

INTRODUCTION.

THOSE who have not made a study of the literature of American Ornithology can have very little idea of the advance that has been made during the present century, and especially during the last thirty years; an advance that is remarkable—not only for the important changes made, and the rapidity with which they have been effected, the value of the improved methods adopted, the number of new facts and forms discovered—but also for the extent and excellence of the literature in which the progress of the science has been recorded. The topic is a tempting one; but as it is not within the province of the present work to discuss it at any length, those who are interested in the subject must be referred to the “Historical Preface” in the late editions of the *Key to North American Birds*, by Dr. ELLIOTT COUES, and to Professor NEWTON’s article on Ornithology in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, where they will find much to guide and instruct them. A brief reference to a few points must suffice here.

An almost complete revolution in Classification and Nomenclature was effected by the late Professor BAIRD’s *Report*, published in 1859. In that celebrated and epoch-making work the species were grouped in six Orders, fifty-six Families, and two hundred and ninety-six Genera; and this system prevailed until 1872, when, in the first edition of the *Key*, Dr. COUES increased the number of Orders to nine, the Families to fifty-eight, and the Genera to three hundred and twenty-eight. Another point of difference in the methods adopted by these authors was, that while BAIRD, following the older systematists, placed the Birds of Prey first, COUES put the *Oscines* at the head of his system, giving to the Thrushes the place of honor so long held by the Vultures and Falcons. The singing birds are still considered as the highest or most specialized types, but their position has been changed to the last named instead of the first, the sequence having been reversed.

Since 1872 numerous alterations have appeared, notably in the *History of North American Birds*, by BAIRD, BREWER and RIDGWAY; in RIDGWAY’s *Nomenclature*, issued by the Smithsonian Institution; and in the second edition of the *Key*; until, finally, in 1886, the A. O. U. COMMITTEE, whose determinations are almost universally accepted by American ornithologists, classed the birds of North America in seventeen Orders, sixty-six Families, and three hundred and twenty-seven Genera. Of these groups, the birds of Canada, as shown by the accompanying Table, represent fifteen Orders, fifty-five Families, and two hundred and thirty-six Genera. The Orders not represented in the fauna of the Dominion are *Odontoglossæ* and *Psittaci*, of which there is but one species of each in America—the American Flamingo (*Phenicopterus ruber*) representing the first named, and the Carolina Paroquet (*Conurus carolinensis*) the latter.

Some idea of the field work that has been accomplished, and the discoveries made, may be gathered from the following list, which shews the total number of species and subspecies given by the different authors at the dates named.

1814, Wilson,	283	1859, Baird,	738	1884, Coues,	902
1838, Bonaparte,	471	1874, Coues,	778	1886, A. O. U. Committee, .	960
1840, Brewer,	491	1881, Ridgway,	930	1887, Coues,	960
1844, Audubon,	506	1882, Coues,	888	1887, Ridgway,	1028

This list requires some explanation, for the apparent increase has not been wholly due to the discovery of new species, as might be inferred. A portion of the increase is due to the extension of the territorial limits embraced under the term “North America,” when used for ornithological purposes. In BAIRD’s *Report* the birds named were those that had been found north of the boundary between the United States and Mexico, excluding Lower California and Greenland. In the first edition of the *Key*, Lower California was included, but Greenland was excluded; and in the Smithsonian Catalogue, published in 1881, Mr. RIDGWAY extended the limits to embrace Greenland, the Peninsula of Lower California, and the Islands of Guadeloupe and Socorro. (Dr. COUES had included the Greenland fauna in the second edition of his *Check-List*, which was in type when Mr. RIDGWAY’s Catalogue appeared.) The A. O. U. COMMITTEE have fixed the limits thus: “The Continent of North America north of the present United States and Mexican boundary, and Greenland, and the Peninsula of Lower California, with the islands naturally belonging thereto.”

Other additions to the list of American birds have been made by the admission of extra-limital species, especially of those occurring in Northern Mexico; but by far the largest addition, apart from the discovery of new forms, has come through the recognition of geographical races as varieties or subspecies, and the giving to these races a distinctive name—a trinomial.