



Citizen Bird

Scenes from Bird-Life in Plain English for Beginners,
A Critical Edition

by Mabel Osgood Wright and Elliott Coues

DESCRIPTION

In the late nineteenth century, American bird lovers faced a crisis. Bird species were becoming endangered or even extinct at an alarming rate, and old methods of hunting and collecting specimens accelerated the process. A new conservationist approach to birding was necessary, and it needed to be taught to the next generation of Americans. Thus 1897's *Citizen Bird*, the first birding guide for children, was born. A tremendously influential text in the Progressive-era United States, it inspired in a generation of schoolchildren a love of wild birds and the desire to protect them.

Born of a collaboration between naturalist Mabel Osgood Wright, ornithologist Elliott Coues, and bird artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes, the book is vital to the history of birding and the broader study of nineteenth-century American culture and literature. This new edition of *Citizen Bird* preserves the original book's 111 drawings and adds explanatory footnotes, supplemental historical material, and a new introduction. More than a century and a quarter after its original publication, Elizabeth Cherry and Meghan Freeman contextualize the book in the tradition and history of birding and discuss the roles of its authors and illustrator in birding history. A landmark text in the history of American conservationism, *Citizen Bird* is a timeless classic that will bring joy to birdwatchers of all ages.

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ELIZABETH CHERRY is a professor of sociology at Manhattanville University in Purchase, New York. She is the author of *Culture and Activism: Animal Rights in France and the United States* and *For the Birds: Protecting Wildlife Through the Naturalist Gaze* (Rutgers University Press).

MEGHAN FREEMAN is the fellowship and internship librarian at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and she has taught and published on nineteenth-century literature, art, and culture.

MABEL OSGOOD WRIGHT (1859–1934) founded the Connecticut Audubon Society and the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary in Connecticut, published

several books on birds and birding, and helped revive and reestablish the National Audubon Society through her work as editor and writer for *Bird-Lore*, the precursor to *Audubon Magazine*. Her book *Birdcraft: A Field Book of Two Hundred Song, Game, and Water Birds* (1895) is widely regarded as the first true field guide for birds, and her book *Citizen Bird: Scenes from Bird-Life in Plain English for Beginners* (1897) is cited by the Library of Congress as a milestone in the conservation movement.

ELLIOTT COUES (1842–1899) was one of the founders, and later the president, of the American Ornithologists' Union (now the American Ornithological Society), published numerous books and scientific papers on ornithological topics, and edited the AOU's publication *The Auk*. His *Key to North American Birds* (1872), a highly regarded scientific bird identification manual, was revised and reprinted in six editions. One of the American Ornithological Society's most prestigious annual awards is named after Elliott Coues.

LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES (1874–1927) was a highly sought-after American bird illustrator, second in prominence today only to John James Audubon. He produced thousands of illustrations for many important works, including Merriam Bailey's *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States* (1902), Keyser's *Birds of the Rockies* (1902), Coues's *Key to North American Birds* (1903), Eaton's *Birds of New York* (1910–1914), and Forbush's *Birds of Massachusetts* (1925–1929). The Wilson Ornithological Society has named its most prestigious award after Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

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