

of Birds in the British Museum,' the latter by Messrs. Salvin and Godman in the 'Biologia Centrali-Americana.' In either case the name is antedated by *Certhia mexicana* Gmelin, Syst. Nat., I, 1788, 480. Gmelin's bird, "C. rubra, gutture viridi, remigum apice cærulescenti," is the *Certhia rubra mexicana* of Brisson (Aves, III, 651), a species not easily identifiable, but certainly not a *Certhia* (perhaps one of the red species of *Myzomela*). As no other name has been proposed for the Mexican Creeper, the bird (No. 726a of the A. O. U. Check-List) may stand as *Certhia familiaris alticola*.—GERRIT S. MILLER, JR., *Washington, D. C.*

A New Family of Birds.—In revising the North American Finches and Tanagers Mr. Ridgway has found it necessary to establish a new family for the reception of the members of the genus *Procnias*. This distinction is certainly warranted by the cranial characters of the genus, the skull, among other things, being notable from the shape of the palatines and total absence of transpalatine processes. The head and skull of *Procnias*, it may be remembered, suggest those of a Swallow, but the resemblance is purely superficial, the skull structurally resembling that of a Tanager more than it does that of a Swallow.—F. A. LUCAS, *Washington, D. C.*

The Tongues of Birds.—Herr Schenking-Prévôt contributes an interesting article on the tongues of birds to the November number of the 'Zoologische Garten,' although some of his statements must not be too implicitly trusted. Such, for example, are the remarks that the tongue of the Woodpecker is not used as a spear, but as a "lime twig" to which insects are stuck by the viscous saliva, and that it is an organ of incomparable pliancy, feeling about in all directions.

Now, as a matter of fact, the structure of the Woodpecker's tongue is such as to render it, for its length and slenderness, extremely rigid, and while the Flicker undoubtedly draws ants out of ant-hills by means of the sticky mucous with which the tongue is plentifully besmeared, yet there can be no doubt that the barbed tip serves, like a delicate eel spear, to coax larvæ out of their hiding places in trees. Herr Prévôt is probably not acquainted with our Sapsucker or he would have called attention to the peculiar modification by which the tongue is rendered an admirable swab for collecting syrup.

The tongues of granivorous birds are said to be often arrow-shaped, or awl-shaped, a term which certainly does not apply to any of our North American Finches, in which the tongue is rather thick and fleshy, and slightly bifid or brushy at the tip, being so constructed as to play an important part in husking seeds.

Herr Prévôt decidedly overestimates the probable taxonomic value of the tongue, for no other organ seems to be so subject to variation; no two species of North American Sparrows that have come under my observation have the tongues exactly alike, while two such near neigh-

bors as *Melospiza fasciata* and *M. georgiana* have tongues quite different from one another. No one would suppose from their tongues that *Picus* and *Sphyrapicus* were members of the same family, while such diverse forms as *Micropus*, *Hirundo* and *Procnias* would, from a 'glossological' point of view, stand shoulder to shoulder. On the other hand, so great may be the amount of individual variation, that three distinct species could be made from the four examples of the Cape May Warbler which have passed through my hands.

Resemblances between tongues indicate more or less similarity in food or mode of procuring it rather than any real affinity between their owners; but while the tongue is apparently of slight taxonomic value it is extremely interesting as showing the remarkable number of modifications which an organ may exhibit and its great susceptibility to physiological adaptation.— F. A. LUCAS, *Washington, D. C.*

Bird Fatality along Nebraska Railroads.— There is a certain bird fatality along railroad lines which is commonly charged to the telegraph wires. Doubtless they are the chief executioners, but not the dark destroyer of all the dead birds along our railroads. In Nebraska more fatality, as I believe, is to be charged to the moving train than to the wires. It is one of the larger States (exceeding in size all New England by 11,000 square miles), and though treeless, save in the cañons and along river courses, it is quite diversified. Still there are large areas of prairie that seem entirely level and unbroken. Here there are no trees, bushes or stones to offer shelter to winter birds. The prairie grasses are very short and give but little protection, and large numbers of misguided birds seek shelter in the lee of the steel rails of railroad tracks.

These are almost wholly Horned Larks. As one walks along the track at night they fly up in considerable numbers from their dangerous shelter, especially in severe weather. The Larks are attracted thither as much by the food and the grain dribbled along the way by passing trains as by the protection which the treacherous rails offer. Crouching at night in the shelter of the rails, and stupefied by the noise and light of approaching trains they rise too late, are struck by the flying train, and thrown dead to either side of the track. I have seen them lying thus in scattered bunches of ten or a dozen. Railroad men say it is the work of the train, and such I believe it to be.

It is the habit of these Larks to fly low, just skimming the surface of the ground, and it is highly improbable that they came to an untimely end by striking the telegraph wires.— EDWIN H. BARBOUR, *Lincoln, Nebr.*

Florida Notes.— Shortly after the late 'freeze' in Florida (on Feb. 9 the temperature was 28° F. at 7 A.M. at New River) large numbers of White-bellied Swallows were seen flying about and a few days later numbers of them were found dead. I saw at least a dozen floating in the