

1878

## Report of Ornithology for 1877

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REPORT ON ORNITHOLOGY FOR 1877.

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In some respects the season has been rather unfavorable to the observation of the birds; more especially as regards their migrations. The year previous was exceptionally characterized by a great tidal wave of bird-life that reached us here in its vernal flow about the 10th to the 15th of May. It was emphatically an ethereal wave of song as it was constituted of the typical warblers. Although less so, yet to a considerable extent, a similar characteristic was manifest through the entire migration of the other groups, determining the measure of collections only by the possibility of taking adequate care of the material obtained. Widely different from this, the birds of the past year have arrived in such inconsiderable number, at or about any one period, that it has required the utmost vigilance to note their presence, and then only as stragglers, stealing their way to their secluded places for resting and rearing their young. It is presumable that the diversity between the two seasons has been principally determined by the contrast in their meteorological characteristics, as affecting the conditions of transit, supply of food, &c. It is to be acknowledged that with all that has been learned of the birds, very little is settled as to the causes and modifications of their migrations. More has been written, perhaps, during the year, upon this matter, than upon any previous one in the history of ornithology.

Of course, the additions to our list of newly recognized species have been very meagre, consisting of Leconte's Sparrow—*Coturnicuius lecontei* (Bor.), collected by Mr. Williams near the city, I think, and the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, *Tryngites rufescens*, (Cob.), collected by the Messrs. Roberts at Sand Lake, near the northern limits of the East Division.

The former, originally discovered and named by Audubon *Emberiza leconti* has long been held doubtful as a distinct species, having been supposed to be either *passcrinus* or *henslowii*.

Numerous collections, made in northern Dakota by Dr. Coues, when associated with the Northern Boundary Survey in 1873, and by others at other localities, have determined its habitation to be the central plains from northern Dakota to Texas. Its presence here shows our formal relationship to the province that lies to the west of us, and together with other species previously obtained, puts us on the alert for exceptional forms hitherto restricted to areas beyond our borders.

The Sandpiper obtained by the Messrs. Roberts has been sought for through many long years without success. Its known breeding places far to the north of us and the scarcity of its numbers in migration along the Atlantic coast led to the anticipation that it would long since have been observed in migration through the state.

We are at last rewarded through the vigilance of these gentlemen who have contributed so much to our already large list, embracing about as many as have been identified in New England, after a century's observation by a legion of experts.

Although offering so little in this Annual Report that is new, the year has not been an idle one in obtaining an extension of our knowledge of the habits and characteristics of species that breed in our district. In this, perhaps, no year preceding has given us nearly so rich results, the proof of which will become evident in the future reports involving life-histories of local species.