

NOTES AND NEWS

THE RÔLE OF THE A. O. U. IN ORNITHOLOGY TODAY

In the early days of its history, the A. O. U. exercised a directive, active influence in shaping the trends and tendencies of ornithology in America. Its early stimulus in the fields of bird protection and popularization of bird study gave rise to two organizations which have long since outstripped their parent in size, wealth, and influence—the Audubon Societies and the Biological Survey. Left thus with the pursuance of ornithological science as its sole remaining field, it has gradually lost its active rôle, aside from publishing a quarterly journal and the various editions of the 'Check-list,' and has become merely the passive recipient of such scientific activity as happened to take place. There is no longer a distinct need for the Union to engage actively in the fields covered by the two organizations to which it gave rise, although a critical sympathetic interest in those fields should always remain one of its societal characteristics. However, in the realm of scientific endeavor and progress, it should again assert its influence and attempt to mold, to encourage or discourage, as the case may be, different trends or developments. If the Union, composed, as it is, of the best ornithological experience and knowledge in America, cannot play a progressive and vigorous rôle in formulating or directing general tendencies in modern ornithology, then it is high time we called in the doctor. It is true that progress may come about without, or even in spite of, the Union—witness the growth, development, and organization of bird-banding. That the scientific results of this new technique have found their medium of expression chiefly outside of our journal is in many ways a loss to 'The Auk,' glad though we be for the success of the banding publications. But there are fields of limited popular appeal which are not less than basic for sound progress in ornithology,—avian physiology, genetics, psychology, to mention but a few,—and which need and deserve more than a careless approbation of an individual here and there. The old, well-established fields will take care of themselves; it is the new ones that need encouragement and aid. Even in the older fields there is need for some non-partisan body to act as an intermediary between institutions and individuals to bring about cooperative enterprises, to help avoid duplication of effort and expense, to prevent unnecessary repetition of outworn themes. The A. O. U. is precisely the body that should serve this function,—never authoritarian, always advisory, tolerant but with the courage of its own convictions.

It is to serve the Union in its rôle of serving ornithology with all the resources of knowledge, experience, judgment, and materials at its command that a Research Committee is in process of appointment with a number of subcommittees dealing with various specialties. It is hoped that the membership of our society will cooperate with the committee and make use of it.—HERBERT FRIEDMANN.

THE FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING of the American Ornithologists' Union will be held at Washington, D. C., October 17 to 21, 1938, with headquarters at the Hotel Raleigh, Twelfth and Pennsylvania Ave. It follows that July 17 next, is the last date upon which to submit nominations for the classes of Fellows and Members so that they may be acted upon at this meeting. Such nominations should if possible be in the hands of the Secretary by July 15.