

species and subspecies (Formenkreis and Race) is merely one of degree and we have in nature forms differing by every conceivable amount of difference from very slightly differentiated geographic races to strikingly different species, their grouping into genera, species and subspecies (or into Genera, Formenkreises and Races) being largely one of personal opinion, aided often by breaks in the series caused by the extinction of connecting links, or possibly by the sudden emphasis exerted by environment, or otherwise, on some usually dormant or recessive character. Also that the subspecies may in course of time, quickly or slowly, become a species through isolation or other cause.

Dr. Kleinschmidt's method of presenting his theme is peculiar and much space is devoted to considering objections to the Formenkreis Theory for which objections,—so far as we can see, the author himself is responsible, standing, as it were, as counsel for both sides of the case! All through the book, too, he seems to consider himself as the originator of a revolutionary theory of creation a claim that hardly seems justified.

The careful distinction of races from sports and other forms of individual variation seems beside the point as such things are not recognized nomenclatorially under any system, and also the explanation that the Formenkreis (literally "form circle") is really not a circle but a union of forms distinct from other unions, the range of which may be anything but circular—we can hardly imagine anyone thinking that a circle, a square or any other geometrical figure was in any way concerned in the discussion!

The book is well gotten up with many interesting illustrations but we regret that the author has not devoted more time and effort to a clearer presentation of his theory and dispensed with much unnecessary praise of what the Formenkreis Theory has accomplished, and will accomplish, in recasting biological education and research—and even the public museum!—claims which we fear his readers will hardly endorse.—W. S.

Belcher's 'Birds of Nyasaland.'—This well gotten up book¹ consists of an annotated list of the birds of Nyasaland based primarily upon the observations of the author during seven years residence in the country. The nomenclature follows that of Sclater's 'Systema' and there is a brief description of each species with keys, sometimes to genera sometimes to species, translated from Reichenow's great work on African birds. The "annotations" are very full and discuss the abundance, distribution and peculiarities of each species. Our only criticism is the use of abbreviations of dates. For instance "21. xi. 26." is very little shorter than "Nov. 21, 1926" and the latter is far more satisfactory. Fortunately this usage is resorted to in only part of the text.

¹ The Birds of Nyasaland. Being a Classified List of the Species Recorded for the Nyasaland Protectorate up to the Year 1930, with brief descriptions and field notes, and a map. By Charles Frederic Belcher. London: Crosby Lockwood and Son. Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E. C. 4. 1930. pp. i-xii + 1-356. Price 15 shillings, net.

Nyasaland is a long narrow country lying west and south of Lake Nyasa, projecting down into Portuguese East Africa and bounded above by Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika. It is roughly 600 miles in length and 100 miles wide and possesses a variety of habitat as may be inferred from the fact that Mr. Belcher lists no less than 521 species of birds. The water birds, gallinaceous species and birds of prey number together 164 species, the Doves, Parrots, Cuckoos, Owls, etc., 117, and the Passeriformes 241, all but two of which are Oscines.

Mr. Belcher has made an important addition to the rapidly growing literature of African ornithology and his book should prove of greatest interest to settlers as well as to more serious bird students.

It is curious to read in his discussion of English names for the birds that, as recently as five years ago, many of them had never been seen by a white man, while in regard to identification he says most truly "I have never yet met with a book description which, without more, would enable recognition on the brief glance which is so often all one gets of a winged passer-by. In time a bird-lover comes to be able to tell a great many species, even in flight, and at some distance: *how* it is done I have not the knowledge of mental processes to say." How many times have we pondered upon this same question!

Beside the English names those given by the native tribes are added and there is an excellent map of the Protectorate prepared by Mr. C. A. Higman. We should have liked to have had a discussion of the faunal areas of the country and their more characteristic species, as such information is most helpful in these days when zoogeography plays such an important part in our systematic work.—W. S.

Nicoll's 'Birds of Egypt.'—It was our privilege in 1920 to review in these columns Michael John Nicoll's 'Hand List of the Birds of Egypt.' We could not but feel that this excellent work by no means exhausted his knowledge of the subject but his untimely death in 1925 seemed to preclude the possibility of a supplementary and more pretentious volume. However it seems that after his return to England he had been making preparations for exactly such a work, and thanks to the support of the Egyptian Government and the sympathetic and painstaking labors of his friend Col. R. Meinertzhagen we have before us the completed work of Nicoll in Egypt, in the form of two portly quarto volumes¹ beautifully gotten up constituting a well deserved memorial to a true student of nature.

The manuscript left by Nicoll covered about two-thirds of the Passeres. This has been much amplified by Col. Meinertzhagen and text for the remainder of the species added, while the limits have been extended to include Sinai, and chapters on relevant subjects as well as a full bibli-

¹ Nicoll's *Birds of Egypt*. By Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, D. S. O. Published under the authority of the Egyptian Government. Hugh Rees Ltd., 5 & 7 Regent Street, London, S. W. 1. 1930 Vol. I, pp. 1-xvi + 1-348. Vol. II, pp. 349-700.