs, and generally hatch but two at a time; but this is repeated several times in a season. The accounts which are given of the number of pigeons in the uncultivated parts of the country, will appear almost incredible to those who have never seen their nests. The surveyor, *Richard Hazen*, . . . [then follows Hazen's account]. The remarks of the first settlers of Vermont, fully confirm this account [Hazen's]. The following relation was given me, by one of the earliest settlers at Clarendon: 'The number of pigeons was immense. Twenty five nests were frequently to be found on one beech tree. The earth was covered with these trees, and with hemlocks, thus loaded with the nests of pigeons. For an hundred acres together, the ground was covered with their dung, to the depth of two inches. Their noise in the evening was extremely troublesome, and so great that the traveller could not get any sleep, where their nests were thick. About an hour after sunrise, they rose in such numbers as to darken the air. When the young pigeons were grown to a considerable bigness, before they could readily fly, it was common for the settlers to cut down the trees, and gather a horse load in a few minutes.' The settlement of the country has since set bounds to this luxuriance of animal life; diminished the number of these birds; and drove them further to the northward."

In the course of a missionary tour in Maine Rev. Paul Coffin (1796) twice dined on pigeons,—August 13 at Duck trap, Me., and again August 16, at Crawford Pond. The same day at Union, Me.,<sup>2</sup> "[his host] took yesterday morning twenty-four dozen pigeons in a net at once; and this morning seventeen dozen . . .

---

<sup>1</sup> Williams, Samuel. *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont.* Walpole, N. H., pp. 112–114.

<sup>2</sup> Me. Hist. Soc. Coll., First Series, Vol. IV, pp. 325, 328, 362.



Thirty-two dozen pigeons were taken at Sunnebeck [Pond, Barretts-town] at one spring of the net." In 1798, August 30, at Livermore, Me., "[his host] had just sprung his net on six dozen pigeons and took them all. To take a whole flock is a common thing with him."

In 1804 "pigeons" were mentioned as among the feathered kind in the Stockbridge Indian Country.<sup>1</sup> In 1815, in Carver, Mass.,<sup>2</sup> "Wood pigeons . . . are Common," as were they in Rochester, Mass., the same year. In the latter place, the writer says,<sup>3</sup> "Wild pigeons annually seek these woods and are very common in this town in August." In a footnote he adds: "Some of the peculiarities of this bird, it is said, are to visit marshes for mud, very early in the morning. They fly, it is computed, at the rate of a mile a minute, leaving the sea coast, by 8 or 9 o'clock A. M. going with this rapidity, occasionally resting in intervening forests far into the interior of the country. This habit is well known about Medford, where they are caught on the marshes by live pigeon decoys."

In the first volume of Timothy Dwight's 'Travels,' etc. (New Haven, 1821, 1822, p. 55), it is said: "Pigeons are (considered amongst) the Land birds principally coveted at the tables of luxury." Shortly after (1824) Zadock Thompson, so well known to zoölogists, barely mentions (p. 18) the "pigeon" as a "bird of passage" in his 'A Gazetteer of the State of Vermont,' but in 1842 he gives it more attention:<sup>4</sup> "The American Wild Pigeon is met with in greater or less numbers throughout the whole region from Mexico to Hudson's Bay. These birds are remarkably gregarious in their habits, almost always flying, roosting and breeding in large flocks. When the country was new there were many of their roosts and breeding places in this state." (Then follow Hazen's and Williams's accounts.)

Finally, in 1846, Beckley gives us the following:<sup>5</sup> "In the early settlement of the state, *wild pigeons* were wonderfully plenty.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., First Series, Vol. IX, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Second Series, Vol. IV, 1816, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Second Series, Vol. IV, 1816, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, Zadock. History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical. Burlington, Vt., 1842, Part I, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Beckley, Rev. Hosea. The History of Vermont. Brattleboro, 1846, pp. 304, 305.



So few are now found in the forests and on the mountains, that the account given by the first settlers of their numbers and multiplication seems almost incredible . . . . The progress of civilization and refinement; and the clearing of the hills and vallies have much lessened the number of these birds, or driven them to other regions."

*New York.*

In the seventeenth century the early writers quite frequently remarked the abundance of the pigeons in the New Netherlands, and we have in this century alone nine or ten such records. First of all comes Wassenaers's observation that<sup>1</sup> "Pigeons fly wild, they are chased by the foxes like fowls." In 1625 John de Laet says<sup>2</sup> that when Hudson was near the present city of Hudson "two men were also despatched at once with bows and arrows in quest of game, who soon after brought in a pair of pigeons which they had shot."

In his 'Voyages from Holland to America,' 1632-1644, DeVries mentions pigeons in three different instances. In one case he remarks,<sup>3</sup> "There are . . . pigeons which fly together in thousands, and our people sometimes shoot thirty, forty, and fifty of them at a shot." In another place he speaks of them as follows: "Pigeons, at the time of year when they migrate, are so numerous, that the light can hardly be discerned where they fly . . . I have also seen, at different times, thirty to thirty-four pigeons killed at one shot, but they are not larger than turtle-doves, and their bodies are exactly like those of the turtle-doves in Fatherland, except they have longer tails."

In 1644 Megalopensis practically reiterates the same observations.<sup>4</sup> "In the forests here there are also many . . . pigeons that fly in flocks of thousands, and sometimes 10, 20, 30, and even 40 and 50 are killed at one shot." In his second voyage into

<sup>1</sup> Wassenaers, *Historie Van Europa*. Amsterdam, 1621-1632. Documentary History of New York, Vol. III, Albany, 1850, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Laet, John de. *The New World, or A Description of the West Indies*. Leyden, 1625. N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. I, 1841, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> DeVries, D. P. N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., New Series, Vol. III, 1857, pp. 58, 90, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Megalopensis, Johannes Junior. *A Short Sketch of the Mohawk Indians in New Netherlands, 1644*. N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., N. S., Vol. IV, 1857, p. 150.



the upper country of the Iroquois (Onondaga mission) Radisson found<sup>1</sup> "The ringdoves in such a number that in a nett 15 or 1600 att once might be taken."

In 'The Representation of New Netherlands,' etc., Adrian van der Donck enumerates<sup>2</sup> "multitudes of pigeons resembling coal-pigeons, but a little smaller," and in 'A Description of the New Netherlands' (2nd edit., Amsterdam, 1656), he speaks of this species at some length.<sup>3</sup> "The pigeons, which resemble coal pigeons, are astonishingly plenty. Those are most numerous in the spring and fall of the year, when they are seen in such numbers in flocks, that they resemble the clouds in the heavens, and obstruct the rays of the sun. Many of these birds are shot in the spring and fall, on the wing, and from the dry trees whereon they prefer to alight, and will sit in great numbers to see around them, spring and fall, on the wing, and from the dry trees whereon they prefer to alight, and will sit in great numbers to see around them, from which they are easily shot. Many are also shot on the ground, and it is not uncommon to kill twenty-five or more at a time. The Indians, when they find the breeding places of the pigeons, (at which they assemble in numberless thousands,) frequently remove to those places with their wives and children, to the number of two or three hundred in a company, where they live a month or more on the young pigeons, which they take, after pushing them from their nests with poles and sticks."

In 1670 Daniel Denton in 'A Brief Description of New York,' etc., says:<sup>4</sup> "Wild Fowl there is great store of, as Turkies, . . . Pidgeons, and divers others," and in another note thinks of New York as a place "where besides the pleasure in Hunting, he may furnish his house with excellent fat Venison, . . . Pidgeons and the like." The following year Montanus remarks:<sup>5</sup> "The pigeons fly in such flocks that the Indians designedly remove to their breeding places where the young birds, pushed by hundreds from their nests, serve for food during a long month for the whole family."

---

<sup>1</sup> Radisson, Peter Esprit. *Voyages of, etc.*, 1652-1684. Prince Soc. Publications, Vol. XVI, 1885, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., N. S., Vol. II, 1849, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., N. S., Vol. I, 1841, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Bull. Hist. Soc. Penn., Vol. I, 1845-47, pp. 6, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Montanus. *Description of New Netherlands*. Amsterdam, 1671. Doc. Hist. New York (octavo ed.), Vol. IV, 1851, pp. 118, 123.



In 'New York in 1692, [a] Letter from Chas. Lodwick.... Dated May 20, 1692,' says <sup>1</sup> "wild pidgeons are here in abundance; they breed up ye country some hundreds of miles of from us Northward, and come flying in great quantity in ye Spring, and pass to ye Southward, and return to us about ye time our corn is ripe, and settle in ye Trees, and on ye corn Lands in great numbers." In 1699, we close the century with Viele's observation made at Onondaga. On April 30, he says, <sup>2</sup> "We sent for the Sachims of Cayouge....; Not far from Cayouge the Messenger met a Cayouge Indian who told him that all their Indians young and old, were in the woods to fetch young pidgeons."

In June, 1749, Peter Kalm when travelling above Albany, <sup>3</sup> "saw immense numbers of those wild pigeons flying in the woods, which sometimes come in incredible flocks to the southern *English* colonies, most of the inhabitants not knowing where they come from. They have their nests in the trees here; and almost all the night make a great noise and cooing in the trees, where they roost. The *Frenchmen* shot a great number of them, and gave us some, in which we found a great quantity of the seeds of the elm, which evidently demonstrated the care of Providence in supplying them with food; for in *May* the seeds of the red maple, which abounds here, are ripe, and drop from the trees, and are eaten by the pigeons during that time; afterwards, the seeds of the elm ripen, which then become their food, till the other seeds ripen for them. Their flesh is the most palatable of any bird's flesh I ever tasted.

"Almost every night we heard some trees crack and fall, whilst we lay here in the wood, though the air is so calm that not a leaf stirred. The reason of this breaking I am totally unacquainted with..... It may be, that the above-mentioned wild pigeons settle in such quantities on one tree as to weigh it down."

In a 'Journey to Oghquaga' (Broome Co.), Rev. Gideon Hawley, 1753, remarks: <sup>4</sup> "It may not be impertinent to observe, that in this wilderness, we neither hear nor see any birds of musick.....

<sup>1</sup> N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., N. S., Vol. II, 1849, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Arnout Cornelisse Viele's Negotiations at Onondaga. Documents Relating to the Colonial History of New York, Vol. IV, pp. 561, 563.

<sup>3</sup> Travels into North America, etc. Transl. by John R. Forster. Vol. II, 1771, pp. 311, 312.

<sup>4</sup> Doc. Hist. N. Y., Vol. III, 1850, p. 1042 (8vo edit.), or Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. IV, 1795, pp. 61, 62.



There is *one wood* bird, not often seen, but heard without any melody in his note, in every part of the wilderness, wherever I have been. In some parts of this extensive country the wild pigeons breed in numbers almost infinite. I once passed an extensive valley where they had nested; and for six or eight miles, where the trees were near and thick, every tree had a number of nests upon it; and some, not less than fifteen or twenty upon them: But as soon as their young are able, they take wing and are seen there no more." In 'A Journal of the New Hampshire Scout,'<sup>1</sup> Sir Wm. Johnson's trip from Lake George to Crown Point, states that September 18, 1755, "Their People (French and Indians), some few [who] were at work at the Intrenchments seemed unconcerned — hunting Pidgeons etc. all around in the Wood."

In 1777 (June 23), when at camp at River Bouquet near Lake Champlain, Anbury says:<sup>2</sup> "There are at this season of the year prodigious flights of pigeons crossing the lake, of a most beautiful plumage, and in astonishing quantities. These are most excellent eating, and that you may form some idea as to their number, at one of our encampments, the men for one day wholly subsisted on them; fatigued with their flight in crossing the lake, they alight upon the first branch they can reach to, many are so weary as to drop in the water, and are easily caught; those that alight upon a bough being unable to fly again, the soldiers knock down with long poles.

"During the flights of these pigeons, which cross this lake into Canada, and are continually flying about in large flocks, the Canadians find great amusement in shooting them, which they do after a very singular manner: in the daytime they go into the woods, and make ladders by the side of the tall pines, which the pigeons roost on, and when it is dark, they creep softly under and fire up this ladder, killing them in great abundance; they then strike a light, and firing a knot of the pitch pine, pick up those they have killed, and the wounded ones that are unable to fly. During the flights of these pigeons, which generally last three weeks or a month, the lower sort of Canadians mostly subsist on them."

---

<sup>1</sup> Doc. Hist. of New York, Vol. IV, 1851, p. 259. (8vo edit.)

<sup>2</sup> Anbury Thomas. *Travels through the Interior Parts of America, in a Series of Letters.* 2 vols., London, Vol. I, 1789, pp. 275, 276.



In 1788, George Henry Loskiel gives an interesting account of this species (equally applicable to Pennsylvania).<sup>1</sup> “The *Wild Pigeon* (*columba migratoria*) is of an ash grey color. The cock is distinguished by a red breast. In spring they take their passage to the north, and in autumn return to the south. In some years they flock together in such numbers, that the air is darkened by their flight. Wherever they alight, they make as much havock among the trees and garden-fruits as the locusts. The noise they make is so intolerable, that it is difficult for people near them to hear, or understand each other. In the year 1778 they appeared in such great numbers, that the ground under their resting-places was covered with their dung above a foot high, during one night. The Indians went out, killed them with sticks, and came home loaded. They delight in shooting these wild pigeons, and sometimes kill thirty at a shot. At night, a party of Indians frequently sally out with torches made of straw or wood, and when they get among the birds, light them. The pigeons being dazzled by the sudden glare, are easily knocked off the branches with sticks. Such a party once brought home above eighteen hundred of these birds, which they killed in one night in this manner. Their flesh has a good taste, and is eaten by the Indians either fresh, smoked, or dried. When the Iroquois perceive that the young pigeons are nearly fledged, they cut down the trees with the nests, and sometimes get two hundred young from one tree.” Of one of its foods he says: “*Virginian Poke* (*phytolacca decandra*) is. . . called by some pigeon-berry, the pigeons being extremely fond of them.”

In 1803, Rev. Clark Brown, in a topographical description of Catskill, says:<sup>2</sup> “These and the wild pigeons are the chief fowls, which are killed for use.” The next year (1804) Robert Munro, in his ‘Description of Genesee Country,’ states:<sup>3</sup> “Large numbers of pigeons frequent the country in spring and fall, of which a great many are caught in nets and shooting, and beds are sometimes made of their feathers.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Loskiel, George Henry. History of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Indians in North America. In three parts. Transl. by C. I. La Trobe. London, 1794, pp. 92, 93, 116 (orig. edit. 1788).

<sup>2</sup> Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. IX, 1804, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Doc. Hist. of New York, Vol. II, 1849, p. 1175. (Svo edit.)



On March 25, 1830, at Albany,<sup>1</sup> "Pigeons had begun their migration, and thousands of them were overwhelmed in the storm; and they were taken in great abundance in the valley of the Butter-milk creek."

(To be concluded.)

---

## GENERAL NOTES.

**A Case of the Migration and Return of the European Teal in Massachusetts.**—The following facts must be taken only for what they are worth, for unfortunately the data are incomplete. There is, however, no doubt in my mind that we are dealing with a case of the migration, and return to the place of birth, of a non-indigenous bird.

In the spring of 1909, Mr. Thomas Johnston came over from England to enter my employment, and brought with him five pairs of live European Teal (*Nettion crecca*), together with some other water-fowl. These birds were bred in England on the estate of Sir Richard Graham in Cumberland County, where many interesting experiments in propagating water-fowl are in progress.

The teal suffered many vicissitudes of fortune, from various causes, and were reduced in 1910 to two pairs. These two pairs were kept with other water-fowl in a small, enclosed, artificial pond, in the orchard at Wenham, situated about 75 yards from the farm-house, 40 yards from the road, and a third of a mile from Wenham Lake. No other varieties of teal were kept.

About the middle of June, 1910, two downy young were led out into the pond by one of the female teal. These thrived amazingly and obtained their wings so soon that the first attempt at their capture, which was put off for fear of disturbing other fowl, resulted in finding that the youngsters were too spry for the net. They turned out to be both females, and were not disturbed again. They traded between the pond and Wenham Lake all the summer and fall, spending the greater part of their time in the enclosed pond and feeding on a mud flat on the eastern shore of the lake. They were perfectly tame while in the pond, and were only flushed with difficulty, but outside its boundaries they were as wild as any teal.

On December 6, the pond, and also the lake, froze. The other fowl were placed in winter quarters the day before the freeze, and our teal vanished, as we thought for good.

---

<sup>1</sup> Munsell, Joel. The Annals of Albany. Albany, 1858, Vol. IX, p. 206.





Wright, Albert Hazen. 1911. "Other Early Records of the Passenger Pigeon." *The Auk* 28, 346–366. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4070951>.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/54988>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.2307/4070951>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/87467>

#### **Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

#### **Sponsored by**

Smithsonian

#### **Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.