(1902)

A-H [owe, R.H., Jr.]

Florida

1902

Various Florida birds.

Howe, R. H., Jr. -

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

LIBRARY

OF THE

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOÖLOGY

44,948

GIFT OF

Outram Bangs.

January 19, 1917.

JAN 19 1917

44.948.

MAY 21, 1902.

VOL. I, pp. 25-32.

CONTRIBUTIONS
TO
NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY.

BY
REGINALD HEBER HOWE, JUNIOR,*
LONGWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS.

NOTES ON VARIOUS FLORIDA BIRDS.

FROM February 24th to April 3rd, 1902, we spent in Florida, visiting Enterprise; Kissimmee, from where we travelled by water via Lake Okeechobee to Fort Myers and return; and Miami, from where we cruised through the Keys to Cape Sable returning the same way. During this time we studied carefully various species of birds, in the status of which we had become interested before leaving the north.

Melopelia leucoptera (Linn.). Prof. W. B. Hinton of Kissimmee told us that in November, 1896, a single live bird of this species was brought to him. It had been caught in a trap with some Mourning Doves. This is, we believe, the second record for Florida.

Aramus giganteus (Bonap.). The Limpkin is still common along the Kissimmee-Caloosahatchee rivers, although being fast extirpated. We take this opportunity of speaking of the shameful destruction of all species of birds by Florida tourists shooting from the steamers. From the upper deck of the river boats they shoot from dawn till eve at every living creature that is within reach of shot-gun or rifle, leaving their kill where it falls. Their work is parallel in its results to that of the plume-hunters, and fully, if not more, destructive. Moreover it can be more easily stopped, and on this route alone one man empowered by the game-commissioner could teach a lesson by meeting a steamer on her return trip, which would be sufficient to stop all further slaughter.

Grus mexicana (Müll.). Along the Kissimmee river we found the Sandhill Crane, occasionally, in pairs (March 5 and 13 above Lanier's Landing).

* In conjunction with Le Roy King of Newport.

Mr. Outram Bangs calls our attention to the fact that the Florida bird is different from western examples in the darker coloring of the back as well as proportions, but as it is impossible for us to obtain proper material from the west or from Cuba it would be unwise to separate the Florida bird. The lack of obtainable material from Cuba is a great inconvenience to any one working on the relationships of Florida and West Indian races.

Ardea herodias wardi Ridgw. The examination of a series of these birds shows unmistakable intergrades between *herodias* and *wardi*, and there is no alternative in our minds except to recognize *wardi* as a race of *Ardea herodias*.

Ardea occidentalis Aud. A few of these birds were seen along the Kissimmee and upper Caloosahatchee rivers, but not until we had got south of Lat. $25^{\circ} 5''$ on the east coast did we find them common. On the mud bars among the keys they were continually seen, though no specimens of *A. wurdemanii* were noticed, and we can throw no light on the status of this interesting bird. We found Great White Herons breeding on the westernmost of the Oyster Keys, where we noted three nests containing young. One nest was built some ten feet above the ground in a tangle of cacti (*Opuntia*) and underbrush. The other two were in the tops of a thicket of iron-wood trees (*Carpinus caroliniana*) about 15 feet up. The nests were slovenly affairs of sticks and measured scarcely two feet across, the first containing four half grown young, the second three recently hatched birds, the third two fully fledged specimens. The notes of both adults and young suggested those of the Great Blue Heron but were more guttural and raucous. The old birds were very wary, though to-day little disturbed in this part of Florida.

Ardea egretta. Gmel. We did not positively identify any birds of this species on our Kissimmee-Calooahatchee trip as we did not shoot any specimens; but we are tolerably certain that we saw a number of them at various points along the former river (Hatcheneha canal). On the Cape Sable trip we saw at White Water Lake on March 28 one bird. This Heron is now, without doubt, the rarest of its kind in Florida. We are told that they are still consistently shot by local plume-hunters, a small colony having been extirpated shortly before our arrival. The birds are shipped by express from Key West in boxes marked "Curiosities"; the hunters receiving fifteen dollars an ounce for the plumes. There is little wonder that the bird is rapidly becoming exterminated, and unless something is done almost at once, Florida will know the Egret no more. The plume-hunters are not, however, as bad men as painted. They shoot the bird because it is a source of income for them to do so, but they kill only this bird and the following species. The hunters are the most difficult end of the trouble to attack and the least to blame, and they stand by each other through thick and thin. If it were possible, those interested in protection should put their energies to work against the dealers rather than against the hunters.

Ardea rufescens Gmel. This is also a species which still suffers from plume-hunting, and during our entire trip we saw but two birds, both near Tavanier Bank, Bay of Florida, on March 23 and 24.

Ajaja ajaja (Linn.). A large flock of over 200 birds were observed about White Water Lake, Cape Sable, on March 28, where they were breeding, we were told, with *Guara alba*. They kept practically aloof from the various species of *Heronidæ* and *Ibididæ* which were very abundant, though once we saw one *A. ajaja* perched in some iron wood trees with a small flock of *G. alba*. On March 13 a single bird was flushed from the banks of the Kissimmee River above Lanier's Landing, but they are now only very rarely seen in that region. We are told by Mr. Torrey that one was seen at Miami (Cocoanut Grove) in January or February, 1902.

Phœnicopterus ruber Linn. On March 26 we observed a flock of from 500 to 1000 birds in a little bay to the east of Cape Sable. They were feeding in four platoons on a certain mudbank where we are told a bivalve of which they are particularly fond occurs. We quote from our journal in regard to our finding them. "As we rounded a point on the mudbank across the bight, a line of vermilion 300 yards long stretched along the white water, and against the intense green of the shore beyond, a sight never to be forgotten! A flock of nearly a thousand Flamingoes were feeding in four platoons of close rank resembling a regiment of British soldiers. A moment later the right platoon rose into the air like a flame of fire, wheeled, and again alighted. Even our two rough guides who had seen the sight many times, were transfixed with admiration . . . Slowly we approached the beautiful birds and watched them eagerly, as they fed with their heads between their feet, scooping up the mud. Now and then they would stand up to their full height of four and one half feet, and walk forward for a short distance like a regiment. Occasionally they would discuss us in goose-like notes. In fact, both their voice and flight suggest the latter bird.

It is useless to describe the unrivaled beauty of the birds, or the interest of the sight we beheld. Rising from the flats as one bird, they flew down the bight and alighted again at its entrance, and a moment later flew from view. This locality we have good reason to suppose is the only one where they occur nowadays in Florida and we are told that they are to be found here at all times of the year, though their breeding grounds have never to our knowledge been found in this state. It is not unlikely that somewhere among the many unexplored keys, on some interior mudflat, this colony breeds, for a number of years ago a French naturalist secured a young bird here whose wings and strength could not have carried it from the Bahamas. Then too, Florida specimens seem to differ slightly from Bahama specimens, though not sufficiently to need separation, yet enough to suggest their probably different breeding places."

Very few Flamingoes are now shot in Florida, and besides one specimen shot of late years by a native, several taken by a tourist and one straggler shot in Miami not over four years ago, we know of no others taken prior to our visit.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos Gmel. On March 27th we observed a single bird off Cape Sable, and found on the following day a flock of perhaps twenty birds feeding in White Water Lake. As soon as disturbed they joined the Brown Pelicans (*P. fuscus*) which were more common, although at first they had been feeding apart from them. Our guide was much surprised when we told him they did not breed in Florida, for he assured us they occurred the year round, and although he had never found them actually nesting, he had always supposed they bred at Cape Sable.

One specimen taken lacked the horn on the upper mandible, a characteristic of the breeding season.

Cathartes aura (Linn.) and *Catharista urubu* (Vieill.). The distribution of these two species in Florida cannot be stated the way we find it in many manuals. At least it was our experience that the Turkey Buzzard was no more confined to the interior than the Black Vulture. Locally both were common at and away from the coast. For example at Kissimmee Vultures were more common, while at Miami the opposite was true; and during our whole Cape Sable trip we did not see a single Vulture.

Aquila chrysaetos (Linn.). A fine male was seen in the taxidermist's shop of W. S. Dickinson of Miami, taken at De Funiak Spring's, Fla., in the third week of January, 1896, with strychnine by Hutchinson Camthaw. This bird is now in the E. A. and O. Bangs collection (No. 2194).

Haliaetus leucocephalus (Linn.) and *Haliaetus leucocephalus washingtoni* (Aud.). To any one familiar with the Bald Eagle of the northern States, it is at once apparent that the Florida bird is not only different in size (Bangs, Auk, 1898, pp. 174-176), but also in habits. Observed breeding in numbers in cypress trees on the west shore of Lake Okeechobee, their dashing manner, and habits of feeding were to be contrasted with the northern eagle.

Elanus leucurus (Vieill.). We saw in a taxidermist's shop at Fort Myers a pair of these birds which had been shot by W. R. Kaune at the latter place in February, 1902. The male was bought, and now is in the Howe-Shattuck collection (No. 2129).

*Cerchneis** *sparverius paulus*† subsp. novo.

Type, from Miami, Fla. No. 2053, adult male. Howe-Shattuck collection. Collected March 20, 1902, by Reginald Heber Howe, Junior.

Geographical range: Florida, at least from Enterprise southward.

Subspecific characters: The *smallest* of the American Sparrow Hawk group. Rufous of upper parts very dark, particularly on the rectrices. *Tail* and wings short. Bill large and heavy.

*Genus *Cerchneis* Boie. Used we believe correctly by Sharpe for the Kestrels and Sparrow Hawks.

† Little.

*Measurements in millimeters.**Average.**C. s. paulus:*

Male:	Lgth.	237	Wg.	173	Tl.	105	Tar.	33	Bill nos.	12.*
Female:	"	258	"	177	"	102	"	33	"	" 12.

C. s. sparverius:

Male:		255	Wg.	187	Tl.	120	Tar.	36	Bill nos.	11.
Female:		271	"	189	"	121	"	37	"	" 12.

C. s. isabellinus:

Male:	—		Wg.	172	Tl.	112	Tar.	34	Bill nos.	12.
Female:	—		"	186	"	122	"	36	"	" 12.

Remarks. The resident Sparrow Hawk of Florida has been referred to several races, but is undoubtedly different from any already described. In fact it is one of the most distinctly separable races of this most interesting group on account of its *very* short tail. It differs from northeastern examples in that its colors are darker, and in its materially smaller size. From *C. s. isabellinus* (Swains.) of northern South America to which it has been referred, it differs in that its upper colors are darker and that its *throat* is immaculate, while in size it is even smaller, its tail being over ten millimeters shorter. Dr. E. A. Mearns pointed out in his excellent review of the American Sparrow Hawks (Auk, 1892, pp. 252-270) the small size of the Florida bird, but did not give it a name as he did not consider it advisable. We have examined a large series of *breeding* birds from Florida which show *darker* not "paler" colors which he attributed to the Florida bird, and whose short-tail and *materially* smaller size makes unlabelled specimens separable. Dr. Mearns included Louisiana birds with the Florida, which probably accounts for his decision in not naming the Florida bird, for although the Louisiana specimens suggest the Florida examples they *are separable*, and averaged with Florida specimens help to conceal the real characters of the southern Florida bird. Mississippi valley specimens of many species approach described Florida races, and in our opinion have been included in some cases under a name which should cover only peninsular examples, *i. e. Sturnella magna angutula* Bangs. It is of course a matter of personal opinion the amount of constant variation which should determine a race, but in our judgment when a bird's habits and superficial appearance are as different as are those of Sparrow Hawks of Southern Florida as compared with those of the northeastern bird, and when *unlabelled* specimens can be invariably separated, the element of personal judgment is almost eliminated.

**Extremes:* ♂ Wg. 170-176, Tl. 99-112, Tar. 31-34, Bill nos. 11-13; ♀ Wg. 175-181, Tl. 99-111, Tar. 33-34, Bill nos. 11-13.

As Linnæus based his name on Catesby, the Florida bird is without a name for which we propose *Cerckneis sparverius paulus*.

Campephilus principalis (Linn.). We are told by Prof. W. B. Hinton of Kissimmee that this species is still to be found not far from that town. It is a pleasure to be able to still record the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's presence in Florida.

Sayornis phæbe (Lath.). That the southern Florida resident *Phæbe* is different from our northern *Sayornis phæbe* is apparent to the most casual observer. It is a darker bird with a very much larger bill. A difficulty at once arises in its study, however, on account of the impossibility of securing Cuban specimens for comparison, and as Gundlach's* description of *Sayornis lembeyi* fits the Florida bird in most particulars it is impossible to at this time definitely settle the matter.

Myiarchus crinitus (Linn.). When Mr. Outram Bangs described the northern race *boreus* he named the northern bird because he drew his line of separation north of South Carolina; Catesby's type of *crinitus* coming from Carolina. We, however, consider that the line should have been drawn through northern Florida, which makes *boreus* become a synonym of *crinitus* and leaves the *resident* bird of southern Florida without a name. Of course the difficulty arises in that Catesby's type was based on an intermediate. It is a well known fact that the fauna of Florida south of a line drawn from Punta Gorda to Cape Canaveral is in many instances different from that of northern Florida and Georgia. South of this line many species represented by individuals, that are migrant as well as summer residents farther north, are residents, and the Crested Flycatcher is one of these. The main and a very sufficient character of separation given by Mr. Bangs, "the swollen bill" of the southern, as contrasted with the small and slender bill of the northern bird, is very marked even in a comparison between northern and southern Florida examples. For the southern bird we propose the name *Myiarchus crinitus residuus*.† (*Type*, from Istopoga Lake, Fla. No. 1233, adult male, Howe-Shattuck collection. Collected by William Henry Phelps).

Vireo noveboracensis (Gmel.), and **Vireo noveboracensis maynardi** Brewst. We were interested in noting in common with Mr. Torrey (Boston Transcript, "A Yankee in Florida," V. Feb. 26, 1902, p. 13) an apparent difference in the song and habits of the Florida White-eyed Vireos as compared with northern birds, but a study of peninsular specimens proves the birds practically identical with northern examples. True *maynardi* seems confined to the Florida *Keys*. Key West though increasingly inhabited still offering as do the many other *Keys*, this race a home.

Sialia sialis grata Bangs. We were much interested in studying the various peninsular races of Florida to determine whether these races were separable on any other grounds than slight color or other differences,

* Journ. Bost. Soc. Nat. Hist. VI (1852), p. 314.

†, Remains or resident.

and were able in a number of cases already cited to note both differences of habits and of song. For example: *Sturnella magna angutula*.

The Bluebird of southern Florida is undoubtedly distinct subspecifically from true *sialia* as described by Mr. Bangs, though we could detect no differences, in notes. A specimen taken at Fort Myers is typical of *grata* and we are convinced not only that this race is resident, but from the examination of winter material that it is the only one of the genus inhabiting southern Florida.

Sturnella magna angutula Bangs. As marked as in the case of the Bald Eagle is the difference between the resident Meadow-lark of Florida and the northern Atlantic coast bird. The former, generally found in the pine woods, is much inferior in its vocal powers, besides appearing in life appreciably smaller and of different coloring.

Ammodramus maritimus peninsulæ Allen. During the past winter the senior author investigated with great care the relationships of the members of this group and, coming to somewhat different conclusions in regard to its various races, begs leave to present them.

When studying this interesting group "one is at once confronted" as Mr. Chapman writes (*Auk*, Vol. XVI, Jan. 1899, pp. 1-12 pl. I,) "with the difficulty which has beset all students of these birds, that is the unusually worn plumage of breeding birds." But one must *not* attempt to compare birds taken on equal dates on northern and southern breeding grounds, considering that the southern bird has had greater chance for its plumage to wear than the northern, from its longer stay on its native salt marsh. Or in their study overlook the fact of *sexual* differences of both color and structure which has been found to throw much light on many cases before not understood, and a consideration ornithologists seem often to wholly ignore.

I have examined a large series of specimens, representing all the races, and have reached the following conclusions only after the most careful study. The group in the first place is one evidently apt to show local variations. This is proved by the species *nigrescens*, but along the marshes of the upper Atlantic coast no extraordinary local conditions occur; and the birds from Massachusetts to Florida I believe must all be called *maritimus*. A series of specimens from Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, and from New Haven, Conn. showing no constant differences of either size or color, if comparison is made between *like* sexes and the plumages. It is impossible to give for any species but one measurement as a criterion for identification as Mr. Chapman does, because certain variations always occur, especially in birds so subject to worn plumage. For example a breeding male's wing from Rhode Island measures 59., while a male's from New Haven, Conn., measures 67. In stating the measurements of birds, the extremes should in our opinion always be given, as average measurements are alone worthless. Audubon when he described

macgillivraii evidently had highly plumaged specimens, showing but little wear,* and it is not difficult to see how he was thus misled. That *macgillivraii* must be held as a synonym of *maritimus* seems positive.

Ammodramus maritimus maritimus (Wils.). The palest representative of the group excepting perhaps *sennetti*. Females most highly colored. Measurements: Male, wing 56.10-69.00 Female, wing "55.88"-62.05.

Ammodramus nigrescens Ridgw. hardly needs any consideration here as both its habitat and characters are so distinct and unmistakable.

We then next must consider the birds inhabiting the west coast of Florida known as *A. m. peninsulæ*, which there is little doubt are distinct subspecifically—if we limit the habitat of the race to the *west* coast of Florida alone. For birds from Georgia and the east coast of Florida are referable to *maritimus*, though referred to *peninsulæ*, the geographical conditions being an index to the facts.

Ammodramus maritimus peninsulæ Allen. The darkest race. Sexes alike in coloring. Measurements: Male, wing "54.36"-62.41. Female, wing "53.59-61.47."

It has been my misfortune to examine but a few specimens of Mr. Chapman's race *fisheri*, but that it is the most easily recognized race there is but little doubt in my mind, and Louisiana with its peculiar fauna seems explanatory of its existence.

Ammodramus maritimus fisheri Chapman. The most strongly colored race. Measurements: Male, wing "56.13-60.96." Female, wing "55.88-58.42."

Lastly the Texas birds, known as *sennetti*, of which I have examined a fine series, seem to show slight constant differences from true *maritimus*, worthy perhaps of subspecific separation.

Ammodramus maritimus sennetti Allen. A pale race, characterized by the ashy coloration of the belly plumage. Sexes alike in coloring. Measurements: Male, wing "58.42-68.47." Females, wing "54.61-58.42."

A difficulty, not sufficiently pointed out and exceedingly troublesome in connection with this group, is the widely different breeding seasons of the races on account of their wide distribution through various climatic belts.

Spizella socialis (Wils.). Just how far south in Florida this species remains as a summer resident we are not aware, but specimens from the southernmost point of its range show the characteristics of Florida birds, dark colors and large bill, though these characters are in this species inconstant.

* See plate in Birds of America.

Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN. 21, 1908