

## Communications

### A Protest Against the Indiscriminate Use of Poison by Orchardists.

EDITOR THE CONDOR.—The proposed new bird law which was considered at the last meeting of The Cooper Ornithological Club, met with the hearty approval of its members, and the discussion which followed illustrated the importance of concentrated action in such matters. In this case, among other methods of destroying birds, that of poisoning, which prevails so extensively in Southern California, was mentioned by the writer. At once enough facts were presented by the members to establish beyond question that this practice, which destroys the beneficial as well as the obnoxious birds, should be suppressed.

Since the meeting I have taken the trouble to write to friends and acquaintances in different parts of Southern California in regard to poisoning of birds in their locality. The evidence from this source shows that most of the animosity is against the linnets or house finch. In outlying districts where little fruit is raised, he remains with it from the start, and no doubt is a pest to that particular orchard. Powder and shot cost money and require constant vigilance in its use, so the orchardist resorts to cups of poisoned water and broken fruit dosed with arsenic or strychnine, placed in neighboring trees. The linnets might, and do, rain down in clouds, without protest; but it happens that about the time of the ripening of the first fruits our beautiful Louisiana Tanager passes through Southern California on its northern migration, some years in immense numbers.

He carries his appetite with him and is sure to meet one of the many death-traps set for the linnets and is destroyed by the thousands, although he tarries but a few days and does no more damage than he is entitled to do. I have myself seen *156 birds dead under one tree*, of which 130 were tanagers, all the result of one morning's work. The fact was agitated in the local papers, but there being no law protecting the bird, it had no effect.

A letter received today from Miss Mollie Bryan, of Orange, who is much interested in bird protection, gives a graphic account of the methods and actual results of bird poisoning. I quote from it as follows: "I have taken a little time to enquire about the birds poisoned here. I know of but one orchardist in Orange who has poisoned to protect loquats and I cannot obtain accurate numbers with regard to the mischief he has done. Three years ago he killed principally tanagers, some orioles, the rest linnets, the numbers running up into the hundreds. I remember hearing at the time that three hundred had been killed before the

season was over. The next year the linnets were the most numerous of the killed. A friend has just told me she was visiting at this place, saw the fruit poisoned with arsenic, tied in the ornamental trees 'and the poor little dead linnets literally rained down. I gathered my dress-skirt full of the dead birds and brought them home.' But the orchardist said that the tanagers were very scarce that year; he had not killed one the day my friend was there. And this year he says there has been but few about his place, though I could tell him they were plentiful at my home.

"The second year his numbers ran to 'about a thousand,' but mostly linnets. My informants are reliable, but they have forgotten the exact numbers, but all are sure that my statement of three hundred is not exaggerated in the least. The idea of linnets eating apricot fruit-buds seems to be exploded, and poisoning for that has stopped in this section, though two years ago it was universally done in San Bernardino Co., and the ranchers were very proud of the work of destruction they were doing. That was done by putting cups of poisoned water in the trees. The most wholesale slaughter I have ever known of was out near Victor or Hesperia. I did know the rancher's name; he had last year the only bearing orchard in the community in which he lived, and killed *one thousand tanagers* in one spring. That was not in my locality, but it seems so horrible I cannot refrain from telling it."

I have no doubt from the letters I have received that this slaughter of the innocents goes on from year to year with more or less persistence according to local conditions. We may not be able to stop the shooting of marauding birds and perhaps it is not best to try to, for the farmer will usually shoot at the ones that pester him the most, but the Club should make a strong fight for a clause in the proposed law prohibiting the use of poisons which kill indiscriminately.

FRANK S. DAGGETT.

*Pasadena, Cal., Oct. 10, 1900.*

### Are Blackbirds Injurious or Beneficial?

EDITOR THE CONDOR:

A note in connection with the recent bulletin of the Department of Agriculture on "The Food of Bobolinks, Blackbirds and Grackles" may prove interesting. Brewer's Blackbird is shown by it to have eaten 60 per cent. of grain, mostly oats. As few oats are cultivated in California, they must have been mostly wild oats, one of the wheat-grower's greatest pests in most parts of the state. Brewer's Blackbird probes for wheat kernels of young grain and often destroys the wheat plant, but it is not as bad in this respect as the Western Meadowlark. However, both species eat many grasshoppers in a year and I cannot say that the

are not beneficial, rather than otherwise. To determine that, long, careful observations are required. A species at one locality may be injurious and in another highly beneficial, and have different values at different seasons of the year. Knowing this, I thought best not to publish the investigations in regard to the food of birds that we had made, in the *Land Birds of the Pacific District*.

L. BELDING.

Stockton, Cal., Oct. 7, 1900.

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### Publications Reviewed

PACIFIC COAST AVIFAUNA NO. I, Birds of the Kotzebue Sound Region, Alaska. By Joseph Grinnell, pp. 80, 1 map. Published by the Cooper Ornithological Club of California, Santa Clara, Cal., November 14, 1900.

This paper is a very solid and important contribution to our knowledge of Alaskan birds. It is the result of observations covering more than a year in the region of which it treats, and is consequently of unusual interest and value. The report consists of an "Introduction," "Field-notes," "Bibliography" and "Checklist." The introduction contains a brief account of the expedition and a description of the general features of the Kotzebue-Sound region. Then follows, under Field-notes, a fully annotated list of 113 species and sub-species of birds actually collected or observed by the author. Of these 61 are water birds and 52 are land birds. One form, *Lanius borealis invictus* is described as new. The "Bibliography" cites the principal authors and titles referring to Kotzebue Sound ornithology. With each title is given a list of birds recorded as new, up to date, by that author, from the Kotzebue Sound region. The "Checklist" is a very briefly annotated list of 150 species and sub-species, and covers all the birds which are known from the region under consideration.

The region covered by the paper includes "the district coastwise between Cape Prince of Wales and Point Hope, and thence eastward to the headwaters of the streams flowing into Kotzebue Sound. This hydrographic basin \* \* \* consists of the valleys of the Noatak, Kowak, Selawik and Buckland Rivers, as well as several smaller streams, all of which empty into Kotzebue Sound." In the spring of 1898 Grinnell joined a company of prospectors who intended to look for gold in the valley of the Kowak. They were thoroughly outfitted, owning their own schooner-yacht, the "Penelope," and besides taking material for a stern-wheel river steamer to be used on the larger streams of the region. The gold, however, did not materialize and the author rather naively remarks, "but this fact was rather fortunate for the writer and his ornithological pursuits,

for he was enabled to devote almost his entire time during the year spent in the Kotzebue Region to collecting specimens and notes on its avifauna." The expedition left San Francisco on May 19, and on the 27th of June arrived at Cape Prince of Wales. Cape Blossom was reached July 9, and the site of winter quarters on the Kowak, August 12. Side trips were made during the following year into the surrounding country. The expedition left Kotzebue Sound on the 10th of July, 1899. Grinnell secured about 700 bird skins and as many eggs. "The immediate coast district bordering Kotzebue Sound is chiefly level or rolling tundra. \* \* \* Throughout the tundra lands and hilly country are numerous ponds and lakes, some of considerable extent. \* \* \* The land is mostly covered with a deep layer of moss and lichens. But in depressions, and bordering lakes and sloughs, are stretches of grass, in some places growing quite tall, and in others forming lawn-like meadows." Timber does not reach the coast, but inland, in the upper river valleys, are extensive areas of spruce, birch and cottonwood. "The Kowak valley averages about fifteen miles wide, the north side being formed by a range of mountains rising as high as four thousand feet, while on the south a lower range forms the divide between the Kowak and Selawik."

It will be impossible to give more than a glimpse into the "Field-notes." In most cases the annotations are full and include observations on distribution and life history. Considerable attention is devoted to nesting habits and eggs, and Grinnell certainly merits praise for his painstaking efforts in this line. If we are not mistaken much will be found under Field-notes which is of more than passing interest. We have particularly enjoyed reading the accounts of the Horned Puffin, Long-tailed Jaeger, Short-billed Gull, Red Phalarope, Northern Phalarope, Wilson Snipe, Hudsonian Curlew, Northern Spruce Grouse, Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, American Hawk Owl, Alaskan Jay, Hoary Redpoll, Alaskan Longspur, Siberian Yellow Wagtail, Kennicott Willow Warbler, Varied Thrush and Red-spotted Blue-throat. In the case of the Red Phalarope (*Crymophilus fulicarius*) the usual order of coloration in birds is reversed. "The females are brightest colored, apparently do most of the courting, and correspondingly it was always the male that was flushed from the nest." The curious song flight of the Wilson Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) is described. Here in the west this is oftener heard than seen. A good account is given of both the Willow and the Rock Ptarmigan. The former "proved to be a common species throughout the lowlands from Cape Blossom up the Kowak Valley." Grinnell secured very large series of both *Lagopus lagopus* and *L. rupestris* and gives an account of