

Philo Romaine Hoy

By A. W. SCHORGER

The subject of this sketch, Philo Romaine Hoy, was born at Mansfield, Ohio, November 3, 1816. His parents were of revolutionary stock and he is reputed to have been the second white boy born in the community. In his youth, on account of the color of his hair, he was called Red-headed Woodpecker by his brothers. This name was in keeping with his subsequent great interest in birds. He graduated from Ohio Medical College, Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1840 and came to Racine to practise his profession in 1846. It is of note that he began his ornithological observations at Racine the year of his arrival.

The scientific interests of Dr. Hoy covered an exceptionally broad field. By 1876 his collections contained 318 species of birds, eggs of 150 species, 35 mammals, 50 reptiles, 1300 beetles, 2000 moths, etc.¹⁴ His published papers cover birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, molluscs, insects, and Indian antiquities. He was the first person to investigate the deep-water fauna of Lake Michigan.

There is nothing more stimulating than friendship with men of kindred interests. At Racine he had Rev. A. C. Barry. Hoy records that on May 5, 1852, he and Barry collected 47 warblers representing 16 species. The beginning of his friendship with Increase A. Lapham is told as follows: "My first acquaintance with Dr. Lapham was in 1846, when one morning there landed from the steamer Sultana a small man with a huge collecting box hanging at his side."

"He came from Milwaukee and intended returning on foot along the lake-shore in order to collect plants and shells, no easy journey, encumbered as he soon would be, with a well filled specimen box. He spoke lightly of the undertaking, saying he had performed similar feats before. . . . In after years we were often together, studying the mounds, quarries, forest trees, etc., near Racine, and my first impression of his energy, perseverance, enthusiasm, accuracy and extent of information were all deepened by our subsequent meetings."¹⁵

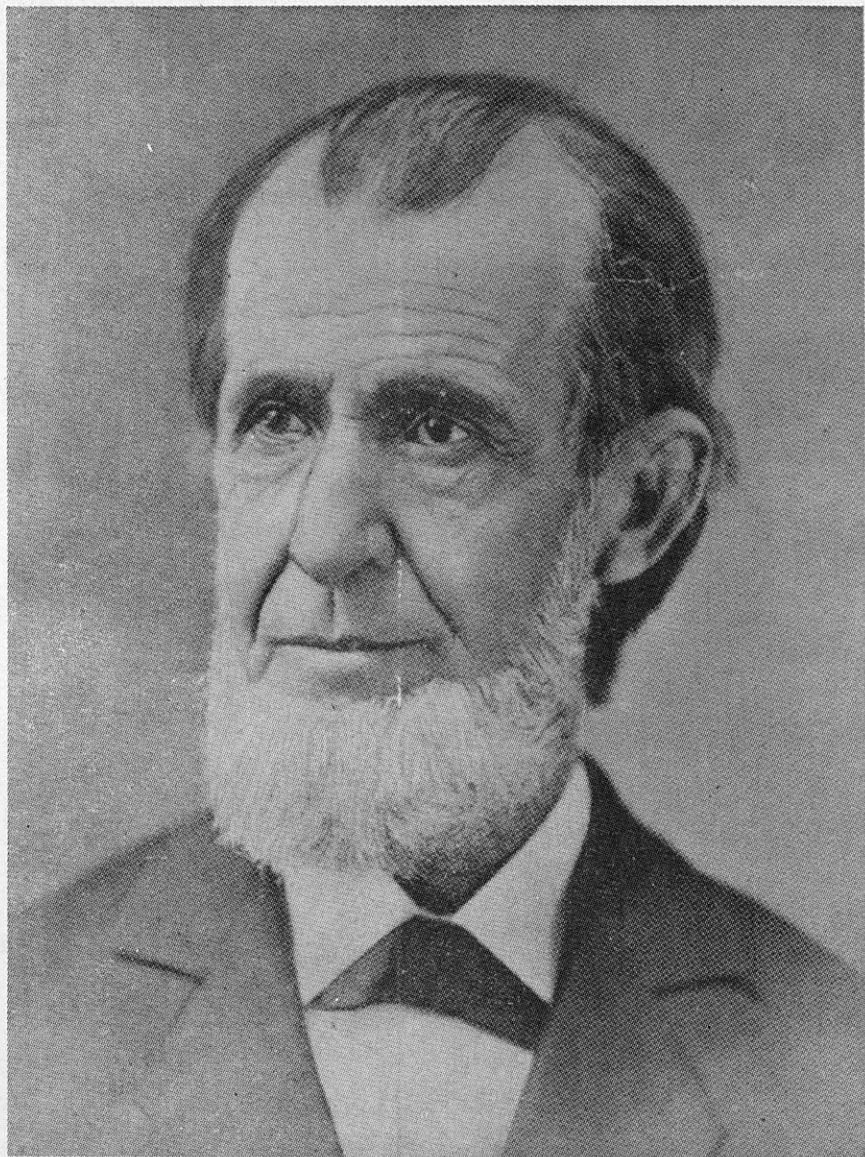
Botany and conchology then engaged the attention of Lapham. His statement that the various other branches of the natural history of Wisconsin, ornithology, mammalogy, ichthyology, herpetology, and entomology were "sealed books" led to Hoy's resolution to devote all of his spare time to their study.¹⁶ A wide country practise was a great aid to his avocation. As would be expected, he was accused occasionally of wasting his time.

In July,* 1853, there came to Racine Spencer F. Baird of the Smithsonian Institution.¹⁷ With him was J. P. Kirtland of Cleveland who took the first specimen of the Kirtland's warbler. The first week was spent collecting near Racine. A garter snake, new to science, was named by Baird *Eutaenia radex* after Racine. Baird shot a Wilson's phalarope on July 15. This species nested "sparingly" at Racine at that time. The party, including the above gentlemen and Rev. Mr. Barry, spent sixteen days driving through the counties of Racine, Walworth, Rock, Dane, Jefferson, Waukesha, and Milwaukee. At Madison Lucius Fairchild stopped his mill at the outlet of Lake Mendota so that they could collect fish in the stream.

One evening while I was watching the late Professor E. T. Owen mount some butterflies, the conversation drifted to Dr. Hoy. He stated that when Hoy was shown a beautiful or rare butterfly, his interest was slight if it did not come from Wisconsin and reached the vanishing point if it was foreign. On the other hand it is recorded that when Philo Romaine Driver, a lad of seventeen, was making a trip to Scotland, he was asked to collect nests and eggs for him.¹⁸ This request was fulfilled. The fact remains however that Hoy was interested mainly in the fauna about Racine. Baird considered his collection of birds the largest local one ever made. It was for this reason that he was visited by Dr. Christian L. Brehm of Germany, and by Henry Seeborn and R. F. Nichols of England.

The promising Robert Kennicott, at the age of nineteen, was sent to Racine in March, 1854, to continue his studies under Dr. Hoy. Kennicott did the first zoological work of importance in the state of Illinois. The high esteem in which Hoy was held

*Hoy states that Baird and Kirtland came to Racine on June 24. Baird's correspondence in the files of the Smithsonian Institution shows that he could not have arrived until the second week in July.



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is shown by the following: "Through Dr. Hoy's instructions Robert's knowledge of practical and field zoology was greatly advanced, as his subsequent correspondence with this gentleman shows. . . . Dr. Hoy's study of the birds had been so thorough and long-continued that the presence of any species, even to the smallest warbler, was known to him by its note. At intervals during this (1854) and the two following years, Robert spent much time at Racine, actively engaged in zoological studies."¹⁹

The far-sighted Lapham was busily engaged in 1859 in the attempt to obtain legislative authorization for a state natural history survey. Under date of February 16 he wrote to Robert Kennicott: "I have many doubts about **our** survey, but there is a small hope of success. It is useless to count our 'chickens' yet—but the plan is to give 'Bob' the Mammals, and Dr. H[oy] the Birds and let each work on their own account,

finishing those two classes first, but lose no opportunity in the meantime to secure facts and specimens in other departments for future use. We could then take up the other classes of animals in succession as time and means would allow. Perhaps it would be well to call in the aid of others occasionally. I would take full charge of the botany."³¹ The bill called for a geological and agricultural survey in order to give the work a thoroughly utilitarian slant. Most unfortunately it did not pass. A survey at that time, when much of Wisconsin was still in a primitive condition, would have been of inestimable value.

In 1852 Hoy¹ described two species of birds, presumably new, and as happened so frequently during this period, they were found subsequently to be otherwise. His *Nyctale kirtlandi* was shown by Ridgway²⁰ to be the young of the saw-whet owl. Hoy's description was based on two specimens, one of which flew into an open shop in Racine in July, 1852.* The presence of a young bird at Racine in July is strong presumptive evidence that the species bred in the vicinity. His *Bubo subarcticus* was considered to be the Western great-horned owl.

His *Buteo bairdi*² was identified as Swainson's hawk. Cassin²¹ in discussing the *Falconidae* stated that he had received two specimens of this hawk, one from Dr. Hoy and one from William Dudley, Secretary of the Wisconsin Natural History Association at Madison.

Dudley²² came into possession of a crane shot on the Sugar River, Dane County, and thought that it was new to science. In 1854 he named it *Grus hoyanus* in honor of Dr. Hoy. It was found to be an immature whooping crane. Stimpson²³ shows a good colored plate of *Grus hoyanus*.

In 1853 appeared his valuable paper, *Notes on the Ornithology of Wisconsin*, an annotated list of 283 species, published by the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.³ This paper with seven additional species, some of which are not valid, was printed the same year by the Wisconsin Agricultural Society.⁴

The collecting trip with Baird in 1853 appears to have carried the element of reciprocity. Hoy,⁷ in the spring of 1854, spent about two months in western Missouri collecting for the Smithsonian Institution. While in St. Louis he noted in the window of a barber-shop a black-bellied fox squirrel such as was found at Racine. On inquiry he learned that it had been taken on the Wisconsin River. His narrative relates largely to birds of which there is a nominal list of 153 species. He also collected mammals, fish, reptiles, and insects.

Several minor ornithological papers were published between 1861 and 1885. The habits of the yellow-bellied sapsucker, the peculiarities of the hyoid organ, and the relation of this species and the downy woodpecker to agriculture were discussed.⁵ A note⁸ mentions the meeting of the rough-winged swallow, and the capture of a yellow-bellied flycatcher at Racine on June 11, a late date for a migrant. In May, 1869, he was elated over taking four nests of the Cooper's hawk. It would not be difficult to duplicate this feat in southern Wisconsin today, but it is evident that the species was not a common summer resident at Racine. A paper on the larger wild animals that have become extinct in Wisconsin deals largely with mammals but does contain some valuable information on the former status of the wild turkey.¹¹ In 1885 he published a note¹³ stating that he had never found but two nests of the golden-winged warbler. This is of interest in that it is a quite common summer resident in southwestern Wisconsin at the present time.

The former status of the Carolina parakeet is of special interest. Hoy, in 1853, made the indefinite statement: "Formerly Parakets were common on the Mississippi within this State, latterly they are seldom met with." Later (1882) he wrote: "Father Joliet . . . mentions that 'on the Wisconsin there are plenty of turkey cocks, parrots, quails, wild oxen, stags and wild goats.'" I have been unable to connect this statement with the Wisconsin River. Hennepin²² in his version of Joliet's account, in discussing the lower Mississippi, says: ". . . plenty of Turkey-Cocks, Parrots, Quails, Wild-Bulls, Stags, and Wild-Goats." The parallelism is obvious. Marquette and Dablon in their writings on the expedition mention parrots only on the lower Mississippi. In fact Marquette mentions that no small game was seen on the Wisconsin. Not a single statement has been found in the literature regarding the occurrence of the parakeet in much travelled southwestern Wisconsin.

Two of Hoy's late papers are especially valuable in showing the great changes in bird life brought about by settlement. In 1874, before life zones were well defined, he pointed out that in the Racine region the northern species came farther south in

*In the U. S. National Museum is specimen No. 12,814 labelled *Nyctale albifrons* (i.e. *kirtlandi*), male, Racine, Wis., July, 1859. This is possibly the date of receipt rather than capture since the specimen was one of several rare skins donated to the Smithsonian Institution by Dr. Hoy in 1859.

winter and the southern species farther north in summer than elsewhere on the Great Lakes.¹⁰ Present Wisconsin ornithologists cannot fail to have a longing for the Hoyian days when they read the lists given below. The observations, with few exceptions, were made personally within 15 miles of Racine.

Winter Visitors

Great grey owl
Hawk owl
Arctic three-toed woodpecker
American three-toed woodpecker
Magpie
Canada jay
Evening grosbeak
King eider
Black-throated loon
Glaucous gull

Summer Visitors

Yellow-breasted chat
Mockingbird
Carolina wren
Summer tanager
Carolina parakeet
Whooping crane
Wood ibis
Royal tern

The paper, *Man's Influence on the Avifauna of Southeastern Wisconsin*, published in 1885, is perhaps Hoy's most interesting ornithological contribution.¹² He points out that for eight to ten years, beginning with the year 1845, Racine was an ornithological paradise. The strip of timber along the shore of Lake Michigan was virtually intact, while west of it was the high, rolling prairie. The land on which Racine is located projects two and one-half miles farther into the lake than Kenosha and six miles further than Milwaukee. Physical conditions served to route through Racine all the birds passing up and down the shore of the lake.

The former and present status of 26 species of birds are discussed. Hawks were only one-twentieth as plentiful as formerly while the swallow-tailed kite had disappeared altogether. It was not seen after 1856. Ravens were quite numerous but the crow was not seen until 1858. This seems strange since in an account of a side-hunt that took place in 1836, "Crows, Ravens, Owls, and Cranes" counted 30 points each.²⁴ It is doubtful that man had much influence on such species as the yellow-breasted chat, prothonotary warbler, Carolina wren, mockingbird, and cardinal. Evidently they were uncommon near Racine, but they cannot be considered rare in southern Wisconsin today. There is a periodic ebb and flow of species on the border of their range.

When it comes to the passenger pigeon, ruffed grouse, prairie chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkey, and sand-hill crane he is on safer ground. Shooting and destruction of habitat by agriculture were important factors in their decline, or extermination. It is of interest that he never saw more than a dozen whooping cranes in all in the vicinity of Racine.

The former abundance of quail is mentioned and he cites as an example that in the fall and winter of 1849 and 1850, C. A. Orvis shipped two tons of these birds to New York. He states: "Since this enterprise they became greatly diminished and have never recovered from that attack." He remarks on the death of hundreds of quail during a severe winter but weather is not mentioned as a factor in the decline. A study of the quail during this period has shown that it was very plentiful through 1854 and that severe weather was the chief cause of their subsequent depletion.

The field sparrow and vesper sparrow increased with settlement. Three specimens of the golden-crowned sparrow were taken in the autumns of 1853 and 1854, and in the spring of 1856. Hoy thought that the species was not as rare as was supposed. Nevertheless no other specimens are known to have been taken in the state.

The first woodcock was found in the vicinity of Racine in the spring of 1849. Subsequently it became common. The woodcock was never a rare bird in Wisconsin but is one of those species that fluctuates greatly in number.

The night of May 11, 1888, a cold driving rain benumbed hundreds of migrating birds at Racine.²⁵ The keeper of the lighthouse sent Hoy 65 birds for identification. The majority of them were warblers, the black-throated blue predominating. The most interesting specimen was an "Eared Grebe."

Hoy's journals and unpublished notes have not been seen. Judging from the few extracts that have appeared,²⁶ they contain valuable information.* In March, 1852, he recorded a flock of ten pelicans flying north along the lake. The Canada goose at that time nested abundantly. In 1850 their eggs were gathered by the bushel in a marsh north of Racine.

The ornithological collection formed by Hoy was donated to the Racine Public Library by his daughter, Mrs. Henry R. Miller. At the time of his death it contained 930 specimens. Through the efforts of the Racine Garden Club, the sadly neglected

*The journals, most of which are in the Milwaukee Public Museum, will be covered by Mrs. H. J. Anderson, of Racine, in a brochure in preparation.

collection was cleaned and most of the birds remounted, in 1939 and 1940, under the state W. P. A. museum project. It is now housed in the Court House. In the collection are specimens of the passenger pigeon, black-throated loon, and whooping crane.²⁷

The smaller birds were mounted originally by Mrs. Hoy, a passenger pigeon being the first specimen. The renovation disclosed that an odd assortment of materials had been used as stuffing, old bills, advertisements, newspaper, and even pieces of leather and neckties. As late as 1886, Dr. Hoy mounted a "white crane" that had been shot in Nebraska.²⁸

The work of Hoy in other branches of natural history is beyond the scope of this paper. It should be stated, however, that two specimens of a shrew taken at Racine were new to science. Baird²⁹ described it under the name *Sorex hoyi*. This shrew, rare in collections, was placed later in a new genus, *Microsorex*.

Hoy belonged to many scientific societies. On September 27, 1853, he and his friend Rev. A. C. Barry were elected Correspondents of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.³⁰ He was one of the members seeking incorporation of the Wisconsin Natural History Association, and a charter member and president of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. He belonged also to the Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Buffalo, and New York academies of sciences. He served as one of the state fish commissioners. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Wisconsin Academy took place in 1920. Hoy is one of the six distinguished academicians whose portraits appear on the medallion struck for the occasion.

Dr. Hoy was short in stature and brisk in manner. He was unusually kind and patient to anyone, child or adult, interested in his favorite subjects. His great love for natural history caused him to take every opportunity to further the cause of science. At his death in Racine on December 8, 1892, passed Wisconsin's greatest pioneer zoologist.

Ornithological Papers by Dr. Hoy

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2. **Buteo bairdii (new species).** Ibid. 6(1853)451.
3. **Notes on the ornithology of Wisconsin.** Ibid. 6(1853)304-313; 381-385; 425-429.
4. **Notes on the ornithology of Wisconsin.** Trans. Wis. State Agr. Soc. for 1852. 2(1853)341-364.
5. **The sapsucker.** Ibid. for 1860. 6(1861)243-248.
6. **The sapsuck.** Trans. Ill. State Agr. Soc. for 1861-4. 5(1865)730-734.
7. **Journal of an exploration of western Missouri in 1854, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.** Ann. Report Smith. Inst. for 1864. (1865) pp. 431-438.
8. **[Nesting of rough-winged swallow and capture of Empidonax flaviventris at Racine.]** Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. 12 (1869) 400.
9. **[Nesting of Cooper's hawk.]** Ibid. pp. 396-397.
10. **Some of the peculiarities of the fauna near Racine.** Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci. 2 (1874) 120-122.
11. **The larger wild animals that have become extinct in Wisconsin.** Ibid. 5(1882) 255-257.
12. **Man's influence on the avifauna of southeastern Wisconsin.** Proc. Wis. Nat. Hist. Soc., March, 1885, pp. 4-9.
13. **Nest and eggs of the golden-winged warbler (*Helminthophila chrysoptera*).** Auk 2 (1885) 102.

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14. **U. S. biographical dictionary.** Wisconsin volume. Chicago (1877).
15. **P. R. Hoy,** Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci. 3(1876)265.
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17. **W. H. Dall. Spencer Fullerton Baird.** Philadelphia (1915) p. 285.
18. **Racine Journal-Times,** March 26, 1939.
19. **[Biography of] Robert Kennicott.** Trans. Chicago Acad. Sci. 1 (1867) 165.
20. **R. Ridgway,** Am. Naturalist 6(1872)283.
21. **John Cassin,** Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phil. 6(1853)451.
22. **William Dudley,** Ibid. 7(1854)64.
23. **William Stimpson,** Trans. Chicago Acad. Sci. 1(1867) plate XIX.
24. **Racine Advocate,** June 4, 1844.
25. **Racine Times,** May 12 and 14, and **Journal,** May 16, 1888.
26. **Racine Journal-News,** May 2 and 24, 1922.
27. **Milwaukee Journal,** Sept. 10, 1940.
28. **Racine Journal,** April 21, 1886.
29. **S. F. Baird. Mammals of the Pacific Railway Survey.** Washington, Vol. 8(1857) 32-33.
30. **Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phil.** 6(1853)403.
31. **Photostat copy** in the files of the Wisconsin Historical Society.
32. **Hennepin. A new discovery.** London. Part II (1698) p. 186.