

Longevity of Bird Names

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KNOWLEDGE OF THE LONGEVITY OF BIRD NAMES depends upon records and these may be quite imperfect. They are progressively scantier with age and prior to the time of the earliest printed pages and manuscripts, there is, of course, a void.

Because of imperfection of the record, the life-spans of folk names here discussed are, as a rule, shorter than the actual; if the whole histories were known, years might be added to later instances and centuries to earlier ones.

The word bird itself, a component of hundreds of avian appellations, and such terms as rook and wren go back to the beginnings of our language. Sound words, like cuckoo and corbie, with recognizable antecedents in Roman and Greek tongues, are of even more ancient lineage. *Kōkila* is Sanskrit for cuckoo, a name that goes far toward transcending all barriers of space and time.

Though some cognomens are very old, others are young. Names are ever being invented and tested; some become part of the language, others fail. Relatively persistent appellations are the subject matter of this paper, which may well begin with consideration of a body of reliably documented terms of a fairly recent period.

In scanning Gurdon Trumbull's *Names and Portraits of Birds*, published in 1888¹, one gets the impression that the names tended to be localized but also that they were dependable in their limited ranges. One wonders whether such firmly anchored expressions were also long-lived; how many years afterward could they be heard at the same place? Getting comparable lists of any extent was not easy, but among those examined was one by Blanchard Pillsbury from Pine Point, Maine—a locality from which Trumbull recorded 15 names of game birds. Fourteen of these titles were sent in by Pillsbury in 1919, more than thirty years after Trumbull did his collecting.

An interesting experience of Ira N. Gabrielson brought to light a somewhat longer span of existence for two cognomens reported by Trumbull. At the time of the *Sportsmen's and Tourists' Fair* at Spokane, Washington, in 1923, Gabrielson wrote me that "One man from New London, Connecticut, called the Golden-eye, 'Merry-wing' and the red-breasted merganser, 'Bracket.'" Consulting Trumbull (1888), we find Merry-wing (a charming name referring to the ringing whistling made by the flight of this bird) recorded from Lynn, and Bracket (of unknown significance) for the common merganser at Stonington, Connecticut. Mergansers are likely to share appellations, so this apparent transfer hardly detracts from the worth of this record of name-longevity. Trumbull noted "Jinny" for the ruddy turnstone at Amityville, New York, and I heard it there (as Jenny) in 1909, from a man whom Trumbull also no doubt had interviewed, namely, the old-time market gunner, Andrew Chichester.

Several other names cited by this author in 1888 (but of course collected earlier) have again come to light at various dates. These include: bill-willie (for the willet, Fla., a recent record, 1942), bracket shelldrake (common merganser, Mass., 1934), cow-frog (shoveler, N. C., 1935), quandy (old squaw, Mass., 1936), and snowl (hooded merganser, Md., 1934). Durations of 30- to 40-some years are thus indicated for the names of a number of game-birds, and it is worth noting that for two of them: merry-wing and cow-frog, Trumbull stated that he heard them chiefly from elderly people. As to the second of these, he wrote, "the oldest inhabitants tell me of hearing it in use from early childhood." That would add 60 years or so to the age of this particular name, bringing its total to about a century.

Continuing with the Americanisms of moderate life-span, it may be noted that the name white-back, reported for the canvasback on the Potomac River by Alexander Wilson in 1814, was found there by Trumbull in 1886. Audubon recorded perrocket as a name of the common puffin in Labrador in 1835; in the form parakeet, the term is current in that and other northeastern maritime countries. Pathrick as an appellation of the common tern was published as from Labrador by Coues in 1861; in 1945, Harold S. Peters (ms.) heard the almost identical paytrick in Newfoundland. Reeks, 1870, recorded silken jay for the blue jay in Newfoundland, and the

merely shortened term silk jay was found there in 1930 (ms.) by Phoebe Knappen.

Lorby, an appellation of the common eider, published by James DeKay in 1844, is another term I heard from Andrew Chichester in 1909. In 1910, Arthur T. Wayne wrote that the title sanguillah for the orchard oriole was known to have been in use for a hundred years; it was reported from Georgia by Gilbert Rossignol in 1936 (ms.), adding another quarter of a century to the known period of its usage. If all the facts were known, a much longer life would probably be indicated as the word seems to be of African origin, and its root could thus be traced back to the time of the slave trade.

So much for a sampling of bird designations that we, or persons we have known, might have collected. In presenting progressively older cognomens, I have resorted to tabulation of selected (mostly folk) names by the centuries to which they can be assigned on the basis of the material in hand, or to which they have been traced by the Oxford English Dictionary, a work developed on historical principles (1933 edition). Summaries and brief comment on the century tables may be in order. "Current" in the "Late Reference" columns is interpreted as the year 1947, as in that year compilation ceased in connection with a large manuscript on American Bird Names by the present writer. This collection contains much ms. material which is cited in the tables only by author or locality and date.

TRACING TO THE 19TH CENTURY

For the 18 terms listed, the shortest period of recorded longevity is 12, the longest, 144, and the average, 113.4 years. Notable sources are the *American Ornithology of Alexander Wilson* (9 vols. 1808–1814) and the *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1804–1806). Wilson proposed numerous names that are still current, at least in books, as Tennessee warbler, Nashville warbler, and Kentucky warbler.

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Gozzard	Common goosander	Peters (Nfd.) 1945	Reeks (Nfd.) 1870
Silken jay	Blue jay	Knappen (Nfd.) 1930 [silk]	Reeks (Nfd.) 1870
Pathrick	Common tern	Peters (Nfd.) 1945 [paytrick]	Coues (Labr.) 1861
White bird	Willow ptarmigan	Ont. 1937	Hudson Bay 1841
Water swallow	Bank swallow	N.C., 1933	Jardine Nat. Library (Engl.) 1834

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Upland plover	Upland plover	Current	Williamson (Me.) 1832
Cliff swallow	Cliff swallow	Current	Bonaparte 1825
Ovenbird	Ovenbird	Current	O.E.D. (Engl., a tit-mouse) 1825
River swallow	Bank swallow	Macauley (N.Y.) 1829	Thos. Forster (Engl.) 1817
Bull-of-the-bog	American bittern	Guthrie (Iowa) 1928	Scott (Guy Mannering, 1815)
Cobble	Red-throated loon	MacMillan 1918	Montagu (Engl.) 1813
Hermit thrush	Hermit thrush	Current	Wilson 1812
Snow owl	Snowy owl	Current	Wilson 1811
Orchard oriole	Orchard oriole	Current	Wilson 1808
Old field lark	Eastern meadowlark	Current	Lewis & Clark (Va.) 1806
Sandhill crane	Sandhill crane	Current	Lewis & Clark 1805
Clape	Yellow-shafted flicker	N.S., 1937	Singleton Mitchell (N.Y.) 1804
Marsh sparrow	Swamp sparrow	Current	Bartram (Pa.) early 1800's
Song sparrow	Song sparrow	Current	Bartram (Pa.) early 1800's

TRACING TO THE 18TH CENTURY

Number of terms 72; longevity: low 22; high 242; average 173.4, years.

In 1799, Dr. Benjamin S. Barton published a paper entitled, *Fragments of the Natural History of Pennsylvania*, which Elliott Coues hailed as "one of the most notable special treatises on North American ornithology of . . . [its] century" (1878). In this work are the names: house wren, marsh wren, and indigo bird, the first two of which have become standard, and the third is in rather general popular use. The *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, etc.* by William Bartram, first published in 1791 (but edition we used that of 1792), contained the first printed examples of numerous American bird names; two of those we cite are in the folk class. These Barton and Bartram designations are around 150 years old. Using the dates of *Letters from Sir Charles Blagden to Sir Joseph Banks on American Natural History and Politics, 1776-1780* (published by the New York Public Library in 1903), we find cognomens nearly or quite a quarter century earlier for various common birds. Among them, nighthawk, chimney swallow, king-bird, and meadowlark are the most familiar appellations of the species today.

The 18th was a century of great activity in the study of American birds. Besides the authors already mentioned, Johann Reinhold

Forster (*A Catalogue of the Animals of North America*, 1771, and *An account of the Birds sent from Hudson Bay*, 1772); George Cartwright (*A Journal of Transactions . . . [in] Labrador*, 1770–1786, published in 1792 and at later dates); Catesby (see following note); and John Lawson (*A new voyage to Carolina*, 1709), all European authors, took part in the description of our avifauna. Mark Catesby seems to have set the fashion for artists of publishing colored illustrations of North American birds (although John White, 1585, long preceded him in making such figures). In the first volume of *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands*, which was issued in 1730–1732, we find various familiar names that Catesby either gathered from the people or coined himself, some of which are standard to this day (nearly 220 years later). Among them are: laughing gull, whooping crane, kildeer, ground dove, red-headed woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, purple martin, blue jay, catbird, and cardinal.

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
House wren	House wren	Current	Barton (Pa.) 1799
Marsh wren	Marsh wren	Current	Barton (Pa.) 1799
Indigo bird	Indigo bunting	Current	Barton (Pa.) 1799
Tinkasheer	Willet	Herrick (N.B.) c. 1825	O.E.D., a guillemot, 1799
Field martin	Eastern kingbird	Hausman 1946	Imlay 1797
Swamp blackbird	Red-winged blackbird	Current	Bartram 1792
Hangnest	Baltimore oriole	Current	Bartram 1792
[Little] field sparrow	Field sparrow	Current	Bartram 1792
Barn owl	Screech owl	Ont. 1937	Belknap (N.H.) 1792 ²
Marsh hawk	Eastern meadowlark	Boston (Mass.) 1929	Belknap (N.H.) 1792
Hangbird	Baltimore oriole	Current	Belknap (N.H.) 1792
Yaffle	Yellow-shafted flicker	Burns (Mass., Conn.) 1900	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1792
Golden robin	Baltimore oriole	Current	Manasseh Cutler (Mass.) 1786
[Chuck] Chuck Will's Widow	Chuck-wills-widow	Current	Pennant (S.C.) 1785
Barn swallow	Barn swallow	Current	Pennant 1785
Mosquito hawk	Nighthawk	Current	Anburey (Conn.) 1778
Yucker	Yellow-shafted flicker	Barton (Va.) early 1800's	Jefferson (Va.) 1781–82
Ground swallow	Bank swallow	Atwater (Ohio) 1838	Jefferson (Va.) 1781–82
Wamp	Common eider	Bent (Mass.) 1925	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Tell-tale [plover]	Greater yellowlegs	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Black snipe	Solitary sandpiper	Mackay (Mass.) 1919	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Fool plover	Dowitcher	Howe (R.I.) 1905	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Grass plover	Pectoral sandpiper	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Nighthawk	Common nighthawk	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80
Chimney swallow ³	Chimney swift	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776–80

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Kingbird	Eastern kingbird	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776-80
Thrasher	Brown thrasher	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776-80
Meadowlark	Eastern meadowlark	Current	Blagden (R.I.) 1776-80
Crested redbird	Cardinal	Iowa, 1936	Bartram 1774
Blue crane	Sandhill crane	Current	Forster 1772
Yellow-leg	Greater yellowlegs	Current	Forster 1772
King duck	King eider	Current	Forster 1771
Clapper rail	Clapper rail	Current	Forster 1771
Passenger pigeon	Passenger pigeon	Current	Forster 1771
Snowy owl	Snowy owl	Current	Forster 1771
Shore lark	Horned lark	Current	Forster 1771
Grackle	Purple grackle	Current	Forster 1771
Sand swallow	Bank swallow	Current	Forster 1771
Dipper ⁴	Water ouzel	Current	Tunstall 1771
Whabby	Red-throated loon	Peters (Nfd.) 1945	Cartwright 1770-86 ⁵
Pied duck	Labrador duck	Fur, Fin, Feather, 1875	Cartwright 1770-86
Brass-wing diver	White winged scoter	Townsend (Labr.) 1911	Cartwright 1770-86
Bottle-nosed diver	Surf scoter	Townsend (Labr.) 1911	Cartwright 1770-86
Spruce game	Spruce grouse	Austin (Labr.) 1932	Cartwright 1770-86
Aunt sary	Greater yellowlegs	Austin (Labr.) 1932	Cartwright 1770-86
Tinker	Razor-billed auk	Current	Cartwright 1770-86
Red bird	Common robin	Ont., 1937	Hearne (Hudson Bay) 1769-72
Nonpareil	Painted bunting	Current	Edwards 1758
Sea duck	Black scoter	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1753
Marsh quail	Eastern Meadowlark	R.I., 1919	Birket 1750
Lord	Harlequin duck	Current	Edwards (Nfd.) 1747
Horned owl	Great horned owl	Current	Ellis (Hudson Bay) 1748
Tree creeper	Tree creeper	Current	Albin (Engl.) 1738
Whooping crane	Whooping crane	Current	Catesby 1731
Killdeer	Killdeer	Current	Catesby 1731
Laughing gull	Laughing gull	Current	Catesby 1731
Cutwater	Black skimmer	Texas, 1936	Catesby 1731
Ground dove	Ground dove	Current	Catesby 1731
Red-headed wood- pecker	Red-headed wood- pecker	Current	Catesby 1731
Red-bellied wood- pecker	Red-bellied wood- pecker	Current	Catesby 1731
Blue jay	Blue jay	Current	Catesby 1731
Purple martin	Purple martin	Current	Catesby 1731
Catbird	Catbird	Current	Catesby 1731
French mockingbird	Brown thrasher	Current	Catesby 1731
Rice bird ⁶	Bobolink	Current	Catesby 1731
Cardinal	Cardinal	Current	Catesby 1731
Towhe [bird]	Eastern towhee	Current	Catesby 1731
Baldface	Baldpate	Current	Lawson 1709
Blue peter	Common gallinule	S.C., 1936	Lawson 1709
[Will] willet	Willet	Current	Lawson 1709
Tomtit	Tufted titmouse	Current	O.E.D. (Engl., titmouse) 1709
Sora	Sora	Current	Beverley (Va., saurer) 1705

TRACING TO THE 17TH CENTURY

Number of terms, 56; longevity: low 194; high 345; average 276.6, years.

In this hundred years the colonizing voyagers wrote (for the most part briefly) about birds of the Atlantic seaboard. However, a visitor, the Reverend John Clayton, in "A letter . . . to the Royal Society, May 12, 1688, giving an account of several observables in Virginia" referred to a surprising number of species and used names for some of them as bald eagle, whip-poor-will, and blue bird that prevail to the present time. Except in the works of these writers, records of our bird names in the 17th century are largely to be found in standard treatises on the avifauna of the British Isles. Some of these designations for the same species (as gadwall, magpie, snowflake) were legitimately applied to American birds, but others could be so used only by more or less strained transfers, as hickwall (green woodpecker to flicker); skylark (that bird to the horned lark); and water wagtail (from a true wagtail to a water thrush, a bird of a different family).

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Cock robin	Common robin	Knight (Me.) 1908	O.E.D. (Engl., a bird of same family) 1699
Mollymawk	Fulmar	Current	Martens 1694
Bustard	Canada goose	Que., 1937	Denys Transl. 1688
Bald eagle	Bald eagle	Current	Clayton (Va.) 1688
White owl	Barn owl	Current	Clayton (Va.) 1688
Scritch owl ⁷	Screech owl	Current	Clayton (Va.) 1688
Whippoo-will	Whippoorwill	Current	Lawson 1709
Blue bird	Eastern bluebird	Current	Clayton (Va.) 1688
Virginian nightingale	Cardinal	S.C., 1936	Clayton (Va.) 1688
Hickwall	Yellow-shafted flicker	Burns (Conn.) 1900	O.E.D. (Engl., green woodpecker 1688) ⁸
Moor-cock	Willow ptarmigan	Nfd., 1878-79	Sibbald (red grouse, Scotland) 1684
Pictar	Common tern	N.B., 1937	Sibbald (Scotland) 1684
Kittiwake	Common kittiwake	Current	Sibbald (Scotland) 1684
Church owl	Barn owl	Current	Sibbald (Scotland) 1684
Sky lark	Horned lark	Current	Sibbald (a British bird of same family) 1684
Snowflake	Snow bunting	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1683
Fish eagle	Osprey	Current	Willughby-Ray (Engl.) 1678
Shoveler	Shoveler	Current	Willughby-Ray (Engl.) 1678

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Golden-eye	Common golden-eye	Current	Willughby-Ray (Engl.) 1678
Eagle owl	Great horned owl	Lees & Clutterbuck (B.C.) 1888	Willughby-Ray (Engl.) 1678
Water ousel	Dipper	Current	Willughby-Ray (Engl.) 1678
Red bird	Cardinal	Current	Glover (Va.) 1676
Smew	Hooded merganser	R.I., 1899	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1674
White partridge	Willow ptarmigan	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1674
Snow bird	Snow bunting	Current	Josselyn (N.Engl.) 1674
Cross-bill	Red crossbill	Current	Willughby (Engl.) 1670
Butcher bird	Shrikes	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1668
Shag	Cormorants	Current	Merrett (Engl.) 1667
Gadwall	Gadwall	Current	Merrett (Engl.) 1667
Green plover	Golden plover	Me., Mass., 1919	Merrett (Engl.) 1667
Gray plover	Black-bellied plover	Various States 1919	Merrett (Engl.) 1667
Sand martin	Bank swallow	Current	Merrett (Engl.) 1667
Sea parrot	Common puffin	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1665
Jacksnipe	Common snipe	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1663
House sparrow	English sparrow	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1663
Ortolan	Sora	Current	O.E.D. (Engl., a finch) 1656
Bank swallow	Bank swallow	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1655
Ox-eye	Dunlin	Conn., 1892	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1649
Jenny wren	House wren	Current	O.E.D. (Engl., a related species) 1648
Sea swallow	Terns	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1647
Old wife	Old squaw	Current	Wood (N.Engl.) 1634
Hummingbird	Ruby-throated hummingbird	Current	Morton (N.Engl.) 1632
Willick	Common murre	Sutton (Southampton Id.) 1932	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1631
Thrasher	Brown thrasher	Texas, 1936	Capt. John Smith, 1624
Hound	Old squaw	Current	Whitbourne (Nfd.) 1623
Goosander	Common merganser	Current	Drayton (Engl.) 1622
Smethe	Pintail	Trumbull (N.J.) 1888	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1622
Cur	Common goldeneye	Trumbull (N.J.) 1888	Burton O.E.D. (Engl.) 1621-51
Sea pigeon	Black guillemot	Current	Mason O.E.D. (Nfd.) 1620
Wood pigeon	Passenger pigeon	Mich., 1912	Strachey (Va.) 1618
Water wagtail	Yellow-breasted water thrush	Current	O.E.D. (Engl. for a bird of another family) 1611
Chugärro	Red-winged blackbird	C. E. Gilliam (Va.) 1935 [letter]	Topsell-Christy (Va.) c. 1610
Magpie	Black-billed magpie	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1605
Sanderling	Sanderling	Current	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1602
Murre	Razor-billed auk	Nfd., 1945	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1602
Duckinmallard	Mallard	Brimley (N.C.) 1911	O.E.D. (Engl.) 1602

TRACING TO THE 16TH CENTURY

Number of terms, 26; longevity: low, 285; high, 434; average, 377.5 years.

The largest single repository of names, the records of which begin in this hundred-year period, is William Turner's *Avium Praecipuarum . . .*, published in 1544, and now chiefly available in an edition by A. H. Evans entitled, *Turner on Birds* (1903). That some of his 400-year-old names are current is a tribute to the lasting quality of words. If Turner were to accompany us on a bird trip today and we would say there's a godwit, a hen harrier, or creeper, he could say, "So it is."

The 1570 terms are from Peter Levins' *Manipulus vocabulorum, A dictionarie of English and Latine words*, and those of 1529 from John Skelton's *Phyllyp Sparowe*, this title itself being the earliest recorded example of a nickname for the House (or English) sparrow, known on both sides of the Atlantic. [Records gleaned from the O.E.D.]

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Heath hen	Heath hen	Bul. 50, U.S. Nat. Mus. 1946	O.E.D. (Engl., another bird of the same fam- ily) 1591
Heath cock	Heath hen	Altoona (Pa.) Tribune 1941	O.E.D. (Engl., another bird of the same fam- ily) 1590
Martin	Purple martin	Current	O.E.D. (for a European swallow) 1589
Noddy	Noddy	Current	O.E.D. 1578
Dabchick	Pied-bill grebe	Current	O.E.D. (for a related spe- cies) 1575
Redstart	American redstart	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of an- other family) 1570
Bullfinch	Eastern towhee	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) 1570
Shag	Cormorants	Current	O.E.D. 1566
Dive-dapper	Pied-bill grebe	Current	O.E.D. (for a related spe- cies) 1559
Yellow hammer	Yellow warbler	Peters (Nfd.) 1945	O.E.D. (for a bird of a different family) 1556
Pochard	Redhead	Hausmann 1944	O.E.D. (for a related spe- cies) 1552
Sea-pie	Brown-backed oyster- catcher	N.C., 1932	O.E.D. 1552
Dabchick	Horned grebe	Libhart (Pa.) 1844	O.E.D. 1550
Robin	Eastern robin	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) 1549
Ox bird	Dunlin	Current	O.E.D. 1547

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Godwit	Marbled godwit	Ark. 1919	Turner (for a related species) 1544
Hen harrier	Marsh hawk	Current	Turner 1544
House swallow	Barn swallow	Macauley (N.Y.) 1829	Turner 1544
Creeper	Tree creeper	Current	Turner 1544
Jackdaw	Fish crow	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) 1543
Penguin	Brown pelican	Brimley (N.C.) 1936	Howe (great auk) 1536
Dunlin	Dunlin	Me., N.Y., 1919	Swann 1530
Water hen	Common gallinule	Ont., 1919	O.E.D., 1529
Philip sparrow	English sparrow	Coues & Prentiss, 1883	O.E.D., 1529
Carrion crow	Common crow	Mason, 1924	O.E.D. (for a related species) 1528
Widgeon	Baldpate	Current	O.E.D., 1513

TRACING TO THE 15TH CENTURY

Number of terms, 11; longevity: low, 358; high, 546; average, 463.3 years.

By this time the references include no works especially devoted to birds, but have become entirely literary. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the c. 1450 names comes from Sir Richard Holland's *The Buke of Howlat*, and those of c. 1440 from the *Promptorium parvulorum*, an English-Latin lexicon. Most of the terms are transfers as applied to American birds, and a few as wood-wall, corbie, and merle have a quite antiquated sound.

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Wood-wall	Yellow-shafted flicker	Cheney 1892	O.E.D. (green wood-pecker) 1489
Blackbird	Common robin	Nfd., 1883	O.E.D. (for a related species) 1486
Stint	Least sandpiper	Ont., Man., 1919	O.E.D. (for a related species) 1466
Corbie	Common raven	Weygandt (Pa.) c. 1910	O.E.D. 1455
Pie	Gray jay	Current	O.E.D. (for the magpie of the same family) 1450
Robin redbreast	Common robin	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) c. 1450
Merle	Red-winged blackbird	Bishop (W.Va.) 1927	O.E.D. (for the European blackbird of a different family) 1450
Didapper	Pied-bill grebe	Current	O.E.D. (for a grebe) 1440
King's fisher	Belted kingfisher	Vancouver 1798	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) c. 1440
Sea mew	Herring gull	B.C., 1936	O.E.D. 1430
Redbreast	Common robin	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) 1401

TRACING TO THE 14TH CENTURY

Number of terms, 9; longevity: low, 392; high, 645; average, 566.3, years.

Geoffrey Chaucer is the author whose manuscripts contain bird names, the earliest references to which are from this century, now seeming so long ago. The c. 1381 example is from *The parlement of foules* and the c. 1366 words from "An ABC" (O.E.D.). The generalized cognomens, as lark, cormorant, and heron seem familiar enough, but hedge sparrow, reed sparrow, and red mavis are strange as applied to American birds.

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Reed sparrow	Swamp sparrow	Bartram 1792	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) c. 1400
Dipper	Pied-bill grebe	Current	O.E.D. (for various diving birds) one as early as 1388
Hedge sparrow	White-crowned sparrow	B.C., 1936	Chaucer, c. 1381
Curlew	Curlew	Current	O.E.D. 1377
Lark	Eastern meadowlark	Current	Chaucer, c. 1366 (ancestral forms to c. 725)
Red mavis	Wood thrush	Mass. 1912	Chaucer (for the European song thrush) c. 1366
Sheldrake	Mergansers	Current	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) 1325
Cormorant	Cormorants	Current	O.E.D. 1320
Heron	Heron	Current	O.E.D. 1302

TRACING TO THE 13TH TO 7TH CENTURIES

Number of terms, 14; longevity: low, 648; high, 1247; average 1033.5, years.

The citations dealt with here as also for the 14th century are entirely from manuscripts. Those of c. 1000 are from Aelfric's *De veteri et de novo testamento* (The old and new testaments) and those of c. 725 from the *Corpus glossary* (O.E.D.). A surprising proportion of the designations are for the same species of birds in England and in America, two of them, however, the pheasant and starling, having been very much later introduced into the western continent. Some of the names, as crow and wren, are every-day expressions, though known to be more than twelve hundred years old, and of course extending much farther back in unrecorded speech.

Folk name	Standard name	Late reference	Early reference
Pheasant	Ruffed grouse and Ring-necked pheasant	Current	O.E.D. 1299
Grepe	Osprey	Nfd., 1945	O.E.D. (a vulture) c.1250
Fieldfare	Eastern robin	Brasher (N.Y.) 1929-32	O.E.D. (for a related species), c. 1100
Starling	Red-winged blackbird, now the Starling	Current	O.E.D. c. 1050
Gannet	Gannet; also widely misapplied	Current	O.E.D. c. 1000
Purre	Dunlin	Samuels 1897	O.E.D. c. 1000
Stern	Terns	Current, N.S., N.B.	O.E.D. c. 800
Raven	Ravens and crows	Current	O.E.D. c. 800
Star	Starling	N.J., 1917; Pa., 1919	O.E.D. c. 725
Snite	Common snipe	Nfd., 1895	O.E.D. c. 725
Wren	House wren	Current	O.E.D. c. 725
Rook	Common raven	B.C., 1937	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) c. 725
Rook	Common crow	Mackenzie 1942	O.E.D. (for a bird of the same family) c. 725
Crow	Crow	Current	O.E.D. c. 700

An interesting phenomenon related to the subject matter of the present essay may be thought of as the "inheritance of names"—or the passing to other kinds of a name or names of a species that has become less common or extinct. Thus the designation penguin, though now applied to distinctive, flightless water birds of southern oceans, originally meant the great auk. This frequenter of the North Atlantic in its heyday migrated (by swimming as it could not fly) regularly as far south as Maine and Massachusetts and casually to South Carolina and even to Florida. As voyagers and fishermen came in ever increasing numbers, the great auk was rapidly reduced by being used for human food and for fish bait, and the last one, so far as known, was killed in 1844.

Though the auk was gone, its name, penguin, remained, being transferred to at least four sizeable sea fowl on our eastern coast. These, in the order reported from north to south, were the: common cormorant (Nfd., date heard 1930), razor-billed auk ("pinwing," Nfd., 1874; penguin, Que., 1894; and York penguin, Que., 1937), gray-cheeked grebe (penquien, Md., 1936; and pinquim, pinquin, and pinquint, Va., 1913), and the brown pelican (N.C., S.C., 1936). Some of these records are for a period nearly 100 years after the extinction of the great auk and doubtless certain of the names persisted long enough to more than fill out the century.

In 1672, John Josselyn (*New Englands Rarities Discovered*) re-

corded "wobble" for a bird that has been identified as the great auk. With only a one-letter difference, wobbie was found as a name of the red-throated loon (N.B., 1873), and in further varying forms is in wide and long-standing use for that species in the far northeast (back to Cartwright, Labr. 1770). It seems possible that a transfer of the name from auk to loon explains the situation. William Dutcher (*Auk*, 1891, p. 215) suggested that the surf scoter had perhaps fallen heir to the title, pied duck (Nfd., Labr), historically pertaining to the Labrador duck, the last individual of which known to man was collected in 1878.

The immense flights of the passenger pigeon made a lasting impression, but even its incredibly vast numbers could not save it from extermination, as at every opportunity it was killed wholesale for food and finally shipped by carloads to market—the finishing stroke. In the midwestern plains country, at least four shore birds got the name prairie pigeon, because their abundance in migration recalled the flights of the passenger pigeon. In the probable order in which these birds received this name, they were the: Eskimo curlew (record from Nebraska), golden plover (Ill., Minn., Iowa), pectoral sandpiper (Iowa), and dowitcher (S. Dak.). The process was a sort of passing along of the name, for the Eskimo curlew was rapidly reduced and is now almost or quite extinct; the golden plover in but little better case (both of these heavily slaughtered for market), and the other species have been cut down to a small fraction of their old-time numbers.

Use of the term golden plover, for the upland plover, as heard by me in Texas in 1934, also probably was in the nature of an "inheritance." F. M. Weston informed me (1928) that the appellation, Spanish curlew was transferred in South Carolina to the Hudsonian, from the long-billed, curlew after the disappearance of the latter species. Records of this usage from the same state and from Texas were received in 1942 and 1936, respectively. In manuscript for a contemplated revision of his "Names and Portraits of Birds," Gurdon Trumbull noted (New Brunswick, and Massachusetts) the transfer of the designation, sickle-bill, to the persisting Hudsonian, from the "vanished" long-billed curlew. The long-bill, still pretty well represented in the West, and once a regular migrant (and winter resident south) on the Atlantic Coast, is now only a straggler anywhere east of the Mississippi. All of these instances tend to show that a word may last longer than a bird.

NOTES

- ¹ Fuller citations of published sources are given in the terminal list of literature, except for those in the *Oxford English Dictionary* which are obtainable from that work.
² In British use for the white, church, or barn owl (Tyto) to Ray 1674.
³ In earlier British use, Pennant (*British Zoology*) 1766, for the European representative of our barn swallow.
⁴ Applied to other water birds in England as early as 1388, O.E.D.
⁵ The period of Cartwright's stay in Labrador, not of publication of his journal, is used.
⁶ To 1704 for an East Indian bird, O.E.D.
⁷ In Merret, 1667, for a distinct European species.
⁸ Ancestral forms to 1532.

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