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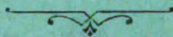
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S. Alpheraky.

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**A FEW WORDS IN REPLY TO MR. E. W. OATES'
PAPER ON THE SPECIES OF BEAN-GEESE.**



С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.

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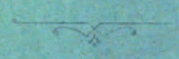
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ПАПИРЪ НА СПЕЦИАЛНОМЪ
ВЪЗДУШНОМЪ ПЛАВАНІИ



С. ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.
ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО С. А. АНДРОНОВА.
1906

A few words in reply to Mr. E. W. Oates' paper on the Species of Bean-Geese.

Mr. Eugene W. Oates has, in the Journal of the „Bombay Natural History Society“ (Apr. 23, 1906), published a paper on the species of Bean Geese with a plate of drawings of their Bills and a postscript, containing a very severe criticism of my book „The Geese of Europe & Asia“.

The Author says that I have by this work „rendered the study of these Birds more difficult in future“. How far Mr. Oates is right in this his opinion I shall try to shew in the following lines.

I shall speak of the species in the order Mr. Oates has placed them.

1. *Anser arvensis*, Brehm (Bill fig. 1).

To begin with, Mr. Oates seems astonished at the great size of the Bill as represented by Mr. Frohawk on the plate which accompanies his paper. Had Mr. Oates read what I have said about this Goose in my book, he would have seen that considerably larger Bills in this species are by no means of rare occurrence.

Mr. Oates acknowledges that this Goose is the Bean Goose proper of Great Britain, and I am glad, that in this case at least, he agrees with what I have said on the subject in my work, and what I knew to be the case some four or five years ago.

I well remember that I had then written to Mr. F. W. Frohawk asking him to have the kindness to settle, by a

careful comparison of British-killed specimens of Bean Geese, the conclusion I had arrived at theoretically; that is, that *it could not be* the *Melanonyx segetum*, but the much bigger *Melanonyx arvensis*, that was the common Bean Goose of the British Isles.

At the same time I had sent Mr. Frohawk the details I had worked out to surely discriminate between the two species. This Mr. Frohawk most obligingly did, and proved practically that my theoretical conclusions were correct.

That things stood so, can easily be seen from two papers (with illustrations of the Bills) by Mr. Frohawk; one in the „Field“ the other in the „Zoologist“. I do not think that Mr. Oates could have arrived at the same conclusion by himself, since he clearly says that he has never even seen the skin of a *segetum*. Now, to decide such a question, not knowing thoroughly both these Geese, and this in numbers too, is, to my belief, an absolute impossibility.

The Author further says: „Mr. Alphéraky would have us call the species the „Yellow-Billed Bean Goose“, but I do not think that many persons will care to follow him in this“. This, at all events, is an unmerited reproach, as I never even had the intention of inventing a new English name for this Goose, but simply adopted the one proposed for this species by Mr. Frohawk in one of his above mentioned writings. I find, however, that the name „Yellow-billed Bean Goose“ is by far a better one than, for example, the one Mr. Oates has found out for the next species, calling it the „European Bean Goose“, since, besides *Melanonyx segetum*, there are several other Bean Geese in Europe, and to call one of them „European“ seems not to have been a „happy thought“ after all.

2. *Anser segetum*, Gmel. (Bill. fig. 2).

Mr. Oates, never having seen a skin of this species, knows it only from Naumann's and Mr. Frohawk's descriptions. I regret that he has not paid more attention to what I have said about it in my book, for, surely, he would have found

there some details that he could not have found in either of the above named authors' writings.

3. *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Baillon (Bill. fig. 3).

This common Goose in England seems to have been but very superficially examined by Mr. Oates, for, as we shall see it later on, speaking of the so called *Melanonyx oatesi*, the Author has apparently quite overlooked the most important of its specific characters.

On the other hand Mr. Oates does well in following my example, i. e. in expelling this species from the list of Indian Birds.

4. *Anser neglectus*, Sushkin (Bill. fig. 4).

Mr. Oates thinks that this Goose may frequent some parts of India in winter,—once more an opinion that has been previously expressed in my book. But it is true that his reasons for thinking so are widely different from mine, as I did not, nor could know, that this Goose had been obtained by the late H. Seeböhm on the Yenissei river; a fact of great interest by itself. My conclusion about this Goose probably occurring in India, during the winter months, was based on the fact of its having been found wintering in Persia by Mr. N. Zarudny.

5. *Anser middendorffi*, Severtz. (Bill. fig. 5).

That this Goose has been met with in India is a very interesting fact, though one that was easy to foresee. The extremely small weight of the specimen mentioned by Mr. Oates, and its very small bill tend to show that it was a very young bird.

That Severtzoff's name „*middendorffi*“ is to be kept for this Goose, instead of „*sibiricus*“ as proposed by me, has been proved by Count Salvadori in the „Ibis“ of 1905, and I at once accepted this correction („Ibis“ 1906, Apr.), although, I here once more repeat, Severtzoff made the description of *middendorffi* after typical *arvenses*, and he also has made a complete set of blunders respecting its geographical distribution.

6. *Anser mentalis*, Oates (Bill. fig. 6).

Mr. Oates expresses his doubts as to the Mandshurian specimen, quoted in my book, belonging to his *mentalis*. But it is as true a *mentalis*, as is the typical specimen at the British Museum. That Stejneger's bird, obtained on Bering Island, is likewise a true *mentalis*, has been pointed out to Mr. Frohawk by me about four years ago, and, if I remember right, as I think I do *), Mr. Frohawk then took my letter to Mr. Oates at the British Museum, where both these Gentlemen compared the type of *mentalis* with Stejneger's drawing of the bill of the Bering Island bird, and decided that I was right in this identification.

Still, although I am sure that the bill figured by Mr. Stejneger, represents *mentalis*, I cannot recognise, as Mr. Oates evidently does, in Mr. Stejneger's description of the two other specimens from the same locality the *mentalis* and I think that, most probably, both of them belonged to *middendorffi*.

Mr. Oates further says, that I have not devoted a single line to his original description of *mentalis*, and s. o. But I really think that I have said in my book every thing that is to be found in Mr. Oates', original description.

That the white chin is of absolutely no value as specific character in the Bean Geese, as also *now* thinks the Author, I have clearly shewn in several places of my book.

I also believe having said that, personally, I do not think *mentalis* is anything but a huge-billed geographical race of *segetum* (or *serrirostris*, which is only the Eastern form of *segetum*), but that the question is not to be settled before a sufficient number of specimens of this Goose can be carefully studied. I also have given in my book all the pros and cons of the question, and if ever it is proved, that *mentalis* is really a separate species, I shall be the first to confess my error and to acknowledge the fact.

*) I am writing these lines in the country, where I have neither my book on Geese with me, nor my correspondence with Mr. Frohawk concerning the different Goose-questions.

7. *Anser serrirostris*, Swinhoe (Bill. fig. 7).

Contrarily to Mr. Oates' statement, this Goose is not only known from Swinhoe's description, but from the writings of several authors. It is true that Taczanowski, Przevalsky, Schrenck, Maak, etc. have spoken of it under the name of *A. segetum*, but all these *segetum* from Eastern Siberia and China are most decidedly *serrirostris*, as is confirmed by the specimens in the Zoological Museum of S.-Petersburg and other skins from the extreme East of Asia, I have had the opportunity of studying.

In all these specimens the light parts of the bill have been noted (by the collectors) as yellow- or orange-colour, not in a single instance as pink- or flesh-colour.

Still, if Mr. Oates had really paid a little more attention to the book he so severely condemns, he would have seen, that I have mentioned three specimens of *serrirostris* from the Anadyr-river, in which the bills had the light parts flesh-colour in life (but they are yellow now in the dry skins *).

I do not wish to say anything more about this Goose, as it shall soon be done by Mr. Buturlin, who has had the opportunity, last summer, of studying and collecting this Goose in its breeding grounds, and this too in considerable numbers. It is better to wait for what Mr. Buturlin has to tell us about the bird from personal observation, than to continue to discuss the question over only a few dry skins at our disposal.

8. *Anser oatesi*, Rickett (Bill. fig. 8).

When I first saw Mr. Rickett's description of this so called distinct species, I at once understood that something was wrong about it. „Similar in size and plumage to *A. brachyrhynchus*, but with a much larger bill and white chin“ is a very vague way of describing a Goose of this difficult group. And so it proved to be the case.

*) Mr. Oates' plate represents the colour of the *serrirostris* bill of the same tint as are those of *brachyrhynchus* and *neglectus*, but we know that it could not have been copied from a freshly killed specimen.

At the time I was preparing my book I could not guess that another entire skin of the bird had reached the British Museum, as Mr. Oates tells us the fact only now, and that is why I placed the name as synonym to *Melanonyx neglectus* with two „??“. Well now, that we know from Mr. Oates' paper and from the drawing of the bill on his plate, what this Goose surely is, we shall simply change its position, transferring it to the synonyma of *Mel. segetum*, leaving out the two now unnecessary „??“. The only thing that could have saved *Melanonyx oatesi*, would have been the fact of its really having the plumage „similar to that of *brachyrhynchus*“ which would necessitate *ashy-grey upper wing-coverts*, as this last species has them, and which are its most important specific feature. Now Mr. Oates, who has examined this entire skin of the supposed new species of Goose, does not say a word about the colour of its upper wing-coverts, which would have at once settled the question of the validity or not of *Mel. oatesi*.

The bill on Mr. Oates' plate represents a typical, though somewhat heavy-billed specimen of *Mel. segetum*, which, at the same time is not, as Mr. Oates supposes, about the same size as *arvensis*, but a much smaller bird.

I have seen both species freshly killed, lying side by side, and could always surely distinguish them by the difference in size at a distance, not even having to look at the differently formed bills. But what Mr. Oates seems to have completely overlooked, is that *brachyrhynchus* had so very pale ashy-grey wing coverts, or he would not have found that Mr. Rickett's short description, containing the „similarity“ of plumage with *brachyrhynchus* was sufficient. As, however, in scientific matter prudence is of the greatest importance, I here declare that, in case this Goose (*oatesi*) has really the wing-coverts ashy-grey (a highly improbable thing) it must belong to a separate species from *segetum*, though with exactly the same bill as in this last.

And now I come to ask the impartial Reader to decide if I am as guilty, as Mr. Oates will have it, of having „ren-

dered the study of the Geese more difficult in future“ by my book on the „Geese of Europe and Asia“. Excepting the two facts: that *neglectus* has been found by Seeböhm on the Yenissei, and that *middendorffi* has been obtained in India, which were not known to me, I fail to find a single statement in Mr. Oates' paper, that has not found its place in my work.

S. Alpheraky.

July 1906.
S.-Petersburg.

Postscript.

Mr. Oates considers all the species of Geese he deals with in his paper, under the heading „The Bean Geese“, as a separate group of the subfamily *Anserinae*. This is quite obvious, and in this he is perfectly right. But why then does he not accept the scientific name *Melanonyx*, proposed for these birds by Mr. Buturlin? I think that a word about the reasons of his not accepting the Genus *Melanonyx* would have proved of interest to systematists. My idea is, that Mr. Oates does not give us his reasons, simply because such do not exist.

S. A.

