

Elliot's *Limicolæ*.¹—A title of twenty-three lines may spare the reviewer some pains in describing a book, but there is much besides to be said of this noble work, in the preparation of which the artist and the publisher have ably aided the distinguished author. Mr. Elliot's splendid monographs of various other families have long since taken classic rank in technical ornithology, but we believe this is his first appearance in book form as a popularizer—an office of not less dignity than that of the systematist or monographer, one of practical importance and human interest, and one not so easy to fill creditably as those who have never tried to do so may imagine. The increase of knowledge is one thing, and its diffusion is another; but the latter is the real measure of the usefulness of the former. He who would make knowledge "understood of the people" has no easy task to perform; and if he attain a measure of success in this effort, he has stood the severest test to which his ability as an author can be subjected. It would therefore seem certain that in the present instance Mr. Elliot has won fresh laurels.

'Shore Birds' is a new departure for him, in which he addresses himself less to his experienced peers in the science than to sportsmen and others in the rank and file of those who love to study birds in their haunts—those for whom birds are among the brightest flashes of animated nature. For all such, the Plover-Snipe group has such special attractions that the author who chooses this theme is sure of his clientèle.

Mr. Elliot's method of treatment is an easy and natural one. After the introductory matter, which includes a glossary of technical terms, illustrated with an outline plate, and a send-off for *Limicolæ* in general, he takes each one of about seventy species or subspecies in its turn, giving as main text a concise life-history, under a popular name, and then in small type paragraphs presenting the most accredited scientific name—

¹North American Shore Birds | a history of the | Snipes, Sandpipers, Plovers and their allies | inhabiting the beaches and marshes of the | Atlantic and Pacific coasts, the prairies, | and the shores of the inland lakes and | rivers of the North American continent: | their popular and scientific names, together with a full | description of their mode of life, nesting, migration and | dispersions, with descriptions of the summer and | winter plumages of adults and young, | so that each species may be readily identified. | A Reference Book for the Naturalist, Sportsman and Lover of Birds | by | Daniel Giraud Elliot, F. R. S. E., Etc. | Ex-president American Ornithologists' Union | Curator of Zoölogy in the Field Columbian Museum, Chicago; Author of "Birds of | North America," Illustrated Monographs of Ant Thrushes, Grouse, | Pheasants, Birds of Paradise, Hornbills, Cats, Etc. | With seventy-four plates | New York | Francis P. Harper | 1895 | One vol., pp. i-xvi, 17-268, pll. 1-74 (counting 2 cuts in text) + 1 pl., = 75 illust., 100 autograph copies with rubricated title, sm. 4to, regular ed. crown 8vo; published Sept. 26.

which members of the A. O. U. and other readers of 'The Auk' will be sure to recognize — a statement of habitat, and a technical description of the plumage for the sexes, ages, and seasons. There is much to recommend this simple treatment; for the sportsman who already knows his bird, or perhaps does not like technical caviar in his usual rations, can decline this dessert, and take his main course of biography in straight, easy reading. He will find these articles reasonably full, interesting as well as instructive, and may feel confident of their high degree of reliability; for Mr. Elliot has been out among the 'mud-dwellers' with his gun himself, and what he knows of their ways smells less of midnight oil than of gunpowder.

The author's admirable treatment of the Phalaropes raises a point on which we wish to remark. He adopts three genera — *Crymophilus*, *Phalaropus*, and *Steganopus*. Contrary to the opinion of some of his contemporaries, chiefly younger than himself, the present reviewer knows that recognition of genera in zoölogy is a purely arbitrary convention, mainly to facilitate list-making. We can take what grade of differentiation we please as our generic standard; but having adopted any one such, we are logically bound by it, and must not read off with a fine vernier-scale in some instances, and with a coarser gradation in some other cases. The differences between the three species of Phalaropes are coördinated; any one of them differs from the other two to the same degree that these do from each other. There is then one genus, or else there are three genera as Mr. Elliot rightly holds; there cannot be two genera. The hitch in this case seems to have been, that the A. O. U. committee permitted themselves to be influenced by a bit of faddism on the part of some person to whom birds' beaks looked big and their toes small — one who could see minute rostral modifications in a great white light, which so dazzled him that he was blinded to equal or even greater differentiations of digital structure. The same one-eyedness reduced the four-toed genus *Squatarola* to a subgenus of *Charadrius*, yet left the three-toed genus *Arenaria* (or *Calidris*) in full fig apart from *Tringa* (type *canutus*). Now if we remember anything about a group of birds which engaged our virgin pen about thirty-five years ago, there are no two genera of Sandpipers so nearly indistinguishable in form as those represented by *Arenaria calidris* and *Tringa canutus*, if we do not count their digits. Why then do we discriminate these generically, yet fail to separate *Squatarola helvetica* by the same token from the species of *Charadrius* proper? In point of fact, the evolutionary processes which result in the development of an articulated digit and its accessories, however small and practically functionless it may be, or those which end in the suppression of such a digit, are vastly greater in duration and in force than those which merely modify the size and shape of a bill to some appreciable extent; so that in ignoring the former to insist upon the latter, we have probably travestied an evolutionary record of geologic date.

But such points as these are niceties which need not have been made in

noticing a popular work, and would not have been raised in a review for any other periodical than our own and only 'Auk.' Consideration of technicalities takes us to Mr. Elliot's appendix, which gives keys to the families, genera, and species—short cuts to much learning, without which no bird-book now seems to be furnished with all appropriate belongings. These are excellent in the main, presenting the reader with successive alternatives, of which he has only to choose the one to which his specimen conforms to be led speedily and happily to its identification. The keyed appendix also gives formal generic diagnoses, references to authorities for the names used, and explication of etymologies. In this part of his work the distinguished author invites criticism which must be adverse in some few particulars, as in the statement that *Heteractitis* is a word "signifying an inhabitant of 'different shores.'" This word is a mere substitute for the prior but preoccupied *Heteroscelus* of Baird, and the difference implied in its construction is not one of 'shores,' but of certain shore-birds, to wit, those of the genus *Actitis*. It is also unfortunate that typographical errors, which crop up in the main text, cluster obtrusively in the appendix. We happen to know that this is not the author's fault, and can see how he wrestled with the printers—not in prayer, but with the reverse of devotional emotions, akin to those which marked the printers' own struggles with unwonted copy. But aside from this, the manufacture of the volume is perfect, reflecting great credit upon the enterprising publisher, who is rapidly making his reputation for fine book-work. The regular edition is handsome in all its appointments; the limited autograph edition is sumptuous.

Edwin Sheppard is a familiar name in connection with illustrated ornithological literature, and the author of 'Shore Birds' is fortunate in his artist. His fine work began early in the Bairdian period, and the present plates show that his hand has lost none of its cunning with rolling years. Mr. Sheppard's forte seems to be small, telling pictures which hit off likenesses of birds remarkably well for their size without the aid of other coloring than black upon white. They are very smooth and pleasing to the eye, and maintain their excellence evenly—none are bad, though some are more pleasing, and some more effective, than the rest. One of the most artistic pictures is that of the Stilt, whose colors suit the mode of printing well, and whose attitude is striking; the group of downy Kildeers is another which specially attracts the eye. Mr. Sheppard has a keen eye for points about a bird, and a sure touch is bringing them out; he understands structure, and consequently poses birds in natural attitudes. This is fortunate; for he had need of all his craft in attempting to delineate the difference between species of such genera, for example, as *Tringa* and *Totanus*, in which a trained ornithologist often has to look more than once to make a diagnosis. Our general criticism of Mr. Sheppard's work has for many years been, his tendency to needless accessories and too much background; but that may be our individual fancy for pictures of birds on plain white paper—not in quarter-sections of

country or even on sections of tree trunks as large as themselves; and in the present case of full-page plates, the technique we have is perhaps preferable.

We wish this book all the success it so thoroughly well merits; and should that be its happy lot, perhaps the eminent author will not forget that some other groups of game-birds might be treated in the same manner, with equally good results.—E. C.

Some Canadian Birds.¹—Mr. Chamberlain's very worthy aim is to produce a book on common birds at so low a price that it will be within the reach of every child who would know something of the feathered inhabitants of field and grove. He warns us not to expect too much, and when we glance at the price on the cover of his little volume, we readily admit that we have received more than our money's worth.

He gives pleasingly written biographies of some forty species. His style is attractive and seems well adapted to interest beginners. It is unfortunate, however, that he pays so little attention to the subject of identification, his descriptions being very brief and generally unaccompanied by measurements. It is to be hoped that in the second series of these bird studies, which we doubt not will duly appear, scientific names will be properly capitalized.—F. M. C.

Kirkwood on Maryland Birds.²—Faunal lists are of two kinds: they may sum up existing knowledge, however slight, of the life of a region as the basis for future work, or they may present the essentially complete results of long continued, careful observations. The present list belongs to the former class and should be considered as a preliminary report on Maryland birds, or, more strictly, the birds of eastern Maryland, for the author's information is largely drawn from what he terms the 'tide-water' region.

It is of course highly desirable that in a list of this kind attention should be drawn to the large number of birds whose presence in the State can scarcely be doubted, but which through insufficient observation have not actually been recorded within the State limits. To prevent their confusion with birds already known from the State, and to properly emphasize the

¹ *Some Canadian Birds. A Brief Account of Some of the Common Birds of Eastern Canada.* By Montague Chamberlain. First Series. Birds of Field and Grove. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Company, Limited, 1895, 12mo. pp. x + 96, 15 cuts. 30 cents.

² *A List of the Birds of Maryland giving Dates of the Arrival, Departure and Nesting Periods of our Regular Birds; also including Stragglers and such others as no doubt occur but are not recorded.* By F. C. Kirkwood. Reprinted from the Transactions of the Maryland Academy of Sciences, pp. 241-382. Baltimore, 1895.