

# The Broadwing



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Montclair, NJ  
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## Mill Creek Marsh

### President's Message November 2020

We will continue with our virtual meetings and virtual bird walks at least through the end of this year. The newsletter will also remain a monthly publication for the foreseeable future.

An experimental bird walk took place at Mill Creek Marsh in October. It went well and we will now schedule additional excursions with a limited number of participants.

**Elise Morton**, Fairleigh Dickinson University, will address the club at the Wednesday, November 11 meeting. Her topic will be the dispersal of peregrine falcons from their birthplace to their first breeding site. More detail can be found on our website.

Sandy

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Meeting: Wednesday, November 11  
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, November 19  
Meeting: Wednesday, December 9

# Head Shots



## A LITTLE MUSEUM INTRIGUE

Rick Wright, [ventbird.com](http://ventbird.com)

It may be unfair to define history as forgotten gossip, but it can be hard sometimes to tell the difference. Digitization and the new accessibility of so much old material online makes it easy to delve deep into the lives of historical personages, even if sometimes what we dig up isn't necessarily all that savory.

A fascinating set of sources only now made widely available is the manuscript correspondence of nineteenth-century natural history collectors. Much, of course, still lurks in libraries, archives, and museums, and more no doubt has been lost, but the pages that have been scanned and posted on line provide a very different kind of insight into the lives and relationships of some of the world's best-known ornithologists—and not a few of the virtually unknown, too.

One of the challenges documented in that correspondence is the mundane matter of transport: Collectors in the field had to see to it that specimens from remote localities made it safe and sound to the colleagues and museums eagerly awaiting them. Things had improved in the American West of the late nineteenth century, but even then, sending a box from just about any site back to Washington or New York was a parlous business. The package might go by horse, by wagon, by train, by wagon again, and finally by messenger on foot before reaching its destination. The possibility of loss or even destruction only increased with the number of links in the transit chain.

To complicate matters further, many field collectors were supplying specimens to more than one friend, patron, or employer. Shipping a number of small packages multiplied the risk of loss and damage, making it preferable instead to prepare a single, less easily misplaced box the contents of which could be distributed on arrival.

Charles Bendire preferred the second method. Bendire, an immigrant from Hesse-Darmstadt, joined the US Army in 1854, serving with the cavalry until his retirement in 1886. He spent the last two decades of his military career stationed in the west, from Arizona to Washington, on a series of campaigns to eradicate Native Americans.

As early as 1870, Bendire was collecting natural history objects on the frontier, some for his own collections but most destined for colleagues and institutions in the east. He shipped botanical specimens to George Engelmann in St. Louis; horrifyingly, Bendire also supplied Engelmann's son, the medical academic George Julius Engelmann, with body parts taken from the Nez Perce and other Native Americans killed by soldiers under his command.



*Charles Bendire.*



Robert Ridgway at the Smithsonian.

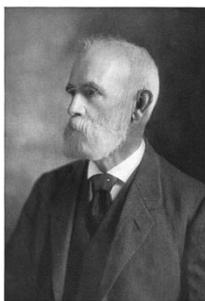
Bendire specialized, though, in birds, providing skins, eggs, nests, skeletons, and sometimes even refrigerated birds in the flesh to a number of well-known ornithologists and collectors in the east. He shipped specimens to Massachusetts for Thomas Mayo Brewer and William Brewster, to New York for Eugene P. Bicknell and George Newbold Lawrence, and of course to Washington, where Spencer Fullerton Baird used his influence to have Bendire and a host of other military collectors assigned to posts where they could be of most use to the collections of the Smithsonian.

Bendire was fretfully aware of the risks in sending such fragile and irreplaceable objects over such long distances. To reduce the possibility of loss, he frequently addressed a shipment to a single recipient, who would take possession of his skins and then dole out the others to the colleagues for whom Bendire intended them. Most often, Bendire directed his shipments to the National Museum in Washington, whence Baird, Robert Ridgway, and other members of the curatorial staff could forward the separate lots, presumably at government expense.

Eventually, though, Bendire began to suspect that his wishes were not being carried out at the Smithsonian.

The source of the bad blood between Bendire and Robert Ridgway is unclear; it is uncertain, for that matter, whether that blood flowed in both directions. Bendire was notoriously brusque and suspicious, and it is quite possible that Ridgway, famously courteous and respectful, had no idea that he was supposed to be locked in a bitter feud. But it was all very real in Bendire's mind, and by April 1885 at the latest, he was convinced that Ridgway was skimming.

In a letter that month to William Brewster in Cambridge, Bendire wrote from Fort Custer, Montana, that he had decided to "keep four birds [namely, four great horned owl skins] here [in Montana with Bendire] and send them on direct [to Brewster] instead of putting them in with those of the Museum, as Ridgway would want to keep all the good ones" rather than forward them to Brewster as allotted.



William Brewster  
December, 1916

William Brewster.

Not long thereafter, anticipating that he might be reassigned on short notice, Bendire alerted Brewster that he had found himself forced after all to add some specimens meant for him to a box addressed to the Museum: "I enclosed for you the finest pair of [greater sage grouse] and the only male [prairie falcon] and a poorly prepared [hairy woodpecker] in



Prairie falcon, Robert Ridgway.

a box which I will ship shortly to the Nat. Museum at Washington.... The three [sic] birds have each a small paper stuck into the slit of the body which cannot be seen and will not be suspected and the birds themselves are tied up in cotton

batting and labeled on the outside for you. There can't be any possible mistake made." In the male grouse, "a particularly fine specimen," Bendire tells Brewster that he has carefully run the wire used to stiffen the skin out through one side of the head. "In all the others [namely, the grouse skins intended for the Museum] the wire is not visible. I want just to know if you get the birds I selected." For the same reason, Bendire tells Brewster that he has also turned the head of the female grouse slightly to the side.

Three months later, Bendire's anxiety had only increased. He writes to Brewster asking again to let him know whether Ridgway has sent the right birds to Cambridge; two weeks later, he writes yet another time, now telling Brewster that he will ask Ridgway himself to confirm that the birds were properly distributed. Finally, in early August, apparently having received an encouraging answer, Bendire sends a note to Brewster expressing his relief that Ridgway has indeed forwarded some birds—but he still insists that Brewster look for the slips of paper secreted in the stuffed skins, the only proof that these were actually the individual birds Bendire had intended for him.

Brewster's reply, if there was one, does not seem to be preserved. But Brewster's manuscript registers record the receipt from Bendire of specimens of the falcon, the grouse, and the woodpecker, with the appropriate dates and matching identifications to sex; and those same birds still lie on their backs in the drawers of Harvard's Museum of Natural History. To my knowledge, however, no one has parted the feathers of their underparts to look for the hidden notes placed there almost a century and a half ago.



*Hairy woodpecker,  
Ridgway.*

On his retirement from the army, Bendire moved to Washington. He had accepted an honorary curatorial appointment to the Smithsonian three years earlier, and now he returned to begin work on what would be the first two volumes of his *Life Histories*. In the Museum he worked side by side with Robert Ridgway. There is no record of any reconciliation (if reconciliation was even required), but the not infrequent mentions of Ridgway in Bendire's letters would henceforth lack any sign of the suspicion with which he had regarded his younger colleague just the year before. Familiarity no doubt bred trust in Ridgway's probity.

Sordid personal stories like this may add little to our understanding of the greater sweep of ornithological history. But the mere fact that they can be reconstructed, nearly a century and a half after the fact, hints at the unfathomed value of manuscript letters unread for nearly as long—and now available to any of us at the click of a mouse.

***Rick Wright leads Birds and Art tours in Europe and the Americas for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours.***

## [First fossil feather matches \*Archaeopteryx\*](#)

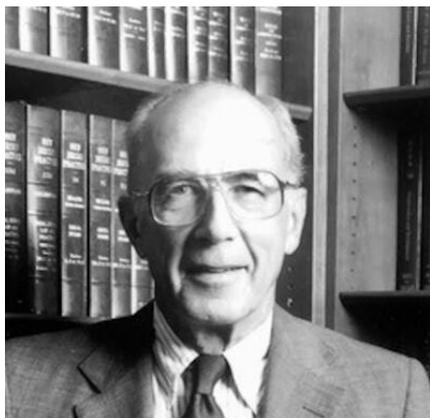
The origins of a stunning, single fossil feather—the first fossil feather ever discovered—has tantalized paleontologists since it was found in 1861. Now it’s “case closed,” [says paleontologist Ryan Carney: the feather is from an \*Archaeopteryx\*](#). Not only that, it was probably matte black. Carney and colleagues compared the feather’s fine details with those on more complete *Archaeopteryx* fossils to make the match. Not everyone is convinced, but scientists welcome the insights into an iconic specimen. “To me, ultimately, the important thing is that this feather belonged to a small-winged Jurassic animal that could fly pretty well,” says vertebrate paleontologist Stephen Brusatte. “No doubt the warm, sunny lagoons of Jurassic Germany were aflutter with lots of flying dinosaurs.”

A close-up photograph of a fossil feather found in 1861 in Bavaria, and originally identified as coming from an *archaeopteryx*. (Museum für Naturkunde)



## Walter Jacobus Hunziker, Jr.

July 19, 2020



Walter Jacobus Hunziker, Jr., 90, known throughout his life as Skip, died peacefully on July 19, 2020 on Martha's Vineyard, MA, where he retired several years ago. A longtime resident of Montclair, NJ, he had lived with Parkinson's disease for some time. He was 90 years old.

Born and raised in Paterson, NJ, Skip attended College High School at Montclair State, Amherst College, Yale Law School, and later earned a Master of Law in Taxation from New York University. After law school, Skip graduated from the Navy's Officer

Candidate School in Newport, RI, and served as an Air Intelligence Officer aboard the USS *Intrepid* in the Mediterranean. Following his term of active duty, he joined his father in the family law firm of Hunziker, Jones & Sweeney, from which he retired in 2015. As an advisor and counselor to generations of families, Skip drafted over 800 estate plans for his clients.

During his professional career he devoted himself to a wide range of community organizations, serving as Chair of the Montclair Township Planning Board for 19 years, Trustee and officer of the Passaic County Legal Aid Society, President of the Hamilton Club in Paterson, Chair of the NJ Supreme Court's District Committee on Professional Ethics, and President of Union Congregational Church in Montclair. He received numerous awards and recognitions for his public service, including the Legacy Award of the William Paterson University Foundation. Skip was legendary in his allegiance and service to his beloved Amherst College, where in his postgraduate years he served as Class President and Amherst Fund Class Agent. It is said that he never missed a reunion.

In addition to his commitment to volunteerism, his family and friends will fondly remember Skip's engaging sense of humor, his love of poetry and song, and his unwavering devotion to the NY Mets. He was an avid birdwatcher and hiker throughout his lifetime, and particularly enjoyed his long association with the Boy Scouts of America. He attained the rank of Eagle Scout with Troop 5 in Paterson and served as Scoutmaster of Troop 13 in Montclair, where he instituted the tradition of mid-winter overnight camping trips on the Appalachian Trail.

Skip is survived by his wife, Norma Norton Holmes of Edgartown, MA, his daughter, Robin Smith of Winchester, MA; and sons, Gordon Hunziker (Katherine) of Glen Ridge, NJ, and Stuart Hunziker (Bonnie) of Topsfield, MA. He also leaves behind his grandchildren, Margaret, Haley, Christopher, Elizabeth, Kurt, Emily, and Brooke as well as many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his former wife of 46 years, Gladys Thompson Hunziker, as well as his brother Robert and sister Sarah Garfield.

## A Dray of Squirrels

By Sandy Sorkin

**“Why dost thou try to reason with a squirrel?”**

*W. Shakespeare*

**“I now realize, I should have been a squirrel watcher.”**

*Anonymous*

On those winter afternoons when the family gathers around the fireplace dreaming up collective nouns to describe the creatures around us, rarely does anyone suggest a “dray of squirrels.” The collective noun aficionados’ default is most often a “scurry of squirrels,” even though a dray accurately reflects our honest feelings about these gray beasts. But it is no wonder we cannot agree on a collective noun when we cannot even agree on whether the squirrel is “gray” or “grey.” If you are not familiar with a dray, it is a cart without sides typically used to haul beer barrels. From the perspective of squirrels, the most important feature is the lack of sides. Undoubtedly, thirsty squirrels appreciate not having to climb over barriers to lighten the barrels.



*Intently not listening to reason*

While we have little demonstrable proof other than their acts, the origin of squirrels and probably their ultimate destination is Dante’s Third Circle: Gluttony. Squirrelologists continually fail to record the simple observation that squirrels can eat three to four times their original weight during one raid on a defenseless birdfeeder. After those gluttonous sessions, they never appear to have gained weight, unless, of course, they have been sampling the dray’s barrels. I admit that I have never seen a fat, or inebriated squirrel, though, I did see one fall out of a tree.

Numerous monuments around the world were originally created as demonstration projects to show the populace how to deter squirrels. None were ever truly successful, but many economies benefited from the enormous expenditures of resources and human effort dedicated to the challenge. Monument examples are everywhere and span the ages all the way back to the Great Pyramid of Giza where Khufu is buried. Notably, no tomb hieroglyphs contain the precise likeness of a squirrel. This did not lessen the motivation to build bigger and better

pyramids. Rulers were buried with possessions, servants, and stores to carry them into the afterlife. To digress again, it is abundantly clear that the afterlife did not include squirrels. But the afterlife would require grain. The seeds could be planted, more likely they could be fermented to provide drink for the guy reclining at the back of the boat being ferried through the sky.



*The only known hieroglyph with a bird feeder (far left) and a happy face preparing to drink a martini.*

And it was that attractive grain that also enticed squirrels. It is therefore debatable as to whether the pyramid was a glorious tomb, or an attempt to keep out squirrels. History can be cruel when incomplete records are kept, but the number of tunnels into tombs attributed to plunderers were probably excavated by legions of squirrels. And they probably did it in a matter of hours.



*Spy squirrel*

Throughout history, attempts to keep out squirrels have been futile. The Great Wall of China did not come close. Most of the executive squirrels clawed their way to the top and leaped from the other side. In the squirrel hierarchy, it was thought that these squirrels were smarter or cleverer, but they were not. All they discovered was that the grass was not greener on the other side of the wall. Of course, they could have made that determination if they had looked before they leaped. The rank-and-file squirrels simply made their way through cracks in the wall

and quickly came to the same conclusion without the risk of bounding from a great height.

Other walls have also failed. Hadrian's Wall, Berlin Wall, Troy Wall, even Wall Street. All failures, the squirrels breached them all.

The squirrel solution adopted in some states is to eat them. While this may have worked to extirpate mastodons and open new horizons for rodents, it has never had a significant impact on the squirrel population. Additionally, history does not record any mastodon versus squirrel confrontations. As our southern neighbors ate their squirrel stews, there was possibly some ambivalence about managing their rude birdfeeder manners with roasting.



*Taunting*

The ultimate irony is that we have sent people to the moon, and discovered the Higgs boson, and it had no impact on protecting birdfeeders. I wanted to end this rant with a pithy comment from Douglas Adams of Hitchhiker fame, but it turned out the quote was about Douglas and Adams Counties in Washington, so I didn't use it.

## Birds in this Issue

Page 1	Semipalmated sandpipers
Page 8	Squirrel, squirrel, squirrel

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### Rick's VENT schedule through September 2022

- **April 20 - 28, 2021** [France: Birds & Art in Provence](#)
  - **April 29 - May 9, 2021** [France: Birds & Art in Burgundy](#)
  - **May 12 - 20, 2021** [Poland: Birds & Art in Royal Krakow](#)
  - **July 18 - 31, 2021** [Circumnavigation of the Black Sea](#)
  - **August 19 - 28, 2021** [England: British Birdfair & Coastal Norfolk](#)
  - **September 8 - 17, 2021** [Spain: Birds & Art in the Northwest](#)
  - **September 19 - 28, 2021** [Germany: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg](#)
  - **September 27 - October 14, 2022** [South Africa: Birds, Wildlife & Culture](#)
  - **May 12 - 20, 2022** [France: Birds & Art in Provence](#)
  - **May 20 - 30, 2022** [France: Birds & Art in Burgundy](#)
  - **May 30 - June 9, 2022** [Germany in Spring: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg](#)
  - **September 7 - 22, 2022** [Hungary & The Czech Republic: Birds & Music from Budapest to Prague](#)
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# The MBC Bulletin Bird

## Broadwing

The Broadwing is published five times a year: January, March, May, late summer, and October. **Or more often if there is a pandemic.**

Send photos, field notes, or articles to the editor at [oguss.editor@gmail.com](mailto:oguss.editor@gmail.com) or mail to Elizabeth Oguss, 200 Valley Road, Montclair, NJ 07042. Thanks!

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From the Desk of the Very Temporary Editor:

Please feel free to e-mail me with any items you would like included in future issues of the Broadwing. Please include pictures and any other news that will reduce anxiety and make us smile.

**[MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com](mailto:MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com)**

# Montclair Bird Club Officers for 2019-20

President ..... Sandy Sorkin  
Vice President..... Jim McGregor  
Treasurer ..... Donna Traylor  
Recording Secretary ..... Pat Sanders

## Committees

Field Trips ..... Bill Beren  
Programs ..... Donna Traylor  
Publicity ..... Wayne Greenstone  
Refreshments ..... JoAnn Katzban and Betsy Cohen



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