

NOTES AND NEWS

At the invitation of the University of Florida, the Eighty-first Stated Meeting of The American Ornithologists' Union will convene in Gainesville, Florida, 12-16 August 1963. Headquarters will be in Hume Hall on the University of Florida campus. Business sessions will be held in Hume Hall Monday 12 August. Public sessions will be held in nearby McCarty Hall, 13-15 August, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings starting at 9:00 A.M. and on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons beginning at 2:00 P.M.

Members and guests may register in the lobby of Hume Hall starting on Monday afternoon at 1:00 P.M. The usual registration fee of \$3.00 per adult registrant will be charged.

A field trip to Silver Springs, 40 miles from Gainesville, will take place on Wednesday afternoon, 14 August, starting at 1:15 P.M., followed by a barbecue supper at the University of Florida's recreation center at Lake Wauberg. For Friday, 16 August, two field trips will be arranged if sufficient interest is shown.

The University of Florida has reserved Hume Hall exclusively for the use of A.O.U. members and guests during the meetings. Hume Hall adjoins Lake Alice, where alligators growl and Purple and Common gallinules, Ospreys, and seven species of herons and ibises breed. Rates, including maid service, for rooms with twin beds are \$2.50 per person per day double occupancy, \$3.50 per day single occupancy.

Reservations for accommodations in Hume Hall, and for various events of the meeting, may be made by applying to Dr. J. C. Dickinson, Jr., Chairman of the Local Committee, Florida State Museum, Gainesville, Florida.

At the recent meetings of the Cooper Ornithological Society at Austin, Texas (18-21 April 1963), the Society's A. Brazier Howell award (for the best paper read at the annual meeting by an individual not holding a Ph.D. in the biological sciences) went to James K. Baker for "The Cave Swallow." The Harry R. Painton Award administered by the Society (for the best paper to appear in *The Condor* in the two years preceding) was made to William R. Dawson and Francis C. Evans for "Relation of growth and development to temperature regulation in nestling Vesper Sparrows" (*Condor*, 62: 329-340, 1960).

OBITUARIES

Colonel LORD WILLIAM PERCY died at his home, Horstead House, Norwich, on February 8, 1963, in his eighty-first year.

Lord William, son of the seventh Duke of Northumberland, was not affiliated with the A.O.U., but throughout his life he was an active naturalist, an extremely skillful field worker and student of bird behavior, and a colleague and friend of ornithologists in many lands.

His first and enduring interest centered in the ducks, of which he amassed an important, well-documented collection. Nearly all the examples were shot by himself and prepared by his own hands as notably beautiful study skins. Many of these were given from time to time to museums in response to particular wants. A representative series of more than 1,200 specimens, rich in rarities, eclipse plumages, and young of the downy stage, became the property of the American Museum of Natural History in 1932.

Percy's keenness as an observer was phenomenal. The late Ludlow Griscom, an

acknowledged virtuoso in bird recognition, once guided him on a winter trip to Gardiner's Bay, eastern Long Island. Griscom afterwards informed me that Lord William had outmatched him—and anyone else he had ever known—in quick and sure identification of flying ducks at maximum visual range.

Educated at Eton and Oxford, Lord William prepared for the law. He practiced only a decade until, after being severely wounded in the First World War while serving in France with the Grenadier Guards, he took over legal capacities with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force under General Allenby.

His travels, always chiefly in search of birds, included Africa, the Near East, Siberia, and the New World. He knew America from Alaska almost to Cape Horn. In 1922 he and Lady William went to southern Chile, primarily to become acquainted with steamer-ducks (*Tachyeres*). Some of the experiences of this undertaking are recounted by their companion in the field, the late Frank M. Chapman, in the *Autobiography of a bird-lover* (1933).

Africa was, however, the continent that drew him most strongly. From youth he returned again and again, several recent visits marking his only departures from home in later life. He became particularly fascinated by the finfoot (*Podica*), which is in certain respects a striking evolutionary analogue of the torrent ducks (*Merganetta*) with which he had gained familiarity in the Andes. It is to be hoped that his comprehensive notes on the finfoot may find early publication.

Most of Lord William's ornithological writings were scattered but they were no less significant than vivid. One that comes to mind is a nostalgic account of Steller's eider in the Arctic Sea ice of springtime, to the north of eastern Siberia. This appears among essays contributed to Bannerman's *Birds of the British Isles*.

His most memorable publication was a small but brilliant book, *Three studies in bird character* (1951). In this he dealt with the gray heron, the water rail, and the bittern, all inhabitants of his beloved Norfolk marshland. In addition to the clarity, constant surprise, and charm of the text, this work is illustrated by 83 of the most amazing documentary photographs of bird behavior that have ever been published. They are the result of periods of as long as 87 consecutive days spent in a blind and they disclose, among many other matters, discovery of a function of powderdown tracts. In the bittern these specialized friable feathers are used as a "dry shampoo" to free the entire plumage from the slime of eels, a favorite prey.

The text and illustrations of this book make it appear that Lord William outdistanced all competitors in establishing a rapprochement with notoriously shy and secretive marsh fowl. Soon after beginning his spying and experiments from hiding, he was able to work in full view without interruption of the program. Two days after the start of at-the-nest studies of the water rail, for instance, his subjects were taking worms flipped from his fingers and leaping several times their height to capture suspended bait. He wrote that once the bird "has plucked up courage to take one worm so supplied, man is progressively accepted as a privileged spectator of water rail life during the twenty days required for their eggs to hatch. During that time they will become so indifferent to the human presence that in the end they will be walking round his feet while he stands in the open."

It is by no means certain that every naturalist would meet with equal good fortune. Without meaning to be mystical, I am convinced that some subtlety of Lord William's approach proved as winning to animals as to his fellow men. I recall an occasion at his former farm near Great Yarmouth when a huge sow with eight or ten farrow repulsed the pig-keeper at every attempt to enter the sty and pick up a suckling which had lacerated jowls. Lord William, on his rounds, asked the man to try once again.

When this produced another infuriated response, his Lordship vaulted the fence himself, pulled the baby pig by its ear from the teat of a wholly complacent mother, and carried it off for medication!

The rare quality of his written words, whether printed or in letters, could be no less than an expected sequel by friends acquainted with the logic, precision, understatement and thrift of Lord William's conversation. He seemed to possess the gift of always expressing himself to best advantage and, within the broad field of natural history and the conservation of renewable resources, whatever he uttered partook of sympathy and wisdom. His concern with the general despoliation of nature was painfully deep. As he himself wrote: "Man, the arch-destroyer and predator in all creation, whose history is degraded and disgraced in every generation by its record of ruthless destruction and brutality inflicted in greed or lust on the animal creation and on his fellow man alike, is wont to describe the law of Nature in such hackneyed and unthinking phrases as 'red in tooth and claw,' and yet may search the operation of that law in vain for similar perpetration of cruelty by wild creatures."

Lord William is survived by his wife, the former Mary Swinton of Kimmerghame, their two sons, and several grandchildren.—ROBERT CUSHMAN MURPHY.

BEECHER S. BOWDISH, a member of the American Ornithologists' Union since 1891, an Elective Member since 1934, and more recently an Honorary Life Member, died on February 21, 1963, at the advanced age of 91 years. Born in Phelps, New York, on February 27, 1872, he had resided since 1904 in Demarest, New Jersey.

Mr. Bowdish had a lifelong interest in natural history and worked as a professional or semi-professional in the field for most of his life. He volunteered in the Spanish American War and then transferred to Puerto Rico, where he collected specimens for various museums. Later he was one of the founders of the New Jersey Audubon Society, which he served in one capacity or another for more than half a century. His close friend P. B. Philipp was President and advanced or raised the funds to employ Mr. Bowdish as executive officer. The two men shared an interest in "oology" and specialized on the little known nesting habits of the Cape May and other warblers to be found near Philipp's camp in New Brunswick (*Auk*, 59: 613, 1942). Two or three joint papers in *The Auk* resulted from this work. Bowdish gave up such collecting years ago and became one of the earliest of bird banders. This activity he continued until his mid eighties, when failing eyesight forced him to desist. His collection of nests and eggs, meanwhile, had been donated to the New York State Museum. Beecher Bowdish was a man of quiet, sincere charm; his many friends were of all ages and classes of society. Though of modest means, he was one of four founders of the J. A. Allen Fund of the Society of Mammalogists and also left a substantial benefaction to the American Ornithologists' Union.—D. AMADON.