



Chas E Bendire

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IN MEMORIAM:

CHARLES EMIL BENDIRE.¹

BORN 27TH APRIL, 1836. DIED 4TH FEBRUARY, 1897.

BY J. C. MERRILL.

Frontispiece.

THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION has again suffered the loss of a prominent member and officer, and, in accordance with a standing resolution, the President has called upon the writer to prepare a memorial of the life and work of Charles Emil Bendire, Captain United States Army, retired, brevet Major, who, after an illness of several months, died of Bright's disease at Jacksonville, Florida, on the fourth of February, 1897. This is undertaken not as a perfunctory duty, but as a tribute to one I have known for more than twenty-two years, first as a correspondent, later as an intimate personal friend, our intercourse closing with a letter written by him a few days before his death.

Karl Emil Bender was born at Koenig im Odenwald in the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt on April 27, 1836. The eldest of a family of two sons and three daughters, of whom two of the latter now survive, he received private instruction at home up to

¹ An address delivered at the Fifteenth Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union, at New York, Nov. 10, 1897.

the age of twelve years, and then passed five years at a theological school at Passy, near Paris. Leaving suddenly, it is understood on account of some boyish escapade, he returned to his home for a short time and then, upon the advice of a friend and accompanied by his younger brother Wilhelm, sailed for New York in 1853.

Upon arrival the new world did not meet their glowing expectations, and in a short time Wilhelm Bender sailed for home, but was lost overboard during the voyage.

Not long after this young Bender enlisted, changing his name to Bendire and dropping his middle initial, which he reassumed about fifteen years ago in correspondence and in his published notes; but to the time of his death he was known officially as Charles Bendire and his name so appears upon the title pages of his 'Life Histories.'

As the greater part of Major Bendire's life was passed in the Army, it is fitting to briefly recount his services and stations.

Enlisting at the age of eighteen years on June 10, 1854, he served for five years as a Private and Corporal in Company D, First Dragoons. Remaining out of the service for a year, he again enlisted June 8, 1860, in the 4th Cavalry, serving as Private, Corporal, Sergeant, and Hospital Steward until September 9, 1864, when he was discharged by reason of appointment as 2nd Lieutenant, 2nd Infantry, of date May 18, 1864. He was transferred to the 1st Cavalry September 9, 1864, promoted 1st Lieutenant, November 12, 1864, Captain, February 21, 1873, and placed upon the retired list for disability contracted in the line of duty, April 24, 1886.

He was brevetted 1st Lieutenant, June 11, 1864, for "gallant and meritorious services in the battle of Trevillion Station, Va.," and Major, February 27, 1890, for "gallant services in action against Indians at Canyon Creek, Montana, September 13, 1877."

During his first enlistment his company was stationed in New Mexico — then including Arizona — but he did no collecting then nor during the Civil War, through which he served, as an officer, in the Army of the Potomac.

After the war he passed three months in 1867 at his former home in Germany, and after this — omitting mention of temporary details and duty — he was stationed in Louisiana until December,

1865; at Drum Barracks, California — now San Pedro — until April, 1868; at Fort Lapwai, Idaho, to June, 1871; and at Camp Lowell, Arizona, to January, 1873. He was on recruiting service at St. Louis until September, 1874; at Camp Harney, Oregon, to May, 1878; at Fort Walla Walla, Washington, to May, 1882; at Fort Klamath, Oregon, to September, 1883; in the East for about one year, and at Fort Custer, Montana, to December, 1885, being retired in the following spring.

From this record it will be seen what exceptional facilities Major Bendire enjoyed for collecting birds and studying their habits in regions then but little known to ornithologists. During these years he saw much hard field service which he performed with the care and fidelity that characterized all that he did. It should be recorded that the testimony of those who accompanied him while in the field is unanimous to the effect that he never allowed his interest in birds to interfere in the least with the strict performance of duty; and more than one anecdote is related of his losing valuable specimens through his unwillingness to delay his command for a few moments.

It is probable that while stationed at Fort Lapwai, Idaho, from 1868 to 1871, Major Bendire first began the systematic study and collection of objects of natural history, and that he was led thereto by his fondness for hunting and interest in the haunts and habits of game mammals and birds. During the early period of his work Major Bendire, while a most assiduous and successful oölogist, paid little attention to collecting birds except for the purpose of identifying sets of eggs. This was unfortunate, because he thus failed to add a number of southern species to our fauna in localities where, at a later period, many such were secured by other collectors. Still, he first obtained in the United States several Mexican species and discovered certain new ones, as *Peucea carpalis*, and *Harporhynchus bendirei*; he was also the first to investigate the breeding habits and procure the eggs of a considerable number of our western birds.

Many ornithologists do not, perhaps, realize that Major Bendire was an assiduous collector in other fields and that at the instance of Professor Baird he sent much good material to the National Museum. In addition to the three species of birds that were

dedicated to him, viz.: *Megascops asio bendirei* Brewster, *Loxia curvirostra bendirei* Ridgway, and *Harporhynchus bendirei* Coues, his name will be remembered in other branches of science. Thus, a mammal bears the name *Atophyrax bendirei* Merriam; a fish, *Potamocottus bendirei* Bean, and three fossil trees are *Acer bendirei* Lesquereux, *Rhus bendirei* Lesquereux, and *Marsilea bendirei* Ward. He also first cleared up the life history of the 'Red Fish' of Idaho, showing that the supposed little land-locked red salmon, *Oncorhynchus kennerlyi*, is really the young breeding male or grilse of *Oncorhynchus nerka*.

While in Washington on leave of absence and on duty from September, 1883, to August, 1884, Major Bendire, at Professor Baird's request, assumed charge, as Honorary Curator, of the Department of Oölogy in the U. S. National Museum, which was in a neglected condition. Most of the eggs of North American land birds were stored without order and very many were of more or less doubtful identification, but the latter have since been eliminated from the collection; the eggs of the water birds were in a somewhat more satisfactory condition, and many are still retained. With his characteristic energy, Major Bendire at once went over this material and incorporated with it his private collection of about 8,000 specimens, which he presented to the Museum, and which is the basis of the present collection of about 52,000 specimens, acquired largely by his personal efforts and by the gifts of his friends and correspondents. This collection is the culmination of Major Bendire's life work as an oölogist; its excellent arrangement, the fine condition and careful identification of the specimens, and the full series of most species being too well known to the members of the Union to need detailed description. There are few of us who have not gladly contributed sets of especially rare eggs, knowing that they would nowhere be of more real scientific use and value than in our friend's custody.

Having rearranged the collection of eggs to his satisfaction and made it available for study while constantly adding to it, he was prepared to undertake a work which he had long had in mind, and which was suggested to him by Professor Baird. This was to be an Oölogy of North American birds, but as notes and material gathered by an extensive correspondence and careful

search of the records were accumulated, it was found advisable to extend the scope of the work which, in its final form, is well described by its title 'Life Histories of North American Birds,' though this name was not decided upon until much of the first volume was written. In the preparation of this volume a great deal of material for the succeeding volumes was gathered, and it should be here recorded that had more encouragement been given to the work in certain quarters, the subsequent volumes would have appeared promptly, and the proposed five, or possibly six, volumes might have been almost, if not quite, completed before the author's lamented death. The resulting loss to American Ornithology is greatly to be deplored, for the two volumes which have appeared fill a place peculiar to themselves and no other publication is in any way a substitute. The first volume, issued in July, 1892, was greeted with the greatest satisfaction by ornithologists, and while it met with scant notice in 'The Auk,' foreign journals gave it a most cordial welcome. This was followed in September, 1896, by the second volume, which fully sustained the author's high reputation, and upon these will rest Major Bendire's secure fame as an ornithologist.

Besides the uniform excellence of the work, two points deserve especial mention, although this is not the place for a general criticism, nor are trite expressions of praise needed to enhance the high appreciation of the work by ornithologists. One is the care exercised in giving the geographical distribution of each form and the extent of its breeding range; these, based upon the latest and most reliable data and the personal identification or reidentification of specimens, are beyond comparison the best ever published. This necessary examination of specimens was most fortunate, for it had much to do with extending the scope of the work as originally planned, and gave the author an enviable position as an ornithologist of sound judgment. The second point is the large amount of fresh, unpublished material incorporated in the 'Life Histories'; much of this is based upon the author's own observations during his long residence in the West supplemented by information derived from his extensive correspondence, the authority and credit for which are carefully given.

A word as to the plates cannot be omitted. No superior work has ever been done, and no praise can be too great to apply to

them. The present writer was in a position to know with what painstaking care and accuracy Major Bendire compared the successive proofs of the plates in the first volume with the individual eggs selected as types, and how often he returned the 'final' proofs to the lithographers for changes in some minute detail that his critical eye detected. It should be stated emphatically that Major Bendire is in nowise responsible for the many serious and inexcusable typographical errors that so disfigure the second volume.

There are few Active Members of the Union who were not personally acquainted with Major Bendire, as he was one of its founders and rarely failed to be present at the annual meetings. On different occasions he was a member of several of the Committees, and at the time of his death was one of the Council of the Union.

Major Bendire was not a voluminous writer. His earlier records were mostly in letters to Allen, Baird, Brewer, and Coues, who sometimes, beginning about 1872, published them as special notes, at others brought them together as a local list. Later he wrote more freely over his own signature, publishing brief records as well as longer articles, as on the breeding habits of *Sphyrapicus*, *Passerella*, *Glaucidium*, and others. His correspondence increased to burdensome proportions before his death, but he attended to it faithfully and gladly, not only obtaining good material for his work, but doing much to establish Oölogy on a broader and safer basis, and to impress upon the younger collectors the paramount importance of properly identifying such specimens as they might collect. He was often consulted as to the identification of eggs, and did not hesitate to expose such men as he was convinced were given to fraudulent practices. This detestation of fraud and insincerity was a marked feature of his character. Frank yet reserved, bluff, honest and truthful to bluntness, he had the courage of his convictions, which he did not fail to make clear when occasion required. Simple in habits, unselfish, and always ready to help others, Major Bendire is sincerely mourned, not only by the members of this Union, but by all those to whom he was known only by correspondence or by his secure title to scientific remembrance, his 'Life Histories of North American Birds.'