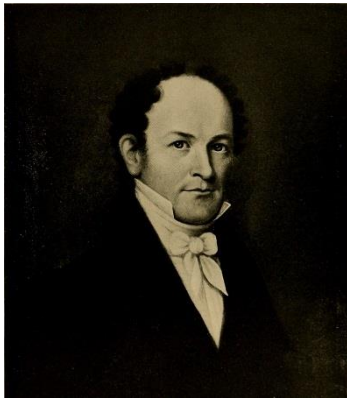


BIRD NOTES by Rick Pyeritz

“All is new! —and life.... was then full of hope and enthusiasm. The forests apparently unbroken, in their primeval solitude and repose spread themselves on either side as we passed placidly along. The extending vista of dark pines gave an air of deep sadness to the wilderness Scenes like these have little attraction for ordinary life. But to the naturalist it is far otherwise; privations to him are cheaply purchased if he may roam over the wild domain of primeval nature.”

Thomas Nuttall



Thomas Nuttall

Thomas Nuttall was born in Yorkshire, England in 1786, and immigrated to America in 1808. Soon after his arrival in Philadelphia, the center for natural history activity in the New World, he became friends with Benjamin Smith Barton, a well-known botanist who encouraged Nuttall's interest in natural history. A reclusive man, Nuttall preferred to work alone despite the hardships and dangers of collecting in the sparsely settled wilderness of eastern America. He explored and collected plant and bird specimens from New Jersey and Delaware to Florida and Mississippi. He then travelled the Missouri river basin and the Arkansas and Red Rivers from 1809 to 1820.

Nuttall published a number of excellent books on botany and assumed the position of Curator of the Botanical Gardens of Harvard University in 1822. He may be best known for his *Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and Canada*. This two volume set was extremely popular due to its small size and excellent drawing of birds. It was the only resource at that time which could be taken in the field. It went through dozens of printings and was widely in use into the early 1900's.

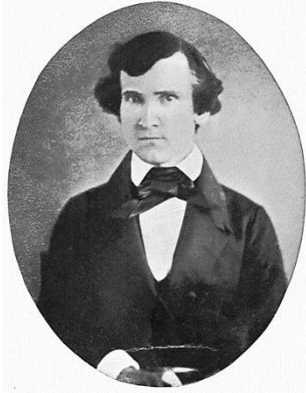
Contrary to his solitary nature, Nuttall invited John Kirk Townsend, a well-respected ornithologist who was half his age on an expedition to the Pacific coast which was being arranged by Nathaniel J. Wyeth. A force of 70 men, 250 horses, and a herd of cattle, along with a group of missionaries, left Independence, Missouri, on April 28, 1834. Their destination was Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River.



Nuttall's Woodpecker, Paul Bannick

“None but a naturalist can appreciate a naturalist's feelings... his delight amounting to ecstasy.... when a specimen such as he has never before seen, meets his eye.”

John Kirk Townsend



John Townsend

John Kirk Townsend was born into a Philadelphia Quaker family in 1809. He developed an early interest in natural history which was encouraged by his family and by the supportive environment of Philadelphia. The expedition was an awesome experience for the young naturalist.

"I never before saw so great a variety of birds within the same space.....All were beautiful and many of them quite new to me; and after we had spent an hour amongst them, and my game bag was teeming with its precious freight, I was still loath to leave the place, lest I should not have procured specimens of the whole."

The journey was not without its problems and major setbacks. Among other hardships endured by Nuttall and Townsend was the consumption of whiskey they used for the preservation of collected specimens by "a fellow whose appetite for ardent spirits was of the most inordinate kind." Their reptile and amphibian collection took a major hit.

As their collection of the western flora and fauna grew, space became a major issue. "Such things as spare waistcoats, shaving boxes, soap and stockings have been ejected from our trunks, and we are content to dress, as we live, in a style of primitive simplicity."

After reaching and exploring the Oregon coast, Townsend sailed to Hawaii and then back to Oregon while Nuttall returned to Philadelphia. Townsend returned by sailing around Cape Horn and arriving home in 1837 after a three and a half year expedition. In all, Townsend collected about 30 species previously unknown to science. Back in Philadelphia, he sold 93 specimens to John James Audubon for inclusion in his *Birds of America*. Townsend's specimens were the models for 74 of Audubon's bird paintings, which irked Townsend because Audubon did not credit his contributions.



Townsend's Warbler by J.J. Audubon

Thomas Nuttall returned to England in 1842 after he inherited an uncle's estate. He died in 1859 never to return to his adventurous ways in America.

John Kirk Townsend died in 1851 at the age of 41. He started a book, *Ornithology of the United States of America*, which was never completed due to the success of Audubon's *Birds of America*. He died from the malady which struck down John Cassin – arsenic poisoning; arsenic being contained in a compound used in preserving bird skins.

"John Kirk Townsend was evidently a genius whom forces of circumstances prevented from reaching his proper place in ornithological annals."

Witmer Stone

Bird species named after John Kirk Townsend

Townsend's solitaire *Myadestes townsendi*

Townsend's warbler *Setophaga townsendi*

Bird species named after Thomas Nuttall

Nuttall's woodpecker *Dryobates nuttallii* by his friend William Gambel,
Yellow-billed magpie *Pica nuttalli*

Common poorwill *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii* by John James Audubon.

Comments and/or questions -- email me at capyeritz@gmail.com.