

## The D. V. O. C. and its Twentieth Anniversary

BY GEORGE SPENCER MORRIS

If one were inclined to question the potent charm of bird study he would surely have his doubts dispelled by reviewing the history of our Delaware Valley Ornithological Club which is about to start on its third decade.

It must indeed be a strong and binding interest which takes a group of men and knits them in so close and kindly a fellowship for twenty years.

To many of us who have played our little parts in the history of this organization it has meant a great deal and we find on self analysis that the D. V. O. C. has come to hold a really vital place in our existence. That is the personal side of it. There is, however, a broader and more important aspect of the club and its work.

Its birth and progress truly mark the renaissance of ornithology in the city, where once it flourished, but for many succeeding years languished—the city that once knew Wilson, Audubon and Cassin.

Faint ornithological quickenings might have been detected throughout the late seventies and early eighties. Collins and Trotter, fired by a common impulse, had started collections of bird skins; Rhoads, with little Morris often at his heels, was scouring the woods with a slingshot when he could not beg or borrow a gun; Stone had started to delve among the dusty skins of the Academy; Baily was busy with the birds of the Haverford woods; while Reed and Voelker were exploring the Tinicum meadows. Then some subtle influence drew these kindred spirits together, all save Collins, whose early death we still mourn.

Thus was born the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, and then was launched the impulse, which after twenty years has

once more made Philadelphia one of the chief centers of ornithological interest in this country, and has made the Academy of Natural Sciences one of the regular meeting-places for the annual convention of the American Ornithologists' Union.

We would not appear boastful, but it is probably a fact, that at no time in the history of bird study in this country has a body of men been able to keep up so full and persistent a line of investigation of the ornithological conditions of a given region for almost a quarter of a century.

Not that the Club's work has been confined to the Delaware Valley. Our members have traveled far. They have wandered from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Maine to Florida. Some have explored in Mexico and some have penetrated the frozen north. Others have visited the islands of the sea, or have renewed acquaintance with the birds of history and song in England or on the continent.

Such journeyings, however, may be looked upon as the individual efforts of certain men who happen to be members of our organization. Our real club work relates to the region which lies between Cape May and the Delaware Water Gap, or to make it a little broader, to Eastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey.

Our early efforts were largely devoted to the formation of local lists, especially in connection with the study of the migrations. This has always been an important part of our work, but our outlook soon broadened, and probably one of the great secrets of our success is to be found in the variety of viewpoints displayed at our meetings. At these a paper or talk by one or more of the members is always prepared in advance and announcement of the subject made by postal. Informal discussion follows the reading of papers in which all join freely. Thus our meetings bear on bird study from all sides, and in so doing reflect the personalities of our members. Scientific, popular and aesthetic ornithology are dealt with; art and photography play their part; the literary man and the sportsman are valued contributors to our evening's entertainment.

And what charming evenings they are which we spend in Stone's snug quarters at the Academy. Outside the world may be white and the winter winds whistling, but within it is cozy

and warm; the skins of summer birds are spread on the table round which we gather, and the talk may be running on days of song and sunshine and nest-building. There is Trotter with snapping eyes and incisive manner shooting some new ornithological theory at his club-mates and hammering it home in clear, terse sentences; or Hughes with his delicious drawl, rambling along in a reminiscent mood as he tells of birds and big game, and seasons his yarn with a dry humor wholly his own; or Rhoads just back from parts unknown with a fresh batch of bird skins and a lot to say about them; or De Haven newly returned from the coast with a whiff of the salt sea in his whiskers, ready to tell us stay-at-homes what the ducks and brant are doing. Few men can speak with greater authority of our coast-dwelling birds than De Haven. It may be, Weygandt is holding us half spell-bound as he reads one of the delightful word pictures which his facile pen has traced, and whereby he transports us at will through the green meadows of spring or into the cool shades of the summer woods. Perhaps Baily is on hand with a new lot of photographs, which are sure to bear tribute to their author's skill and patience, as well as his artistic sense and keen powers of observation. Pennock or Carter may be giving clear and illuminating accounts of recent trips or of some fresh bit of news from the bird world. And then there is Stone, with his hand ever on the tiller, quiet of manner but potent in influence. No matter who may be president, we all recognize him as the power behind the throne. With infinite tact he gives a push here and a pull there, as occasion requires, keeping us all in line. In our hearts we know that the guiding hand of Stone has made the D. V. O. C. what it is.

Our club exists with the least possible amount of business and politics. These are the rocks that have wrecked many a promising organization. We meet solely with one end in view, namely, the study of birds, and this is pursued in an atmosphere of good fellowship. The ornithologist is almost always a good fellow; he can hardly be otherwise. Life in the open, the love of nature, the joy in her beauties, the touch of adventure, the dash of sport, and then the illusive grace and charm of the wild bird pervading it all—that is ornithology. Such things

are not for the morose or mean man; of course the ornithologist is a good fellow; he cannot help himself. Birds and good-fellowship are, therefore, the watchwords of the D. V. O. C.

As has been said before, this club means a lot to some of us. Warm friendships have had their birth at our meetings, and with the passing years these have waxed stronger and stronger. It is there that we receive the inspiration and encouragement that sends us into the field full of enthusiasm and that brings us back eager to tell our story and to show the fruits of our labors.

The members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, in looking back over its twenty years of existence, see it against a fair background that reaches far beyond the somber walls of the Academy. 'Tis a background of woods and streams; of sandy beaches where gray gulls hover; of green salt meadows where curlews cry; of rolling hillsides and pine-clad mountains; of shady rivers, the haunt of the wood-duck; of dark morasses where dwells the heron; of breezy bays where the wild-fowl flock; of lonely lakes where laughs the loon; of silent nights, gleaming campfire and snug tent. The white and glistening fields of winter, the tender beauty of the spring, the richness of the summer-time, the glory of the autumn. The new day breaking on the mountain-tops, the red sun sinking in the sea. Truly "the wilderness and the solitary place" have been glad for us. Blue sky and white clouds, gray mists and driving storm; the crack of the gun, the tug of the sail, the stroke of the paddle—these are the things that lie back of it all and make us glad we have lived. To such things the elemental and that which is best in us responds. We may be often in doubt as to the wisdom of belonging to this or that organization, but we know that the D. V. O. C. is worth while.

After twenty years we find our little club stronger and more in earnest than ever before, and thus we meet the future with the confidence born of the knowledge that a good work has been well begun.