

CORRESPONDENCE.

Some Suggestions.

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:— I take this occasion to voice the feelings of many amateur ornithologists who are members of the A. O. U. We all have the keenest sympathy for the success of the cause for which 'The Auk' stands as the organ of the A. O. U., and we fully realize that the highest advancement of American ornithology can be accomplished only through and by professional men, and that 'The Auk' must and should be their favored organ.

But we further believe that the continued success of 'The Auk' and Union depends upon the moral and financial support which they receive from the amateur members of the A. O. U. In many, maybe in most instances, this support must be dependent upon the contents of 'The Auk.' Many of the readers of 'The Auk'—and I am one of them—are only secondarily interested in technical and local faunal articles. Their leisure opportunities, and perhaps their inclinations, are sufficient to grasp only the general features of systematic and faunal ornithology. On the other hand they are intensely interested in general and field ornithology, and peruse and study those matters which relate to the habits and life histories of the feathered kind with the keenest enjoyment. Such reading appeals to their sympathy and feelings, enlivens and deepens their interest, and may lead them on to the study of scientific ornithology, which is in most instances regarded at first as dry and uninteresting.

I feel assured that if 'The Auk' contained more articles of the nature of Bent's late article on North Dakota Anatidæ, or Peabody's on Le Conte's Sparrow—articles interesting to the student as well as to the professional—the membership of the A. O. U. would be measurably increased, the funds available for publishing 'The Auk' would be greater, and its value both to the scientist and to the amateur would be enhanced.

Very truly yours,

J. C. KNOX,
Jackson, Minn.

Jan. 17, 1903.

[The above letter is in line with others received from time to time by the Editors of 'The Auk,' offering suggestions for its improvement from the standpoint of the lay reader. But Mr. Knox's letter is exceptional in its courteous tone, and in the reasonableness of its suggestions. That the matter may be better understood, it seems well to present in this connection a few words of editorial comment.

'The Auk' is, first of all, the organ of the American Ornithologist's Union, which is primarily an association of professional ornithologists, or

advanced workers in ornithology, whose purpose of organization was to promote community of interest, and coöperation among the leaders of the science, and to secure a medium of intercommunication, and for the publication of the results of their investigations. Secondly, the purpose of the Union was to secure the affiliation of all American bird students, — to bring the amateurs into touch with the professionals, in the hope that their interest in bird study would thereby be fostered and their efforts be in a measure favorably guided by being brought into contact with the more experienced workers. For this reason the lay element was invited to accept enrollment in the Union, to attend its annual congresses, to present papers and otherwise participate in the scientific proceedings, and especially to form acquaintances and associations that would prove pleasant and helpful. Such has been, we believe, to as large an extent as could be reasonably expected, the outcome of the founding of the Union. Its membership is, however, so widely scattered that, although the congresses are held alternately in the larger eastern cities, the social feature of the organization is necessarily somewhat limited.

In regard to 'The Auk,' its function is, first of all, that of a medium of publication for the working ornithologists, and holds the position of the 'Proceedings' or 'Annals' of a scientific society. It pays nothing for the articles contributed to its pages, and rarely solicits contributions. More matter is offered for publication than can be accepted, and the editorial function as to choice of material is limited to excluding what seems the least desirable. It thus differs notably from the ordinary literary magazine, which pays for its contributions and whose editorial management is supposed to cater to the public needs or taste.

Mr. Knox refers to certain papers as being especially desirable and stimulating to the clientèle for whom he assumes to speak. The editors of 'The Auk' never reject articles of this character; they are only too glad to receive this class of papers. The rejected matter is almost wholly of the class to which Mr. Knox specifically objects. The editors of 'The Auk' cannot publish for the entertainment of its readers what does not come to their hands. Technical papers, containing the results of special research by members of the Union, should, in the nature of the case, be promptly accepted; faunal papers, which are a real contribution to knowledge, are not lightly to be passed by; but if they relate to comparatively well known regions, or contain little that is new, they are rated at once as unavailable. Finally, it is the aim of the editorial staff of 'The Auk' to cater especially to the popular side of ornithology, to furnish to the amateur readers papers that they will enjoy and find profitable. The technical side will always take care of itself; the demand for space for such contributions is always greater than the supply, and it is papers of this character that get the cold shoulder and not those of a popular character, provided of course that they contain something worthy of record.—EDS.]