

IN MEMORIAM: ALBERT KENRICK FISHER

BY FRANCIS M. UHLER

DR. ALBERT KENRICK FISHER, a Founder and Past President of the American Ornithologists' Union and one of its best known Fellows for nearly 65 years, died in Washington, D. C. on June 12, 1948, after a brief illness from circulatory complications that developed as a result of advanced age.

With his passing, the American Ornithologists' Union has lost one of its last links with that eminent group of bird students who founded this organization in the autumn of 1883.

Dr. Fisher was born in Ossining (then called Sing Sing), New York on March 21, 1856, and thus had a life span of more than 92 years. He was the son of Hiram and Susan E. (Townsend) Fisher. His father operated an extensive mercantile business in New York City. Their home, on a beautiful hill overlooking a tidal section of the Hudson River, had spacious grounds and a surrounding countryside that undoubtedly stimulated his ardent interest in natural history. As a boy he spent much time in the tidal marshes along Croton Point, about two miles north of Ossining, and in the rugged hills of the adjacent region. While his principal interests centered around birds and plants, he also was a keen observer of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and many kinds of invertebrates.

His early schooling was obtained at Holbrook's Military High School in Ossining. He trained for the medical profession and graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York in the class of 1879. He then married Alwilda Merritt of Ossining. Two sons and twin daughters were born to this union. One son, Harry T., died at an early age and a daughter, Mrs. Ethel M. White, died recently. The survivors are Walter K. Fisher and Mrs. Alberta M. Marble.

Dr. Fisher was a leader in conservation movements from early manhood and a personal friend of such outstanding conservationists as Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt.

When a college classmate and good friend, Dr. C. Hart Merriam, was appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture to set up a Branch of Economic Ornithology in the U. S. D. A. Division of Entomology on July 1, 1885, he persuaded Dr. Fisher to give up further thought of practicing medicine and join him in founding this new Branch. They had already worked together closely for two years, along with 21 other Founders of the A. O. U., in setting up organized studies of bird

migration and geographic distribution under the sponsorship of the newly founded Union. It was upon the recommendation of the A. O. U. Council that the Commissioner of Agriculture had appointed Dr. Merriam to begin the economic studies of birds.

On July 1, 1886, through the efforts of Drs. Merriam and Fisher, this newly created Branch of the Division of Entomology was given independent status and called the "Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy." The early work was largely devoted to food-habits studies and to educating farmers about birds and mammals affecting their interests, so that the destruction of useful species might be prevented. It was during this early period that Dr. Fisher prepared his monumental work on 'The Hawks and Owls of the United States in Their Relation to Agriculture,' published in 1893. This report is still considered a classic in its field. As a result of this work the destruction of harmless hawks and owls has been greatly reduced, and they are no longer threatened with extermination.

The economic studies were gradually broadened to include the various biological surveys of little-known parts of North America, and on July 1, 1905, a separate Bureau of Biological Survey was organized by virtue of a Congressional Act of March 3, 1905. Again Dr. Fisher rendered outstanding aid in furthering this expanded work.

In 1891 Dr. Fisher served as ornithologist for the famous Death Valley Expedition and prepared an extensive report on the birds observed in Death Valley and adjacent poorly known areas in California, southern Nevada, and parts of Utah and Arizona. He also took part in the Harriman Alaska Expedition in 1899 and was a member of the Pinchot South Seas Expedition in 1929. Numerous bird skins were added to the research collections of the U. S. National Museum as a result of his efforts on all these expeditions.

Dr. Fisher's ability in dealing with Members of Congress, as well as with his fellow workers, played an important part in successfully administering the broadened scope of the Bureau of Biological Survey which was later to become an important part of the present U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He retired in 1931, after more than 46 years of continuous effort to develop the fore-runner agencies of that Service.

In addition to the outstanding publications already mentioned, he was the author of more than 150 shorter papers dealing primarily with birds but including a number devoted to mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and various invertebrates, and biographical sketches. It is unnecessary to cite these here, because a list complete to that date was prepared by T. S. Palmer and W. L. McAtee and published on Dr. Fisher's 70th birthday, March 21, 1926, in the 'Proceedings of the

Biological Society of Washington' (Vol. 39: 21-28, 1926). A few notes, several biographical papers, a list of the birds of Plummer Island, Md., and, in collaboration with Alexander Wetmore, a report on birds of the Pinchot Expedition, appeared in later years.

Few men had a wider circle of friends in all walks of life than did Dr. Fisher. To most of them he was affectionately known as "A. K." In addition to his long connection with the A. O. U., he was a member of the following organizations: Honorary Member, American Game Protective Association and Cooper Ornithological Club; Corresponding Member, Linnaean Society of New York; as well as a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, the International Association of Game and Fish Commissioners, and the Washington Biologists' Field Club; Associate Member, Boone and Crocket Club, Baird Ornithological Club, and Cosmos Club.

During his last years he resided at the Cosmos Club, but for many years he lived in the Plymouth Apartments in Washington, where his "Apartment 44" became a cherished gathering spot for his close friends. He was always a genial host and an expert cook who delighted in regaling his guests with delectable sea-foods and game.

He had strong convictions on many subjects, not the least of which was a firm belief in the ill-effects of tobacco. He spread his thoughts on this subject with a missionary zeal that would have done credit to the Quaker ancestors of his mother.

Dr. Fisher was a true sportsman in the best sense of the word, a lover of dogs, rod, and gun from boyhood, but never taking any game in excess of his immediate needs.

He brought an appreciation of nature to hundreds of acquaintances and enjoyed taking them on excursions to his favorite area, Plummer Island and along the wooded shores of the Potomac River. He went regularly to this headquarters of the Washington Biologists' Field Club for more than 45 years and was active in its management and in the study of its fauna and flora. There he was widely famed as an out-of-door cook at the Club's many shad-bakes and oyster roasts. His last visit was made only a few weeks before his death, and his delight in still being able to participate in the May, 1948, shad-bake was apparent to all his friends.

He retained his keen interest in natural history and an alertness of mind that was an inspiration to all who knew him. There was no failing of memory such as is commonly associated with advanced age. He had oft expressed the wish that no formal ceremony attend his passing and requested that his remains be cremated and placed on his beloved Plummer Island amid the plants and birds that formed such an



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important place in his life. These wishes were carried out by a small group of intimate friends.

His life has left a lasting imprint in the field of wildlife conservation. His many friends will greatly miss the kindly personality of the genial "A. K." He truly lived a complete life.

*U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Patuxent Research Refuge,
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THE FOOD OF NESTLING BRONZED GRACKLES,
QUISCALUS QUISCULA VERSICOLOR, IN
CENTRAL NEW YORK

BY W. J. HAMILTON, JR.

THE food of the Bronzed Grackle has been studied by several investigators. Beal (U. S. Dept. Agric. Bull. 13: 60, 1900) reported on 2346 specimens from all parts of this bird's range. Of the specimens examined, 456 (19.1 per cent) were nestlings. Beal's study indicated that the food of young grackles often differed materially from that of the adults. The food of the entire year, taking into account all 2346 stomachs, adult and young, was made up of 30.3 per cent animal and 69.7 per cent vegetable matter. Of the total examined by Beal, 28 specimens taken in May and June are reported from New York, but there is no indication if any of these were nestlings. Warren ('Birds of Pennsylvania,' pp. 221-222, 1890) stated that the diet of the young birds, while under parental care, is almost exclusively insects, consisting mainly of caterpillars and grubs. This large blackbird, with its formidable bill, has been praised and cursed alike by those who farm the land. Few exact data on the food of this common and widespread species have been recorded. This report is a minor attempt to provide data on the dietary of the nestlings in a restricted locality.

To determine the dietary of nestling Bronzed Grackles in the Ithaca, New York region, collections of young in the nest were made in May and June of 1947, 1948, and 1949. A few nestlings were collected in May, 1926, and analyses made of their food at that time. These analyses do not differ materially from the observations recorded in later years. One hundred and thirty young birds have been examined. The droppings of nestlings at various ages were likewise collected. Feces can be collected merely by handling the young or stroking their abdomens. Droppings deposited in this manner were