

CORRESPONDENCE.**Semi-Centennial Greetings**

LONDON, 21ST MARCH, 1934.

To the Hon. Secretary,
American Ornithologists' Union.

Dear Sir,

I am instructed by the President and Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union to inform you that at the General Meeting of the Union held on 14th inst, a resolution moved by the President to the effect that "The British Ornithologists' Union heartily congratulates the American Ornithologists' Union on the celebration of their Jubilee Anniversary and sends their heartiest greetings and best wishes for the continuation of their success and great and increasing influence in the Science of Ornithology" was put to the Meeting and carried with acclamation.

May I add my personal congratulations to the Union of which I have the honour to belong and say how much I, and all British Ornithologists, have appreciated the kind and constant courtesy and help which has been extended to us in our mutual work.

Believe me dear Sir,
Yours very Sincerely,
E. C. Stuart Baker

CHARLOTTENBURG, WILMERSDORFERSTRASSE 74,
Nov. 6TH, 1933.

Dear Dr. Palmer,

I send my most hearty congratulations to the 50th Anniversary of the American Ornithologists' Union and wish it will have a long life of some thousand odd years.

With best greetings to all my friends over there.

Yours very Truly,
Prof. Oscar Neumann

Alleged Excessive Collecting.

April 27, 1934.

Editor of 'The Auk.'

Dear Sir:—

I have been considerably distressed to hear from an ornithologist friend, recently returned from the Pacific Islands, of ruthless and excessive destruction of rare birds by the American Whitney expedition. He tells me they have apparently exterminated the small lory which is only found on a mountain in the interior of Viti Levu killing no less than 47 when permission was given to take 5. 18 specimens of the rare *Pyrrhulopsis personata* were taken, again much in excess of the permit number, and the bird does not appear to have been seen since in a wild state. The Norfolk

Island Parrakeet (*Cyanorhamphus cooki*) has also been decimated or exterminated, and it is feared that great mischief has been done on Antipodes Island and other islands as well.

I trust the report may be exaggerated but my friend seems sure that his information is accurate. The slaughter of rare birds of the parrot family is particularly foolish and deplorable as, if a few pairs had been taken alive, they could easily have been bred in confinement in California where the climate is ideal for avicultural purposes. An abundance of museum specimens could thus have been produced without harm. For some years past, with the aid of a few American friends, I have been endeavoring to encourage the breeding in California of species threatened with extinction in a wild state. The experiment has been successful and would have been *very* successful if our efforts for financial support had not met with an exceedingly poor response. By a rather curious irony if *C. cooki* does still survive it may be as the result of my action in sending a few pairs to California where they are now breeding.

Yours truly,
Tavistock

Editor of 'The Auk.'

On behalf of the American Museum of Natural History, I beg to acknowledge your courtesy in permitting me to reply to the letter which, under date of April 27, 1934, the Marquess of Tavistock writes to you for publication in your pages. In so doing, however, I must express my regret that consideration for his fellow-workers, if not protection for himself, did not induce the Marquess to attempt to confirm the charges he makes against this Museum's Whitney Expedition before giving them publicity. The facts are as follows:

Of "the small lory" which the Marquess states "is only found on a mountain in the interior of Viti Levu" and which we are said to "have apparently exterminated" by "killing no less than 47" specimens, we secured 12 examples all taken during a short one-week trip, proof to those familiar with the difficulties of mountain forest collecting, that the species is by no means rare; nor is it restricted to the island of Viti Levu, but is also found on other large islands of the Fiji group. There are, for example, specimens in the British Museum from Taviuni.

Of the Masked Parrot (*Pyrrhulopsis personata*), we took not only "18" but 26 specimens. However, the work of Beck, our collector, showed that this species is neither rare nor threatened with extinction. Viti Levu, the island it inhabits, exceeds in size the whole of southeastern England (Counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Middlesex) and the greater part of it is still unexplored. That in a short visit Beck could have secured so large a series of this forest-inhabiting species is evidence of its abundance, while the restriction of his labors to a limited part of its range renders it obvious that he could not have seriously affected its numbers.

As for the Norfolk Island Parrakeet (*Cyanorhamphus cooki*), which Beck is said to have "decimated or exterminated" he secured two specimens. The "great mischief" "it is feared" that Beck did on Antipodes Island appears to be restricted to collecting 5 specimens of the island Paroquet (*Cyanorhamphus unicolor*) and two specimens of the Snipe (*Coenocorypha auklandica tristrami*). Incidentally it may be remarked that the existence of 33 specimens of the former and 20 of the latter in the Rothschild Collection has not aroused criticism. Moreover, since Beck's visit to Antipodes Island in 1926, Oliver ('New Zealand Birds' 1930) writes that both this paroquet and snipe are common there.

On the whole, therefore, I believe we may assure the Marquess that his "trust" that the reports to which he so unfortunately gives credence are "exaggerated" is warranted. His concluding suggestion that we breed specimens for our collections has, at least, the merit of novelty. But studies of insular evolution, for which the Whitney Expedition was primarily inaugurated, and also of other phases of geographical variation, based on birds raised in aviaries would not, in our opinion, be acceptable contributions to the science of ornithology.

I confess that I am at loss to understand why persons who make or repeat these charges against the American Museum do not write direct to us for information, rather than to a third person. We have nothing to conceal, and if excess of zeal should have led our collector to violate the ethics of his profession we should be among the first to admit and regret it. Our critics do not appear to be concerned with either the object or the results of an undertaking to which at great expense we have already devoted fourteen years, and which bids fair to occupy as many more. Nevertheless, we hope that they may be interested to learn that there have already been published, chiefly by the American Museum, 44 papers based on Whitney Expedition collections, and that these merely mark the beginning of our studies of this unique representation of island bird-life. Also, we are now preparing to send a second expedition to the Pacific to make paintings and collect accessories for the production of large Habitat Bird groups for a hall in the new Whitney wing of the Museum which will be wholly devoted to a popular presentation of the work of the Whitney Expedition.

June 8, 1934.

Frank M. Chapman,
Curator Dept. Birds,
American Museum of Natural History, New York City.