

have kept in touch with the bird-lore of the region referred to and now would add three more species to those enumerated in that list.

***Strix pratincola*.** BARN OWL. In August, 1906, while on a visit to Cumberland, Maryland, I saw a captive specimen of this species, which had been taken at Corriganville, a hamlet nearby.

***Passerculus s. savanna*.** SAVANNAH SPARROW.—I saw an individual of this species August, 1906, at Mt. Lake Park, Allegany County, the noted summer resort on the Baltimore and Ohio Railway. It must have been an oversight of mine not to find it there and at Cumberland earlier.

***Minus polyglottos*.** MOCKINGBIRD.—During my residence in the region covered by the list, I kept my eyes open for this species, being told that they were sometimes seen, but I failed to find any. Now Mr. John Fulton, a well-known nature lover of Cumberland, writes me, that a Mr. LeFevre found three pairs near Oldtown, Allegany County, on May 5, and subsequently the nest of one of these containing four young. Unfortunately this nest was shortly after robbed of its contents by prowling boys from South Cumberland. It is to be hoped that the other pairs brought out their young safely, so that this fine bird may become firmly established at Cumberland, where, no doubt, it ought to be.—G. EIFRIG, *Ottawa, Ont.*

The Food of Several Maine Water-Birds.—The following notes are the result of a number of actual observations on the food of birds, that for the greater part have been examined under conditions which did not admit of the preservation of the stomach contents for expert examination. Therefore they are here offered as a contribution to a subject both important and interesting.

In the diet of the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) I have noticed sea cucumbers (*Pentacta frondosa*) disgorged by the side of a nest, and during the winter of 1907-08, one of these birds was seen repeatedly dropping a frozen *Pentacta* on Old Orchard beach. Previous to freezing a hole had been torn in its side, evidently by the beak of a gull or crow.

The shell bodies of the beach snail (*Polinices heros*), with operculum attached, have been found by the sides of nests. The broken and empty shells are common at resting places of this gull. This mollusk is a well known and abundant enemy of the common clam (*Mya arenaria*). On the Maine coast it is eaten by modern man to a very limited extent, and in certain sections, and at certain times it is used to a great extent for fish bait. Yet its destruction of the clam, so extensively used in commerce, offsets its own small use, and the habit of the Gull in feeding upon it is an economic service, to be considered in the summary of its feeding habits. At the No-mans-land colony, in summer, I once saw nearly a pint of cockles (*Purpura lappillus*) disgorged by the side of a nest; and at the Brothers, Englishman's Bay, a half pint of the crustacean, *Thysanopoda norvegica*, disgorged by the side of a nest.

Larus philadelphia, besides its diet of fish, and garbage, has been found

feeding over rafts of drifting sea weeds, when its diet was found to consist of maggots, probably *Coleopa frigida*, a fly that breeds at high water mark in decaying seaweeds (*Algæ* and *Zostera*).

Once at Matinicus Rock in the month of August, a school of skeleton shrimps (*Thysanopoda norvegica*) was stranded near the boat house, at high water, and were left in a windrow to perish, by the receding tide. The Arctic Terns were quick to detect their presence, and became engaged in carrying large numbers from the beach to their young, until darkness caused them to stop.

Winter Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*) taken on the outer islands off the coast in winter have been found to be chiefly fed upon *Littorina palliata*. A specimen taken on the Presumpscot River, in Windham, late in November, was gorged with a fresh water snail (*Campeloma decisa*). Two specimens taken on tide water at the mouth of the same river, in the fall, had their gullets filled with seed of eel grass (*Zostera marina*) and a few isopods (*Idotea marina*).

The importance of *Zostera* as a food for winter birds seems to be considerable. Black Ducks, Whistlers and probably other ducks feed upon its seeds in our coves and bays. Horned Larks, Snow Buntings and other finches feed upon them on our beaches in winter. Geese and Brant devour its rhizomes. Its seeds are of a good size, and the crop extensive. Its value must be enormous though not appreciated.

Wood Ducks coming under my observation have shown a fondness for bulbs of *Sagittaria*.

A Scaup (*Marila marila*) from the Fox Islands in winter was well filled with shells of *Macoma balthica*.

In the stomach of Whistlers (*Clangula clangula americana*) seed of *Zostera* and shells of *Lacuna vineta* and *Margarita helicina*, both associates on the eelgrass, have been identified.

A King Eider, shot at Scarborough, during the winter of 1907-08, had its gullet filled with large specimens of *Crammarus locusta*, the common sea flea of our shores. Another taken in 1908 was similarly filled with young crabs (*Cancer irroratus*), in both instances to the exclusion of other food.

In the stomachs of Canada Geese, and Brant (*Branta bernicla glaucogastra*) I have found rhizomes of *Zostera*, and in the Canada Goose, sea lettuce (*Ulva lactuca*).

In the stomach of the Common Bittern, besides frogs, I have seen the field mouse (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) and the large Water Beetle (*Distycus*).

In the stomach of a Dowitcher (*Macrohamphus griseus*), maggots, probably *Coleopa frigida*, a beach fly which abounds on our coast, breeding in decaying sea weeds at or above high tide mark.

Arquatella maritima is abundant on the outermost ledges and islands east of Cape Small. I have found its diet to consist commonly of small

blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) and barnacles (*Balanus balanoides*), the same diet, and same resort, as that of the Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres morinella*).—ARTHUR H. NORTON, *Portland, Maine.*

Hybridism and Generic Characters in the Trochilidæ.—I am tempted to offer a few comments on Mr. Walter P. Taylor's interesting article in the July 'Auk,' not merely because the subject is one to which at the present time I am giving special attention, but because I believe there is much to be said against Mr. Taylor's view of the case. Before discussing the question of generic differences, however, I wish to correct an error (for which I seem to be responsible) concerning the type-locality of *Selasphorus floresii*. This is given as "Bolaños, State of Oaxaca," whereas it should read Bolaños, State of Jalisco; therefore, the supposed fifth specimen mentioned in the second paragraph on page 292 is the same example as that on which the supposed species was based. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that this bird is a hybrid of *Selasphorus rufus* or *S. alleni* and *Calypte anna*, and it is not improbable that all four of the known specimens are of California origin, for I have an indistinct recollection of having somewhere read that some of Flores's specimens were obtained in California and subsequently, through error, labeled Bolaños.¹

Concerning generic distinctions it will simplify the matter very much to state that the question hinges entirely on what constitutes a genus in birds, and especially in the Trochilidæ. The generally accepted definition of a genus in zoology and botany is *a group of species which agree in the possession of certain characters not possessed by any other species or group of species*. In the various definitions of a genus which I have consulted in connection with this article,² it is nowhere implied that the differences must be exclusively morphological; the implication being that it is only necessary that a given group or set of species should share in certain obvious characteristics which separate them from any allied group. Every one knows that taxonomic groups, whether generic or of higher rank, are by no means of equal value in all classes of vertebrates (see footnote on page 6, 'Birds of North and Middle America,' Part I), and that birds, as a Class, are so very much more uniform in structure, and at the same time so much more numerous in species than the members of any other Class that, necessarily, a more minute subdivision is required, or, in other words, orders, families, genera, etc. (all super-specific groups), while arbitrarily equal in taxonomic rank are by no means (and cannot be) based on characters of equal anatomical importance. It is unfortunate that this fact is sometimes lost sight of, and that some would require for an avian genus

¹ If I am not mistaken in this impression, a similar case is that of several specimens in the National Museum collection received from Mr. John Xantus and labeled by him "Plains of Colima" which were undoubtedly obtained in California.

² See Agassiz, *Essay on Classification*, § 5, *Standard Dictionary*, *Century Dictionary*, etc.