

had this to say in an article on *Spring Birds* in the *Cornell Era* for April, 1912:

With the possible exception of the lower Hudson valley, there is not in the entire middle states a more advantageous station from which to study the spring migration than this Lake region, and Ithaca is the best point, being in an exceedingly diversified country and within easy reach of all possible conditions. Since the recession of the glaciers an additional feature has been added to the numerous attractions this region offers to birds, in the form of transverse ravines of varying depth. The fact that most of them are east and west in their course is of great importance, as their south banks never get the sun, and their north slopes are bathed in it and get all the shelter and radiation there is, with the result that they offer shelter and comfort to the early comers, while the cool, shaded south banks, where the ice hangs late, develop truly Canadian conditions, and attract the northern species, even inducing many to stay and breed well to the south of their normal nesting grounds. One needs only to stand on the foot-bridge over Fall Creek and compare the two sides of the ravine, noticing the preponderance of conifers and soft woods on the campus side and the oaks, ashes, chestnuts, elms and hickories on the north, to understand what havens these gorges are to the wandering birds of all classes. . . . Early in May begins the last and far most thrilling of the three waves [of migrating birds], when we may hope to see all the rare and unusual things. Now is the time to wake up. The bird to start things is the oriole. His loud, rich, 'plurp!' in the shade trees along South Avenue, a gay dash of orange and black; this is the sign to get out for a morning walk with a notebook, for Lord Baltimore is the official herald of the great pageant.

Any May you might have found Louis Fuertes looking into the gorge upon the backs of migrating warblers, hearing the 'plurp!' of the first oriole, crossing Thurston Avenue to put his glass on a scarlet tanager for one of the children to see. It was a lifetime of living in the Ithaca area — the center of central New York — that mainly qualified him as artist of its birds.
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LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES

ARTHUR A. ALLEN

Nearly thirty years have passed since Louis Agassiz Fuertes painted his last picture. The last one, so far as known, was of two Abyssinian Turacos done for Miss Mary Young of Williamsport, Pa. on August 14, 1927. It now hangs in the Fuertes gallery of the new Research Center of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology. On the opposite wall hangs one of a Passenger Pigeon which he painted from a fresh specimen in 1889 when he was a high school boy of 15.

Fuertes' first published pictures appeared in Florence Merriam Bailey's *Birding On A Bronco* in 1896 and for the next thirty years his brush was

rarely idle. Scarcely a bird book of note appeared without some of his pictures and those like *Birds of New York* and *Birds of Massachusetts* are as much monuments to Fuertes as to the authors. The generation of bird observers that grew up between 1896 and 1927 were so accustomed to having his pictures used in the various bird books that appeared that to find any other artist was considered a distinct criticism for the book. One often heard, for example, of Beebe's *Monograph of the Pheasants* (1922) or Phillips' *Monograph of the Waterfowl* (1926): "The plates are beautiful, but too bad Fuertes didn't do them all." The careful bird student had come to realize that there was something in Fuertes' pictures that one did not find in those of the less gifted.

There is little question but that Fuertes set a standard of accuracy as well as charm that could be imitated but never attained. Other artists recognized this and gladly accepted Fuertes as the leader of the school that combined scientific accuracy with artistic skill in composition and in use of pigments.

Prior to Fuertes, bird plates had been largely conventionalized diagrams or feather charts done as from taxidermists' models with little thought as to how the birds really appeared in life. Some were almost cartoons of the subjects, portrayed with the artist's interpretation of how he thought the bird ought to use its various structures in some dramatic pose. Audubon was past master of the latter school and skillfully produced birds in imaginative poses that still hypnotize ignorant or careless observers but which shock followers of the Fuertes' school.

In the historical preface to his great work on North American birds, Elliott Coues divides the history of American Ornithology into a series of "Periods" such as the Catesbian Period, the Wilsonian Period, the Audubonian Period, etc., according to the outstanding name of that particular time bracket. His history does not continue into the 20th century and so we are left free to make our own choice for the period in which we live. The number of outstanding ornithologists in the 20th century is far greater than in all the preceding years together but it is my firm belief that when time has mellowed the ornithological progress of the 20th century, the first twenty-five years will bear the name of Louis Fuertes, the outstanding bird artist of all time.

Louis Fuertes' greatest contribution to New York State ornithology is naturally his illustrations for Eaton's *Birds of New York* (1909-1914) although his inspiration to other bird artists like Sutton and Peterson and Dilger and to countless other students is difficult to measure. His only addition to the New York State list of birds, so far as I know, was a specimen of Leconte's Sparrow which he collected at Ithaca and painted October 11, 1897, but his collection of some 6000 beautifully prepared skins, many of them from New York State, formed most of the initial framework about which the modern 25,000 skin collection of Cornell University has been assembled.

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