

RECENT LITERATURE.

Hellmayr's 'Catalogue of Birds of the Americas.'¹—The fourth part of this invaluable work prepared by Dr. C. E. Hellmayr, appeared on December 29, 1925, and covers the difficult families Furnariidae and Dendrocolaptidae, comprising the Ovenbirds and Woodhewers. The treatment follows exactly that of the third part with the same abundance of foot notes covering original or amplified descriptions of critical species, discussions of relationships, etc., etc., while in the recognition of genera the author is commendably conservative.

Since noticing Part III the reviewer has had occasion to use it extensively and is more than ever impressed with the thoroughness and excellence of Dr. Hellmayr's work. Mr. Ridgway's 'Birds of North and Middle America' made intelligent systematic study of the Mesomyodian Passeres possible for those who are not specialists in the group, so far as the species north of Panama are concerned, but it was always exasperating to find only scattered mention of genera or species from farther south, although even that we were thankful for, as it was an extension of the task that Mr. Ridgway had set himself. Now, however, Dr. Hellmayr has continued the work from Panama to Cape Horn, and we have an exhaustive up-to-date treatment of these difficult families in their entirety.

Four new genera appear in the present volume: *Limnoctites* (p. 54) for *Limnornis rectirostris* Gould; *Dendrophylax* (p. 70) for *Synallaxis setaria* (Temm.); *Oreophylax* (p. 74) for *S. moreirae* and *Xenocistis* (p. 188) a new name for *Syndactyla* Reichenbach, preoccupied; and nine subspecies of the genera *Chilia*, *Leptasthenura*, *Asthenes*, *Phacellodomus*, *Xiphocolaptes* and *Dendroplex*.

We wish Dr. Hellmayr all speed with his work and congratulate ourselves that his first volumes covered families so vitally in need of revision and concerning which he is probably better informed than any other ornithologist.—W. S.

Dwight's 'Gulls of the World.'—Dr. Jonathan Dwight has been engaged for some years past in an exhaustive study of the Gulls of the world with especial reference to their plumages and molts and the results of his researches are presented in a recent bulletin² of some 300 pages issued by the American Museum of Natural History.

¹ Catalogue of Birds of the Americas. Initiated by Charles B. Cory, Late Curator of Zoology. Continued by Charles E. Hellmayr, Associate Curator of Birds. Part IV, Furnariidae—Dendrocolaptidae. Wilfred H. Osgood, Curator, Department of Zoology, Editor. Field Museum of Natural History Chicago, U. S. A. December 29, 1925, pp. 1-390 with one colored plate.

² The Gulls (Laridae) of the World; Their Plumages, Moults, Variations, Relationships and Distribution. By Jonathan Dwight, M.D. Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. History. Vol. LII, Art. III, pp. 63-401, New York. December 31, 1925. [The distribution of the author's separates of this bulletin has been delayed pending the preparation of an index.]

Probably no such series of detailed plumage descriptions has ever before been prepared for a single group of birds, and to one who glances casually through the pages it is fairly bewildering in its minutiae and complexity. At the same time one is deeply impressed if not appalled at the vast amount of work that the preparation of the report has entailed and the endless series of specimens which it has been necessary to examine and compare. The study of Gulls is by no means child's play and to make proper use of such a work as this, one must have some experience with the group—must be something of a "Laridist" as Dr. Coues has termed the Gull expert. With a series of specimens of any of the species before one it is now possible to match them up with the careful descriptions here given and ascertain to a nicety just "who's who" in Gulls. Without specimens, however, it is a difficult matter to compare the long descriptions, and while there are some useful keys one longs for a more definite contrasting of the important characters, even though the admirable plates of wing and tail patterns serve this need to some purpose. Doubtless, however, study will show that individual variation is so great that such tables of contrasting characters are impossible. Indeed, we infer as much, when we find that the key to the species of *Rissa* includes the subspecies also, while those for *Larus* and *Hydrocoloeus* do not. Indeed with only casual mention of some of the differences in certain of the plumages, it is difficult to ascertain just what such a form as *Larus argentatus thayeri*, for instance, really is, and on what characters it is based.

The introductory pages explain the two, three and four year plumage cycles which are exhibited by the various species, and the several plumages and intervening molts are ingeniously plotted in concentric circles or spirals. Variation in bill, leg, foot and tail are discussed at length, as well as color variation both of plumage and of the soft parts, the latter gleaned from the field notes of many collectors. Then follows the detailed description of the various plumages of each species, which in the Herring Gull number no less than ten—the natal and juvenal, and the nuptial and winter plumages of the first, second, third and fourth year, after which the annual plumages are not distinguishable. It requires ten pages to cover these Herring Gull descriptions with four more for the summary. Under each plumage are quoted the number and location of several "reference specimens" which when consulted will show just exactly what the author is describing, if there should be any question as to the accuracy of his deductions.

The series of 386 drawings of tail and wing patterns of most of the plumages of nearly all of the species, constitutes one of the most valuable features of the work as it is always easier to grasp an idea from a drawing or diagram than from a lengthy description, necessary as the latter may be. There are also colored plates showing the head and foot of at least two plumages of each species, and outline drawings of the bills of all the species. Mr. Allan Brooks is responsible for the colored plates while the black and white illustrations are mainly from sketches by Mr. H. Ira Hartshorn.

The paragraphs on distribution are full and detailed and there are tables of measurements for each species.

Dr. Dwight's knowledge of the plumages and molts of birds is exhaustive and his more important contributions to ornithology have all been in this field, but in the present work we feel that he has outdone himself and has surpassed in detail and accuracy any of his former studies.

In matters of classification and nomenclature, his treatment of the group has not, perhaps, been quite so happy. While it is convenient, for instance, to have an alphabetical list of the species names and those of the genera, with their equivalents indicated according to the author's views, it would have been far more satisfactory, in the case of the genera, to have had the type species indicated in every case. Thus while "*Chroicocephalus* = *Hydrocoloeus*" in the sense that they both belong to the same generic group in the present work, they are by no means *equivalent* and each is available for generic use if we cut our genera finer, yet nowhere in the work can we ascertain what the type species of *Chroicocephalus* is, or just what species it should be associated with.

Again, in the matter of the recognition of genera, while Dr. Dwight conforms to the current attitude as to most genera, he attempts to divide the species of the great genus *Larus* into *Larus* and *Hydrocoloeus* without being able to present clearly defined characters for their separation. As a matter of fact, as it appears to the reviewer, there are a number of subgenera of *Larus*, which Dr. Dwight recognizes, but these must all be left as subgenera or all elevated to generic rank, and nothing is gained by attempting to divide the lot into two grand divisions where no clear line of demarkation exists. Such an attempt smacks more of a *genus de convenance*—a desire to reduce the number of species in *Larus* rather than the discovery of a natural distinction, and the necessity of calling so many species by a generic name with which they have never before been associated does not advance science.

We note a few evident slips apparently due to changing names while the work was going through the press. *Chroicocephalus* is thus retained on pp. 111 and 394 where we presume *Hydrocoloeus* is intended, and under Franklin's Gull a type locality is quoted under *franklinii* but none under *pipixcan*, the name adopted. However, slips are inevitable in a work of such scope and, as the author truly says, nomenclature is largely a matter of personal opinion so that we can afford to pass over such trivial matters and congratulate Dr. Dwight upon a splendid piece of ornithological work which places him at once in the enviable position of high priest of the "Laridists."—W. S.

Wright and Dewar on 'The Ducks of India.'—The present work,¹ we

¹ *The Ducks of India: Their Habits, Breeding Grounds and Migrations; together with other Useful Information for the Sportsman and Observer.* By R. G. Wright & Douglas Dewar. With Twenty-two Full-page Plates in Colours. H. F. and G. Witherby, 326 High Holborn, London, W. C. 1., 1925, pp. 1-2311. £ 3/3/net.