

RECENT LITERATURE.

Townsend's 'The Birds of Essex County, Massachusetts.'¹ — This is by far the most elaborate treatise on the birds of so limited a district that has yet appeared in this country, it forming a neatly printed quarto volume of over three hundred and fifty pages. It is published as a memoir of the Nuttall Ornithological Club of Cambridge, and its thoroughness of research and literary execution does credit alike to the Club and the author. The introductory matter, comprising some seventy pages, is divided into nine chapters, following which is Chapter X, 'Annotated List of the Birds of Essex County' (pp. 74-321), a bibliography of ten pages, and an excellent index.

The introductory matter comprises nine chapters, as follows: (1) 'Topography and Faunal Areas' (pp. 6-11), which includes an account of the geographical boundaries, the topography, especially in its relation to glacial agencies, the principal botanical features, and the faunal affiliations of the district; (2) 'The Ocean and its Birds' (pp. 12-17), which treats informally of the manner and season of occurrence of the various species of water fowl that frequent the seacoast; (3) 'The Sand Beaches and their Birds' (pp. 18-29), in which various other beach inhabitants, as fishes mollusks, crustaceans, etc., come in for incidental mention, mainly as furnishing food for the birds. The characteristic birds of a sandy sea-beach are, primarily of course, the Limicolæ, but Gulls and Terns, Ducks and Herons, are found among those that leave their 'footprints on the sands,' while many passerine birds also visit the beach for food. The interest of the seabeach to the ornithologist, at all seasons, in winter as well as in summer, is dwelt on at length, and the incidents of personal observation here set down afford proof not only of this claim, but of the author's familiarity with the varied forms of life of the beach under the ever varying conditions due to the passing of the seasons. (4) 'The Sand Dunes and their Birds' (pp. 30-44). The sand dunes of the Ipswich and other beaches of Essex County are well worthy of the special chapter devoted to them; the constantly changing forms of the dunes, due to the action of the winds, and their peculiar vegetation, as well as the birds that visit them, — in winter for food, in summer for nesting places, — conspire to give them special interest. It was here that the first specimens of the Ipswich Sparrow were taken — by C. J. Maynard in 1868. (5) 'The Salt Marshes and their Birds' (pp. 36-42), and (6) 'The Fresh Marshes and their Birds' (pp. 43-48), which furnish each their peculiar environment

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and assemblages of birds, are minutely described; several pages are also given to "some actual records of the various bird-voices" heard during the hours of night in the Fresh Marshes. (7) 'The Ponds and their Birds' (pp. 49-52) are similarly treated; a list of the water-fowl killed by gunners in Wenham Lake for the five years 1900-1904 forms part of the chapter. (8) 'Lighthouse Records' (pp. 53-59). Apparently few birds strike any of the nine lighthouses of Essex County. (9) 'Ornithological History of Essex County' (pp. 60-73). This is naturally one of the most interesting chapters of the book. The records of such early writers as Morrell (1623), Higginson (1630), Wood (1634) Morton (1637), and Josselyn (1675) are cited (although not here for the first time exploited) in evidence of the former much greater abundance of water-fowl and sundry other species. As is well known, the Great Auk was formerly a bird of the Massachusetts coast, though probably not within historic times; but the case is quite different with the Labrador Duck, the Wild Turkey, the Heath Hen, the Sandhill Crane, and the Wild Pigeon, all of which in earlier days were among the common birds of the region, while many others formerly common but now known merely as accidental stragglers have become practically extirpated. The history of the extirpation of several of these species is summarized. The author adds his own valuable observations on the changes in the bird life of Essex County during the last twenty-eight years; some species of water-fowl and shore birds have declined in numbers, while others appear to hold their own; hawks are growing scarcer, and the English Sparrow has greatly reduced the number of box-breeding birds.

The 'Annotated List,' forming of course the chief part of the volume, is admirably done. The points of chief interest are always explicitly stated, and the biographical observations are, in the case of a few species, extended to considerable length. Authorities are fully cited for the occurrence of the rarer species, and a number of species formerly attributed to the county are excluded on the ground that the evidence of their capture within the limits of the list is unsatisfactory. They are, however, together with species of probable occurrence, mentioned, in smaller type, in their proper places, with appropriate comment. The list of indigenous species and subspecies authenticated as birds of Essex County numbers 319; there are in addition 6 extirpated and 2 extinct species, making a total of 327, besides 2 introduced species. Sixteen are given as of doubtful record, 2 as of erroneous record, and one as mythical, making the total number of species considered, 254. The bibliography occupies pp. 322-331, and includes about 150 entries.

As already said, the work is marked by careful research, is well executed and in every way creditable to the author and the publishers, the Nuttall Club. The quotations from the seventeenth century historians of the region, which serve as mottoes for the chapters, are not only appropriate but impart a pleasing literary quaintness to this portion of the work.—J. A. A.