

and was simply presenting Mr. Thayer's views as concisely as possible. What Mr. Thayer says is as follows: *The reader . . . is now in a position to perceive the fallacy of the statement prevalent in former years and still made by certain writers, that a protectively colored animal of the type described above escapes detection because being of a dull brown color like the ground and the bushes, it looks when it sits motionless like a clod or a stump or some such inanimate thing. . . . The protectively colored animal, on the other hand, is as if were obliterated by its countergradation of shades. . . . If these animals were merely brown or gray like clods or stumps they would not be concealed, because their structural forms are too distinct, and the eyes of enemies are keen to detect their characteristic modelling and outlines. On the other hand, a perfect shade gradation, even of some rankly brilliant color would go far toward concealing an animal.*<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Roosevelt can surely not be charged with misquotation here! Mr. Allen was probably contrasting his remarks with p. 15 of Mr. Thayer's book instead of with p. 19.

There are other quotations the significance of which would be materially changed if the entire paragraph or correlative matter elsewhere were considered. Indeed in a complicated discussion such as this it is quite possible to quote apparently contradictory statements from different parts of the same paper. The editor repeats his regret that through his oversight statements like the above were allowed to pass uncorrected.

WITMER STONE.]

### The Scientific Value of Bird Photographs.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':

*Dear Sir:* In selecting as the major title of his paper in 'The Auk' for October (Vol. XXIX, pp. 489-507) 'Roosevelt vs. Thayer . . . ' rather than *Revealing vs. Concealing Coloration*, Mr. Francis H. Allen evidently betrays his mental attitude toward a controversy to which his article is contributed.

Fair-minded, critical discussion of any subject tends to advance our understanding of it, but criticism which is unpleasantly personal, even discourteous in tone, which accuses a writer of misquoting, misrepresenting and perverting, of being dogmatic, ignorant, and grossly careless, obscures the main issues and for this, as well as for other reasons, is to be deplored. Particularly is this true when the criticism is not only unwarranted, but when the critic himself appears to be in error.

To illustrate Mr. Roosevelt's "inaccurate habit of mind and slap-dash style of thinking" Mr. Allen (*l. c.*, p. 492) challenges Mr. Roosevelt's reference<sup>2</sup> to photographs of certain birds as illustrating their conspicuousness in nature, and writes that Mr. Roosevelt quite overlooks "the obvious facts

<sup>1</sup> *Italicized sentences quoted verbatim from Mr. Thayer's book (italics mine).*

<sup>2</sup> *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, Vol. XXX, 1911, pp. 156; 220.

that the photographers naturally chose the conspicuous subjects, avoiding those that were at all obscured and getting their cameras into positions where the birds would come out most clearly, and thus made the birds as conspicuous as they possibly could, which was the end and aim of their work. I take it that the birds in most photographs do not appear at all as they would under average conditions in their natural surroundings."

In making this statement Mr. Allen not only does not fairly represent the views that Mr. Roosevelt expressed in the paper referred to, but he incidentally discredits the work of the bird photographer. No better answer to his criticism of Mr. Roosevelt's views can be found than in the very paper in which they are presented, and I write in this connection mainly in the defence of the field ornithologist who records some of his studies with a camera.

No doubt many bird photographs are made with the object of displaying their subject to the best advantage, but it does not follow that for this reason most bird photographs are lacking in scientific value, or that they do not faithfully portray nature. On the contrary, and replying in detail to Mr. Allen's disparaging estimate of photographs of birds in nature, I maintain, on the basis of the photographs contained in the works cited by Mr. Roosevelt, (1) that the photographer does *not* avoid subjects that "are at all obscured" (witness so-called puzzle pictures of Grouse, Woodcock, Whip-poor-will, etc.), (2) that he does *not* always make the bird as "conspicuous" as possible, (3) that to make birds conspicuous is *not* "the end and aim" of bird photography, and (4) that many bird photographs *do* represent birds as they appear "in their natural surroundings."

In his apparent eagerness, however, to convict Mr. Roosevelt of a "slap-dash style of thinking," and, as a side issue, the bird photographer of misrepresenting his subject, Mr. Allen fails to call attention to the fact that while Mr. Roosevelt mentions certain photographs to show that the birds portrayed are revealingly colored, so Mr. Thayer publishes the photographs of others to prove that they are concealingly colored! Thus Mr. Roosevelt refers to photographs of Black Skimmers, Gannets, Guillemots, Ibises, Cormorants, Egrets, Anhingas, Pelicans, and other birds which *are* conspicuous in nature as well as in photographs; while Mr. Thayer publishes <sup>1</sup> photographs (all taken by others) of the Virginia Rail, American Bittern, Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Upland Plover, Ruffed Grouse, Ptarmigan, Bob-white, Whip-poor-will, Nighthawk and other protectively colored birds to show that they are protectively colored.

In passing, it is well to note that while Mr. Roosevelt freely admits that the birds just mentioned, and of which Mr. Thayer publishes photographs, *are* protectively colored, Mr. Thayer does *not* admit that *any* bird is revealingly colored. In any event, I venture to claim that both writers demonstrate the scientific value of the properly made bird photograph, whether it be used as evidence to prove conspicuousness or inconspicuousness.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom.'

So much for this particular case from the bird photographer's point of view; as a more general comment on Mr. Allen's condemnation of Mr. Roosevelt's "inaccurate habit of mind," it will be sufficient to quote, as above suggested, the passages which Mr. Allen instances in support of his accusation. The first occurs on page 156 of the paper referred to, where, in a foot-note, Mr. Roosevelt says:

"Mr. Job's photographs of nesting nighthawks, whip-poor-wills, grouse, quail, woodcock, snipe, and least sandpipers show birds that actually are concealed by their coloration when on their nests. His photographs of nesting gannets, murre, guillemots, black skimmers, ibises, noddies and pelicans, and his and Mr. Finley's photographs of nesting gulls, terns and herons of many species show birds of a strikingly advertising coloration which coloration reveals them to every onlooker as they sit on their nests. The young herons, although not as advertisingly colored as the adults, have a revealing rather than a concealing coloration; the young anhingas are even more advertisingly colored than the adults; the young of some of the other birds seem to be concealingly colored."

The second passage, appears on page 220 of the same paper. Here Mr. Roosevelt writes:

"Take for example the descriptions and photographs of waterbirds by Messrs. Chapman and Job; no one can look at the photos of the black skimmer and stilt on their nests without seeing that even in that critical position their coloration is highly advertising, while the coloration of their young is concealing; no one can look at the photographs of the nesting egrets, anhingas, cormorants and pelicans without seeing that both the adults and the young are exceedingly conspicuous, without a vestige of concealing coloration; no one can look at the photographs of the nesting woodcock, nighthawk, Wilson's snipe, bob-white, and upland plover without seeing that they possess a concealing coloration."

Perhaps the reader can discover in these quotations some evidence of an "inaccurate habit of mind and slap-dash style of thinking," but I confess that I have been unable to do so. To my mind Mr. Allen's whole argument is here based on his assumption that photographs of birds in nature do not represent the birds as they would appear "under average conditions in their natural surroundings," an assumption which I believe will not be supported by an unprejudiced consideration of the recorded evidence.

Very truly yours,

FRANK M. CHAPMAN.

American Museum of Natural History,  
Dec. 10, 1912.

**The A. O. U. Check-List.**  
**Third Edition.**

EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':

*Dear Sir:* — I beg to submit herewith some comments which I presented before the last meeting of the A. O. U. in regard to the third edition of the Check-List of North American Birds.