

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 volumes<sup>1</sup> 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-

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

ography have been added. So the work as published becomes as much Meinertzhagen's as Nicoll's.

The supplementary chapters cover respectively (1) Origin of life in Egypt, (2) Migration, (3) Birds of Ancient Egypt (by R. E. Moreau) and (4) Bird Protection in Egypt.

Under the first heading the physical geography of Egypt is discussed and the country divided into six regions: the Mediterranean coast, the Nile Valley and Delta, the Desert, the Western Oases, the Sinai Peninsula and the Red Sea. Of these the desert as Col. Meinertzhagen says is the dominating factor of Egyptian life and we cannot refrain from presenting the picture that his facile pen has drawn: "The attraction of the desert," he says, "is that of woman for man. It is when she is silent that she is most attractive, most elusive, most seductive. It is when she is boisterous that one hates her most. Life with her is one continual dream of romance, for she has the power of making the traveller feel he is her sole admirer, her lonely visitor. She attracts with a magnetism which is irresistible, never assumes familiarity, never permits a liberty, gives freely of her charms, which never fail to please, and one leaves her wishing for more. She calls again and one cannot refuse. She takes and gives of her best. Cruel and merciless to those who play with her, generous and even gracious to those who love her and dwell with her. To ignore her is to court disaster. Her fancies and follies are various and numerous, her surprises never failing. One cannot linger or loiter in her arms. She demands efficiency and energy, character she respects and repays. To lassitude and carelessness she meets out death in its most hideous form." American ornithologists might easily imagine that they were reading one of the late Elliott Coues' sketches! The geological history of Egypt is next considered and the alternations of desert and pluvial conditions as well as the advent of the Nile and the formation of the Delta. Evidence is presented to suggest that the present deserts are older than the Delta and that the oases are older than the desert, being relics of a former widespread era of pluvial conditions which has everywhere else been superceded by the desert.

Northern forms, it is suggested, were driven into Egypt from the north during the Glacial Period and tropical species intruded from the south before the deserts were formed, traces of both of which elements are still to be found in the fauna and flora of the oases, while the Nile brought with it from the south a luxuriant flora with accompanying animal life which with the encroachment of recent desert conditions has been largely exterminated. The strikingly varied physical conditions of the present and past in Egypt certainly offer wonderful opportunity for speculation.

The chapter on migration is replete with interesting discussion both of the general problem and migration in Egypt. Col. Meinertzhagen considers that adults usually precede the birds of the year in migration which corresponds with our experience in America but we cannot agree that molt never takes place during the migratory flight as we have found many Sanderling in full molt of the primaries on the New Jersey coast in August

(see Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1897, p. 368). Col. Meinertzhagen also includes in his discussion of the origin of the Egyptian fauna an interesting consideration of evolution and the ways in which it operates, which we cannot for lack of space consider here.

Mr. Moreau identifies some 90 species of birds in the paintings and carvings on ancient tombs, etc., and considers that the most potent factor in the extermination of many of these was the disappearance of the papyrus thickets with the increasing aridity of the country.

The work proper is a very fully annotated list of the birds of Egypt and under each species we find reference to the original description and synonyms, a full description of the several plumages and paragraphs on distribution, nidification and field characters.

The illustrations are numerous including many text figures, thirty-eight full page plates in color and three maps. The artists are G. E. Lodge, Roland Green and H. Grönvold. There is also a frontispiece portrait of Mr. Nicoll with a brief biography.—W. S.

**Lynes' 'Review of the Genus *Cisticola*.'**—The Grass-warblers of the genus *Cisticola* have long been a stumbling-block to systematic ornithologists. Although in most cases easily distinguished in life by their habits and habitats, many of these little birds display a variety of plumage, seasonal and sexual, which has led to the naming of more species and sub-species than in reality exist.

During the years 1920 and 1921 Rear-Admiral Lynes made an extended collecting trip to Jebel Marra, an isolated mountain in central Darfur, and in 'The Ibis' for the years 1924 to 1926 he wrote an excellent account of the birds he collected. Seven species of *Cisticola* were obtained and in identifying these he encountered difficulties which necessitated a careful taxonomic study of the genus as a whole. This he reserved for an appendix and in the meanwhile completed his account of the rest of the collection. Then turning his attention to this single genus he began a comprehensive study of all the available material in the combined collections of several of the larger museums of the world. With this unrivalled series at his disposal many of the errors and misunderstandings of the past were cleared up and a provisional classification adopted. Realizing, however, the necessity of a better knowledge of the birds in life in order to elucidate certain problems of relationship, Admiral Lynes then commenced an extended tour of the greater part of Africa with the express purpose of meeting as many species of *Cisticola* in their nesting season as possible. On his return, with much added knowledge, he resumed his study of the museum skins, the outcome of which is a work of 673 pages and 20 colored plates.<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably this represents the most exhaustive study ever made on a single avian genus, and Admiral Lynes is to be congratulated upon the

<sup>1</sup> Review of the genus *Cisticola*. By Rear-Admiral H. Lynes, C.B., C.M.G., M.B.O.U. &c. *Ibis*, 12th series, vol. VI, Supplementary number, pp. 1-673, pls. I-XX. August 1930.