

GENERAL NOTES

On the American status of *Tiaris canora* and *Carduelis carduelis*.—In checking literature references and specimen material for the two final volumes of Bent's *Life histories of North American birds* I found two minor discrepancies of long standing in the A. O. U. Check-list. The first of these involves the Melodious Grassquit, *Tiaris canora*, endemic to Cuba and admitted to the American list on the basis of a pair of wings from a bird that struck the lighthouse at Sombrero Key, Monroe County, Florida, 17 April 1888. The lightkeeper forwarded these, together with a number of other birds that had struck the light in passage, to C. Hart Merriam, then curator of birds at the United States National Museum.

Robert Ridgway identified the wings as *Tiaris canora*. They were catalogued as U. S. N. M. 113605, and placed in an envelope in the *Tiaris* tray. There I found them in June, 1962, and examined them for their historical interest. They showed such manifest differences from the far more adequate series of *T. canora* now in the U. S. N. M. than that available in Ridgway's day that I asked Alexander Wetmore to check them with me. We agree that the wings are actually those of *T. bicolor bicolor* of the Bahamas, also in the Check-list on the basis of a later stray to Miami.

T. canora is commonly caged in Cuba, and has been imported in quantity into the United States by cage-bird dealers, particularly in Miami, where enough have escaped to have been reported in the feral state six times in the last decade (*Florida Nat.*, 26: 57, 1953; 33: 172, 1960; *Audubon Field Notes*, 7: 212, 1953; 12: 276, 1958; 15: 405, 1961). Four of these observations, on 11 May 1952, 9 January 1953, 2 April 1960, 2 and 16 September 1961, were by Louis A. Stimson, one of the most reliable observers in Florida. One recent sight record by Ira J. Abramson on 25 May 1961 suggests the possibility of the species nesting in the Miami area. But as yet there is no certainly wild-taken specimen on record for the area covered by the Check-list, no proof that the species has ever reached this country by its own power, and no incontrovertible evidence that the species has as yet established itself firmly in the wild in Florida. Hence I have deleted it from the *Life histories*.

The 5th edition of the A. O. U. Check-list follows previous editions in assigning the populations of the European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*, resident in continental North America and in Bermuda, to the British race, *C. c. britannica*. This was apparently on the basis of the British source of the birds introduced in several places in the United States in the 19th century, and on the authority of Hellmayr (*Cat. bds. Americas*, pt. 11, p. 264, 1938) who states (footnote 2): "A single adult from Long Island is unequivocally the British form." John Jackson Elliott, who has studied the small and now dwindling Long Island colony of this species for the last three decades, and who has contributed its life history to the Bent series, points out the strong likelihood that this population could well have been bolstered by later escapes or unrecorded releases of captive birds. The cage birds imported in the 20th century have come largely from central Europe, and are assignable most probably to the nominate race. Whether or not the surviving United States population is pure *C. c. britannica* or a hybrid one with admixtures of other racial strains will probably never be known, for a search has revealed no adult wild-taken North American specimens in the major United States collections. Hellmayr's specimen, actually taken at Hoboken, New Jersey, 2 March 1878, and three other specimens collected at Long Island City in the winter of 1889 (all formerly in the American Museum of Natural History) cannot be located today.

The Check-list assigns the Bermuda population to *C. c. britannica*, apparently on

the grounds that the 19th century colonization was by escapes from a British ship. Its compilers evidently overlooked F. M. Chapman's statement (on p. 513) in his last revision (1932) of his famous *Handbook of birds of eastern North America*, the bible, in youth, of my generation of ornithologists: "The Bermuda bird has been described as *Carduelis carduelis bermudiana* Kennedy, but Dr. Percy R. Lowe writes me that specimens from that island agree with the race from Madeira, the Azores, and Canary Islands, *Carduelis carduelis parva* Tchusi [Tschusi]." I recently examined three fresh adult Bermuda specimens in the American Museum of Natural History and, with the expert help of Charles Vaurie, compared them with the excellent series of European material there. We agree that they are unequivocally, to use Hellmayr's adjective, of the Madeiran race, *C. c. parva*. This is not at all surprising, as the most avid cage-bird fanciers in Bermuda are found in the large colony of resident Azorians, who very probably imported from their home islands the stock that now dominates the wild Bermuda European Goldfinch populations.—O. L. AUSTIN, JR., *Florida State Museum, Gainesville, Florida*.

Mississippi Kite in Argentina; with comments on migration and plumages in the genus *Ictinia*.—The winter range of the Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) is "not certainly known" (A. O. U. *Check-list of North American birds*, 5th edit., p. 101, 1957). Blake (*Auk*, 66: 82, 1949) called attention to two examples from southern South America, taken in different years in Paraguay (Colonia Nueva Italia, Dept. Villeta) on 26 February 1942 and 14 December 1944. Supporting the idea that South America may be the main wintering ground is an unrecorded female in the American Museum of Natural History (*ex* Rothschild coll.) taken at Mocoví, Chaco, Argentina, on 6 January 1904. This adult example, in every way typical of *mississippiensis*, was recorded as a Plumbeous Kite, *I. plumbea* (Hartert and Venturi, *Novit. Zool.*, 16: 240, 1909), presumably because *mississippiensis* was not then known to reach South America and two other specimens of *Ictinia* from the same lot (one taken at the same locality four days later) are indubitably *plumbea*. Statements in the literature that the Mississippi Kite winters in Florida, Texas, México, and Guatemala appear to be based on occasional stragglers and transients. I have not seen any published winter date from México or Guatemala. For Florida there is one published January sight report in the twentieth century and an undetailed nineteenth century report of January and February occurrence (Howell, *Florida bird life*, p. 167, 1932; Sprunt, *Florida bird life*, p. 97, 1954). Recent writers on Texas birds do not list this kite as a wintering species (Wolfe, *Check-list of the birds of Texas*, 1956; Peterson, *A field guide to the birds of Texas*, 1960). As it is quite likely that on migration through tropical America *I. mississippiensis* may be mistaken for its more abundant Neotropical relative, *I. plumbea*, which breeds from México to northern Argentina, but is also migratory, some comment on the migration and distinguishing features of these two forms may be helpful. If *I. mississippiensis* winters in South America it will be present when certain populations of *plumbea* are breeding, others are migrating, and still others are wintering.

Migration in the tropics of the Mississippi and Plumbeous Kites.—*I. mississippiensis* leaves the United States between the end of August and late September, a few remaining into early October; it returns chiefly from April to the third week of May, some arriving as early as the beginning of March (Bent, *U. S. Natl. Mus., Bull.* 167: 63–64, 69, 1937; Sutton, *Condor*, 41: 41–47, 1939; Allan and Sime, *Condor*, 45: 111, 1943; Peterson, *op. cit.*). Loose flocks of migrants must regularly pass through México, but I have found few definite dates in the literature. Migrants have been