

GEORGE N. LAWRENCE

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George Newbold Lawrence (1806-1895), one of the most eminent ornithologists in the nineteenth century, was born in New York City. His parents were John Burling and Hannah (Newbold) Lawrence. During his youth Lawrence lived at "Forest Hill", then in a rural setting some eight miles north of City Hall. He began collecting at the age of fourteen and his eventual accumulation of 8000 bird skins went to the American Museum of Natural History.

Lawrence was engaged in the wholesale drug business in New York City, retiring in 1862. His ornithological publications began before this date, and he embarked on a study of the birds of neotropical America in the 1850s. He was one of the Founders of the American Ornithologists Union and was made an Honorary Member. Following his death a memorial was prepared by D. G. Elliott which will be found in the January 1896 issue of the "Auk".

Of particular interest to us is Lawrence's "Catalogue of Birds observed on New York, Long and Staten Islands, and the adjacent parts of New Jersey." This was published in the "Annals of the Lyceum of Natural History of New York", April 1866. New York Island is, of course, Manhattan. A few places in New Jersey, such as Barnegat, Fort Lee and Hoboken are mentioned, but it appears that most of the birds listed were seen or collected in New York State. The "Catalogue" has a total of 327 species, thirty-two of which are annotated. With the great majority only the common and scientific names are given. Eight species are designated as being rare. Some of the common names used by Lawrence are quite different from those now in vogue. For example:

Mottled Owl, now Screech Owl

Yellow Rump, now Myrtle Warbler

Red-breasted Snipe, now Dowitcher

Black Woodcock, now Pileated Woodpecker

Green Black-capped Flycatcher, now Wilson's Warbler

The European Woodcock is discussed at some length, three specimens being referred to; one from Rhode Island and two from New Jersey. Commenting on one of these, Lawrence says, "it probably came by way of Iceland and Greenland, a route by which other European species occasionally visit us." Shortly before the report was written the House Sparrow had been successfully introduced into this country, and Lawrence's remarks, after the passage of nearly one hundred years, show how wide of the mark were those responsible for its introduction. "That pest of our shade trees and the horror of pedestrians, the caterpillars or larvae, familiarly known as measuring worms, from a single one of which a sensitive lady shrinks in disgust, are said to form part of the diet of this species. In Philadelphia, where these worms abound to a greater degree than in New York, the introduction of this bird would confer a boon on the inhabitants they could not fail to appreciate."

Eaton, "Birds of New York", Volume I (1909), in commenting on this report insofar as our State is concerned, reduces the 327 species to 315 on the basis that for eight no New York State specimen existed, and four others, Hutchins Gull, Green-backed Mallard, Cooper's Sandpiper, and Wood Wren are not considered valid species.

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