

THE LABRADOR DUCK — ANOTHER SPECIMEN,
WITH ADDITIONAL DATA RESPECTING
EXTANT SPECIMENS.¹

BY WILLIAM DUTCHER.

MR. ERNEST D. WINTLE, of Montreal, Canada, a member of the Union, reports a heretofore unrecorded specimen of the Labrador Duck in the Museum of the Natural History Society of Montreal. It is a male in immature plumage, and was evidently mounted from a dried skin; it bears no date or record as to whence it was obtained. He has searched through the Journals of the Society from the beginning to date and cannot find any mention of the specimen therein, and no person connected with the Society seems to know anything about it.

This is the third specimen discovered since the publication of my 'Revised List,'² and makes the known specimens in America twenty-nine, and the total number extant forty-one.

A less pleasant duty than the recording of a newly discovered specimen of this extinct species now devolves upon me. I would gladly escape the responsibility, but justice to the ornithologists whom I quoted in my former paper, and also to myself, compels the following remarks. Prof. Alfred Newton, in his 'Dictionary of Birds,' pp. 221-223, makes the following statement under the subject 'Extermination.'

"Far less commonly known, but apparently quite as certain, is the doom of a large Duck which until 1842 or thereabouts was commonly found in summer about the mouth of the St. Lawrence and the coast of Labrador, migrating in winter to the shores of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, New England, and perhaps further southward. There is no proof, according to the best-informed American ornithologists, of a single example being met with for many years past in any of the markets of the United States, where formerly it was not at all uncommon at the proper

¹Read at the Eleventh Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union, held at Cambridge, Mass., Nov. 20-23, 1893.

²The Auk, Vol. VIII, pp. 201-216, April, 1891.

season, and the last known to the present writer to have lived was killed by Col. Wedderburn in Halifax harbour in the autumn of 1852.¹ This bird, the *Anas labradoria* of the older ornithologists, was nearly allied to the Eider Duck, and like that species used to breed on rocky islets, where it was safe from the depredations of foxes and other carnivorous quadrupeds. This safety was, however, unavailing when man began yearly to visit its breeding-haunts, and, not content in plundering its nests, mercilessly to shoot the birds. Most of such islets are, of course, easily ransacked and depopulated. Having no asylum to turn to, for the shores of the mainland were infested by the four-footed enemies just mentioned, and (unlike some of its congeners) it had not a high northern range, its fate is easily understood."

My remarks may be divided into two heads: first, proof as to the date when the last living specimen was shot, and, second, the cause of the extinction of the species.

Date of capture of the last living specimen. — Professor Newton claims that "the last known to him to have lived was killed in Halifax harbour in the autumn of 1852," and in his foot note he refers to three specimens recorded in my 'Revised List' as "supposed to have been obtained between 1857 and 1861; but the information of the former owner of two of them points to an earlier time, and that respecting the third is somewhat vague. Still more uncertain are the rumours . . . of examples said to have been obtained in 1871 and 1878, but since lost. If they could be recovered a mistake would probably be found to have been made."

¹"It is needless to observe that no one at that time had any notion of its approaching extinction. The skin of this example is in Canon Tristram's collection, its sternum, which was figured by Rowley (Orn. Miscell. pp. 205-223), is in the Cambridge Museum. Mr. Dutcher (Auk, 1891, pp. 208, 211), reports three specimens supposed to have been obtained between 1857 and 1861; but the information of the former owner of two of them points to an earlier time, and that respecting the third is somewhat vague. Still more uncertain are the rumours, though properly printed by him (pp. 214, 215), of examples said to have been obtained in 1871 and 1878, but since lost. If they could be recovered, a mistake would probably be found to have been made. Modern American authors profess their inability to explain the extirpation of this species. I have little doubt that the cause mentioned in the text and published by me in 1875 is the true one. The shooting down of nesting-birds, witnessed by Audubon when he was among the islands of the Labrador coast, and year by year carried on with increasing intensity, could produce no other result."

The specimens referred to above are as follows: The Cory specimens, formerly the Boardman specimens, 1857 to 1860; the Brewster specimen, 1857; the Herrick specimen, 1871; and the Gregg specimen, 1878. This last specimen I make no claim for now, nor did I in my list. My statement there was "*specimens recorded, since lost.*" If the Gregg specimen had not been before recorded in a scientific journal of acknowledged good standing¹ I should not have included it in my list on the evidence furnished.

Regarding the Herrick specimen, however, no such doubt can possibly exist and the record can but stand, although the specimen was unfortunately lost. My previous quotations from Mr. Cheney, who shot the duck on the Island of Grand Manan, from Mr. Herrick, who received the skin from Mr. Cheney, and from Mr. Boardman, into whose possession it finally passed, were necessarily brief. Since then, however, I have had further correspondence and interviews about this specimen, the chief points of which I submit herewith. Mr. Cheney could furnish no further information regarding the specimen, but very kindly presented me with an autograph letter written to him by the late Prof. Spencer F. Baird, from which I quote as follows: "Wood's Holl, Mass., June 22, 1871. My Dear Mr. Cheney: Mr. Boardman has just informed me that you have sent him a female of the Pied Duck, which he would forward to us if we wanted it. As we do not possess a specimen in the Smithsonian Museum, I very promptly informed him that the specimen would be very acceptable."

Mr. Herrick verifies the date (1871) by the following statement: "In May, 1871, I was collecting about Grand Manan Island and stopped at the house of Simeon F. Cheney, a fisherman and gunner with an excellent knowledge of local birds. I obtained from him some skins, among them this duck which he had shot a few weeks before. It was the only one he had ever seen. Although I had at the time a very fair knowledge of our ducks, it was new to me. In returning home I left my traps at Eastport, Maine, and went to Calais, to visit Mr. Geo. A. Boardman. He was much interested in this duck and so anxious to obtain it that

¹ American Naturalist, Vol. XIII, p. 128, February, 1879.

on my return to Eastport I sent it to him. He at once wrote to me that it was a female Labrador Duck and that he had sent it to John Wallace, of New York, to be mounted for the Smithsonian."

The above facts seem to me to be conclusive as to the date; now as to the identification. No ornithologist who is acquainted with Mr. Boardman can doubt for a moment his ability to identify any specimen of the American Anatidæ, especially so exceptional a species as *Camptolaimus labradorius*, and further, at the time, he had in his collection a specimen of the female Labrador Duck with which to compare it. Under such circumstances the veriest tyro could make a positive identification. That so careful a naturalist as Professor Baird had no doubt on the subject his letter quoted above would seem to indicate, and our ex-President, Mr. Elliot, tells me that he considers Mr. Boardman as able to identify a Labrador Duck as any one of us, and that he would accept what he said of the 1871 specimen without question. To still further fortify the good standing of this specimen I quote from Mr. Boardman, who says, "I am positive about it; I had my own pair and would have known the bird as soon as I would a Crow."

Regarding the Brewster specimen (1857): While I have no further evidence to offer as to the date, yet it seems unreasonable to doubt the correctness of the label, which was probably written at a time when there would be no object to be gained by falsifying it. One of its previous owners, William P. Turnbull, LL. D.,¹ evidently knew that it was rare, even in 1857, for in his 'Birds of East Pennsylvania and New Jersey,' published in 1869, he so states.

Regarding the Cory-Boardman specimen: No additional light can at present be thrown on the male bird, but I have fortunately been able to trace out the history of the female specimen by the aid of Mr. Boardman and Mr. N. Vickary, of Lynn, Mass. Shortly after the 'Revised List' appeared Mr. Vickary wrote to Mr. Boardman asking whether he, Mr. Boardman, had not purchased from him, in the early sixties, a specimen of the female Labrador Duck, and related the circumstances. Subsequently I obtained from Mr. Vickary the following information which fixes beyond doubt the date of the capture. "In 1862, I

¹ In my 'Revised List' the name is incorrectly printed "Trumbull" instead of "Turnbull."

took a trip to Labrador and on my return, one of the party, Mr. Arthur Thomas, of Boston, was boarding at Swampscott and while there shot this female duck in September. We returned the first of that month, so it must have been about the first week in September, 1862. When he brought the bird in I did not think enough of it to stuff it, so it lay several days on my floor; however, I did stuff it, and Mr. Boardman called to see me and bought it. I never had another specimen except the one referred to." Mr. Vickary has within a few hours seen the specimen in question in the collection of Mr. Chas. B. Cory and positively states it to be the bird shot at Swampscott in September, 1862, and sold by him to Mr. Boardman.

Professor Newton in quoting from my 'Revised List' either overlooked certain other specimens of a later date than 1852, or else selected those that he considered the most doubtful. Those omitted are as follows¹: The Lawrence specimen in the American Museum of Natural History, 1865 (p. 205); the Elliot specimen in the same institution (p. 205); the Bell specimen in the Smithsonian Institution, 1875 (p. 210); and the Pike record, 1858 (p. 216).

Mr. Lawrence says of the specimen formerly owned by him: "You can rely upon what I say about it. The date is correct."

Mr. Elliot says of the specimens formerly in his collection, now owned by the American Museum: "If Professor Newton says that the last Labrador Duck ever taken was killed in 1852, he is certainly mistaken. I had several in the flesh at various times during the ten years between 1852 and 1862, mostly females and immature males, and J. G. Bell had others, all obtained in the old Washington Market. The female and young male in the Museum were obtained in the flesh and prepared by Bell. I saw them before they were skinned. Also the full plumaged male in the Museum was procured from John Akhurst of Brooklyn; it was shot on Long Island, received by him in the flesh, and *I saw it*. He made a skin of it for me. I never procured any Labrador Ducks as early as 1852, all having been received several years after that date — I should say between 1855 and 1863."

¹ In this connection see 'Ornithological Miscellany' by Geo. Dawson Rowley, M. A., etc., Part VI, Jan., 1877, pp. 212, 219, 220, in which he quotes certain American ornithologists, and gives dates later than 1852.

Mr. Bell's specimen in the Smithsonian was purchased for that institution by Mr. Lawrence. He says of it: "I remember perfectly the Labrador Duck, male juv., bought from J. G. Bell for the Smithsonian in the fall of 1879; I think Bell's note on the label, 'Fall of 1875,' must be accepted as the time of its capture. This case is unimpeachable and changes Professor Newton's date materially."

The Pike record¹ is as follows: "In 1858 one solitary male came to my battery in Great South Bay, Long Island, near Quogue, and settled among my stools." Col. Pike is a sportsman with a scientific knowledge of birds and was the donor of the specimen of the Labrador Duck now in the Museum of the Long Island Historical Society,² and also of the major portion of their whole collection. It will be noted that Col. Pike states that the bird lit among his stools, and he therefore had an opportunity for positive identification. As he was fully acquainted with the species there can be no reasonable doubt of its correctness.

The records above given extend without any possible doubt the date of the latest capture of a specimen of the Labrador Duck nearly a quarter of a century, *i. e.*, to 1875, and thus brings the species much nearer to the present time than the readers of the 'Dictionary of Birds' would be led to believe.

In this connection Mr. Lawrence suggested to me a very pertinent enquiry regarding the extinction of the species when he was giving me the information about the young male specimen taken on Long Island, N. Y., in the fall of 1875, and now in the Smithsonian Institution. It was, "Where were the parents of the juvenile?" That two old birds were alive somewhere in 1875 is certain and possibly some additional young, as one offspring is a small brood. That many species of birds do not have more than one or two offspring in a season is well known, yet this does not obtain with the Anatidæ, which are usually prolific breeders. It is true that nothing whatever is known of the breeding habits of this species, yet allied species lay as many as five eggs in a clutch.

¹ Auk, Vol. VIII, p. 216.

² Auk, Vol. X, p. 268.

Cause of Extinction.—Professor Newton thinks it was owing to the persecutions of man during the nesting period, and also by reason of its not having a high northern range where it would, presumably, be free from such attacks. There is absolutely nothing known of the exact distribution of the species, nor of its breeding habits. In the literature on *C. labradorius* there is not a single fact relative to the above points given; all that has been written is conjecture. If so, why may we not consider that it did have a high northern range? Our President, Dr. Coues, in his ‘Notes on the Ornithology of Labrador,’ made in 1860,¹ says: “I was informed that though it was rarely seen in summer, it is not an uncommon bird in Labrador during the fall.” This certainly points to a migration to Labrador, in the fall, from some other point further north. Its nearest relatives breed much further north than Labrador, and why not *labradorius*? The only statement we have as to its nesting habits is from Audubon,² whose son was shown nests on the top of the low, tangled, fir bushes which he was informed were those of the Pied Duck. If this is a fact, this species was free from the depredations of foxes and other carnivorous animals, and man only could cause its disappearance. The appearance of this species, and what little we know of its habits,³ tell us that it must have been a strong, swift flyer and thus able to protect itself from man after it had obtained maturity. We can speculate as to the cause of its disappearance, but we have no facts to warrant a conclusion.

Since the publication of my ‘Revised List’ (1891), two northern exploring expeditions have been made, and with both of them I sent copies of the plates of the Labrador Duck which appeared with the ‘List.’ The route of the expedition under the auspices of Bowdoin College was along the northeast shore of Labrador during part of July, August and until September 2, 1891. A party of four left the main body at Hamilton Inlet (Lake Melville), and penetrated the interior some 300 miles from the coast. The main party did not see nor hear anything of the species. On August 9, when some 200 miles up the Grand River, Mr.

¹ Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1861, p. 239.

² ‘The Birds of America,’ 8vo. ed., Vol. VI, p. 329 (1843).

³ See ‘Revised List,’ Auk, Vol. VIII, p. 216.

D. M. Cole and his associate, Mr. Cary, saw a female duck with a brood of young which he was sure was this species. Unfortunately they had no shot-gun with them, as their only one had been lost a few days previously when their canoe was capsized in some rapids, so they could not procure either the old bird or any of the young. The only persons seen during the five weeks and two days the Grand River party were gone were a trapper and his family, six miles up the river, and a party of native Indians on the second day out. From none of these could Mr. Cole get any information of this species of duck. The facts obtained by this expedition, while negative, serve to point to the conclusion that the species has become extinct.

The second expedition was that under the leadership of Lieut. Peary, U. S. N., to Greenland. The ornithologist of the party was our fellow-member, Mr. Langdon Gibson, who has furnished me with the following interesting statement of his enquiries relative to the Labrador Duck, and the results, with which I will conclude.

“The Expedition sailed June 6, 1891, from New York. Friday, June 12, 1891, we reached Sidney, Cape Breton, but made no enquiries, as we saw no one who would be likely to know anything about the species.

“Monday, June 15, while passing through the Straits of Belle Isle, we stopped long enough to catch some codfish; here we were boarded by some French Canadians. I showed each one of them the plates of the Labrador Duck in my possession and they all shook their heads saying, in broken English, that they had never seen such birds.

“Saturday, June 27, we reached the settlement of Godhavn, Disco Island, Greenland. Here careful enquiries were made amongst perhaps a dozen leading hunters of the tribe. They also, through an interpreter (a Dane), said they had never seen the bird. Leaving Disco, we proceeded by slow stages, owing to heavy ice in Melville Bay, to our final camping grounds on McCormick Bay. During the ensuing winter nearly every male Eskimo in the tribe came to visit us, and so, from time to time, I questioned nearly every one of them on this subject, showing each my picture of the duck. On first seeing the picture, with few exceptions, each native exclaimed that they had ‘Tark-

koood emis u-ah,' meaning by this that they had 'seen many.' They gave the duck the name 'Argly' and told me in the spring I could get many, also their eggs, at the head of our own bay. I was disappointed when the spring came to have my Labrador Duck materialize in the form of the Long-tailed Duck, which sure enough was very plentiful at the head of the bay.

"In August, 1892 (the latter part, I believe), on our way home we touched at Godthaab, the largest town in Greenland. Here we were entertained by Herr Anderson, the Danish Inspector of South Greenland, an accomplished naturalist, and at his house I had the pleasure of inspecting one of the finest collections of Arctic birds I have ever seen. I showed him my little pamphlet on the Labrador Duck, and also presented it to him on my departure. He told me that his collection represented twenty years' work, and all the hunters in South Greenland (some 500 men) had instructions to bring to him any strange birds that they might get. In this way he has added to his collection from time to time many rare birds and eggs. In all this time he claims to have heard nothing of the Labrador Duck, which I consider is substantial proof that within the last twenty years the Labrador Duck has not visited Greenland. From Godthaab we came directly home to Philadelphia, and this ended my ineffectual attempts at learning something more definite regarding this species."

REMARKS ON THE ORIGIN OF BIRD MIGRATION.¹

BY FRANK M. CHAPMAN.

AS A TEXT for the remarks I have to offer on this subject I have taken the following paragraph from Dr. Allen's paper on the 'Origin of the Instinct of Migration in Birds'²: "Nothing

¹ Read at the Eleventh Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union, held in Cambridge, Mass., Nov. 20-23, 1893.

² Bull. N. O. C., V, 1880, pp. 151-154.