

**MEMOIRS OF THE NUTTALL  
ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB NO. V:  
SUPPLEMENT TO THE BIRDS OF  
ESSEX COUNTY  
MASSACHUSETTS**

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Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club No. V: Supplement to the birds of Essex county  
Massachusetts by Charles Wendell Townsend

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**CHARLES WENDELL TOWNSEND**

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No. V

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SUPPLEMENT  
TO  
THE BIRDS OF ESSEX COUNTY  
MASSACHUSETTS

By CHARLES WENDELL TOWNSEND, M.D.

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WITH ONE PLATE AND MAP

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.  
PUBLISHED BY THE CLUB  
AUGUST 1926,



## INTRODUCTION

FIFTEEN years have passed since Memoir III of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, "The Birds of Essex County, Massachusetts," was published. In these fifteen years many changes have taken place in the bird-life of the County, many more observers have studied it, and many notes have been accumulated. It is the purpose of this Supplement to bring our knowledge of the birds of the County up to date, and in order that it may be complete in itself all the species are listed whether or not there are any changes or additions in the annotations.

Changes are made in the nomenclature wherever necessary to conform to the latest American Ornithologists' Union Check-list.<sup>1</sup> As several species new to the list have been added, the serial numbers are changed. The additions are denoted by an asterisk (\*).

In the original Memoir I gave in detail the habits and field-marks of most of the water-birds and of several other birds of especial interest for the County. In this Supplement I have added to the notes on these birds, wherever possible, have increased this list by the addition of the hawks and some others, and in many cases have laid special stress on courtship habits, the study of which in the last fifteen years has especially interested me.

When the original Memoir was published, there were none living in Essex County sufficiently interested in birds to become members of the American Ornithologists' Union. At the present time there are twelve members listed from the County. In addition there is a very active club,—the Essex County Ornithological Club,—with a membership of about fifty having its headquarters and monthly meetings at the Peabody Museum in Salem. The Club was founded in 1916, but for some eight years prior many of the present members were in the habit of making an annual trip by canoe on the Ipswich River at the height of the warbler migration in May. In preparing this Memoir I have consulted the records of the Club, of which I have the honor to be a charter member. The first number of the annual Bulletin of the Club appeared in December, 1919.

The number of contributors of notes and records to this Supplement has increased to a great extent. Their names will be found in the Annotated List in connection with their contributions. To all of them I wish to express my grateful thanks.

Some of the contributors to the original Memoir who have died are: William

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<sup>1</sup> The Check-list of 1910 has changed the names of 26 genera and of 16 species of the original list.

Brewster, A. B. Clark, Julian M. Dodge, G. M. Magee, Henry A. Purdie, J. H. Sears, Bradford Torrey, M. A. Walton, George O. Welch. All of these I knew personally. To my friend William Brewster I had turned for many years for judicious advice and unflinching help. To many of us personally, and to all ornithologists in general, his death is a very great loss. Julian M. Dodge I have missed greatly. He always placed at my disposal his camp in the Topsfield Marshes, a region where with him I have made many interesting observations. Mr. Purdie and Mr. Torrey, each in his own way, were of help to me in writing the original Memoir. They are widely missed. Mr. Welch was the last of the band of older taxidermists who contributed so much to our knowledge of the bird-life of Essex County. I am glad to be able to add that Mr. Charles J. Maynard, always to be remembered as the discoverer of the Ipswich Sparrow, is still active and still visits the Ipswich dunes.

A new source of information on the birds of the County was unearthed by Dr. Glover M. Allen<sup>1</sup> who published an account of a hitherto unknown ornithologist, Benjamin F. Damsell of Amesbury, with notes gleaned from his records and collections. Mr. Damsell, a carriage builder by trade, was born in Amesbury, 1854, and died there in 1911. He never published anything but left note-books covering a period of thirty years from 1880 to 1911. Dr. Allen says: "The bird records seem to be made with much caution and as they are frequently substantiated by the actual specimens, may in most cases be deemed wholly trustworthy. Part of the collection was destroyed but the remainder is in good condition and consists of several hundred mounted specimens, some of the more interesting of which have been acquired by the Boston Society of Natural History for its New England collection."

As for my own work, I can state that, although most of my life is necessarily spent in Boston, I have continued my observations on the avifauna of Essex County as much as possible. I have spent a month of every summer at my house not far from the dunes at Ipswich, with the exception of the years when my vacations have been in Labrador or elsewhere. Since 1915, I have gone back and forth daily from Boston during the remainder of the summer. In winter my week-end trips to Ipswich from Saturday night to Sunday night have become increasingly more frequent, and I have visited from time to time other parts of the County.

As in the case of the original Memoir I am greatly indebted to my friend, Dr. Glover M. Allen, for his assistance in reviewing the manuscript and proof.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, Glover M. "An Essex County Ornithologist." *Auk*, vol. 30, p. 19-29, 1913.



## CHAPTER I

## CHANGES IN THE BIRD-LIFE OF ESSEX COUNTY SINCE 1905

FIFTEEN years are, of course, but a mere moment of time in the life of a species, yet, as birds are to a large extent dependent on the works and acts of mankind, many changes may take place even in that limited period.

When the original Memoir was published an increase in the gulls and terns,—then for a few years protected,—had already been noticed. The first practical work of protecting breeding bird-colonies on the Atlantic coast was begun in 1900. The wings, heads, and bodies, not only of terns but even of passerine birds, formerly so common on women's hats, are no longer seen and the influence of the National Association of Audubon Societies, incorporated in 1905, is still spreading.

Another change wrought by man, which has increased the number of these and other birds, is the establishment of reservations where shooting is forbidden. Most of these in Essex County were already in existence at the time of the publication of the original Memoir, but their influence has increased as the enforcement of laws has become more strict, and the birds have learned the value of these refuges. The peninsulas of Nahant and Marblehead Neck, the Lynn, Swampscott, and Manchester Beaches are instances. Coffin's Beach and the Ipswich dunes have been protected by private owners, and more and more large estates throughout the County are posted against shooting. At Topsfield there is a considerable reservation of private ownership.

The changes in the laws as regards shooting of birds have been very great during the last fifteen years and are destined to have a very beneficial effect in conserving them. Prior to 1906, it was lawful to shoot ducks up to May 20. Prior to 1909, the open season for Black Ducks extended from September 1 to March 1 and for other ducks until May 1, except in the case of Wood Ducks, which were then first protected at all times. In 1909, spring shooting of ducks was stopped and the close season began on January 1. In 1912, a law was passed stopping the sale of all game.

But the most important law is the Federal law protecting migratory birds throughout the United States, passed by Congress in 1913. By a treaty with Great Britain, in 1916, the jurisdiction of this law was extended to Canada, and,

in 1918, the Enabling Act for enforcing the law was passed by Congress. Insectivorous and song birds, Wood Ducks, Swans, Wild Pigeons, Mourning Doves, Herons, Bitterns, Cranes, Eagles, Fish Hawks, Marsh Hawks, small owls, gulls, and terns and all shore-birds,—with the exception of the Black-bellied and Golden Plovers, Snipe, and Greater and Lesser Yellow-legs,—are protected at all times and their feathers are not to be used for millinery purposes. Spring shooting of water-fowl throughout the country has been forbidden. In Massachusetts, the open season for water-fowl extends from September 15 to December 31. The opening of the season for shooting shore-birds, now restricted to the two species of yellow-legs and of plover mentioned above, is August 16 instead of July 15 as previously. All birds are protected on Sundays and from sunset to a half hour before sunrise. In 1918, approximately 65,000 hunting licenses were issued in Massachusetts.

Another cause for change in the bird-life of the County may be ascribed to certain insect pests. Brown-tail and gypsy moths, accidentally introduced from Europe, had begun their pernicious work long prior to 1905, but after that date they increased so in numbers and spread so universally throughout the County that many orchards and woodlands were devastated, and dead and dying trees were common. Apple trees and oaks were particularly affected. Not only directly in this manner did these pests influence the environment of the birds of the County, but indirectly the influence was still greater owing to the measures used for the control of the pests. Underbrush was cleaned up by cutting and burning, holes in trees were closed, egg-clusters were creosoted, arsenical spraying was conducted on a very extensive scale, and bands of workmen went through the country like a devouring flame.

The remedy, as far as the birds were concerned and to a considerable extent as regards the vegetation, was worse than the disease. Although spraying is often necessary to save individual trees, the great aid that can be rendered by birds is thereby to a large extent removed. The filling-up of holes in trees has a bad effect on the nesting of Flickers, Tree Swallows, Chickadees, and Bluebirds, while the cutting-down and burning of bushes and underbrush interferes with the nesting of warblers, thrashers, vireos, and many other birds. In Swamp-scott, for example, White-eyed Vireos and Chats were practically eliminated. That a large number of birds are killed by the arsenical fluid used in spraying, there can be little doubt. Birds have been seen to drink of the poisonous drops that remain on leaves, in the same way that they drink the dew. Mr. M. Abbott Frazar, the well-known Boston taxidermist, tells me that orioles and other birds, showing no signs of injury and presumably poisoned, are brought to him for mounting in considerable numbers during the spraying season.

That birds, when given a chance, are of great value in fighting these pests was well shown in an acre of mixed woodland on my own place. This I have made attractive for birds and have never sprayed, but have removed only the brown-tail nests. Several years ago gypsy moths started to devastate it and their egg-clusters were abundant in the fall. A pair of Chickadees had nested in one of my boxes there, and five or six of these birds were busily at work in this limited area all winter, with the result that the gypsy-moth eggs disappeared. Fortunately the insect and vegetable parasites have in the last five years made such inroads on these two insect pests that their influence for evil on a large scale is practically over in Essex County.

Another factor influencing the numbers of birds in Essex County is the arrival of the Starling and its considerable increase during the last ten years. All hole-breeding birds are in danger of being driven out by this alien. The English Sparrow, on the other hand, has probably diminished in numbers to some extent. Our native birds are adjusting themselves to its presence. The diminution is more marked in towns and villages, however, than in the country.

Another alien, in this case a human one, the Italian workman, has also increased in numbers in the County and has undoubtedly had a bad effect on the avifauna. Although these aliens are not allowed the possession of a gun unless they are real-estate owners to the extent of \$500, and take out an alien-hunter's license for \$15, they have secretly done much shooting of birds as well as trapping and liming. All is game that comes to their net from Chickadee to Pheasant.

The extensive and increasing use of automobiles has undoubtedly contributed to the reduction in numbers of Pheasants and Ruffed Grouse. By means of the automobile, residents of cities are enabled to visit a number of widely separated shooting-areas in the same day and shoot these birds. Many of these 'game hogs' exceed the limit allowed by law, but by distributing the bag among the passengers of the automobile the penalty, in the rare chance that they are inspected by a warden, is escaped. The electric street-railroads have also contributed in the distribution of gunners.

The rapid extension of cities and towns beyond their former limits, and the substitution of clean lawns and shade trees for natural tangles and swamps, has also had its effect on the bird population.

A change has been made in the character of some of the lamps in the light-houses during the last five years, which has apparently rendered them less destructive to birds. This is the case at Thatcher's Island where formerly, as shown in the original Memoir, a large, although decreasing, number of birds was killed. Instead of ordinary kerosene lamps with their yellow lights there is now used a spray of kerosene oil and air, which brings a Wellsbach mantle to a white heat