

## COMMUNICATIONS.

## THE DECISIONS IN THE TENTH SUPPLEMENT.

Editors THE CONDOR:—

The Tenth Supplement to the A. O. U. Check-List published in the July *Auk* contains many surprises to our western ornithologists in the wholesale manner in which carefully worked out species and subspecies have been relegated to obscurity. If it were the policy of the Committee to discourage the creation of trinomials entirely our workers might well receive its decision with good grace, but when it accepts a subspecies like *Pipilo fuscus carolæ*, whose invalidity had already been pointed out by its describer, we can only conclude that our judges sit too far away to fully appreciate the conditions which surround the western worker.

Our eastern friends would not consider it strange if climatic conditions and other influences produced two subspecies in a country stretching between New York and Florida. One could readily grasp the idea that a *Geothlypis* feeding and breeding in Florida might differ from one feeding and breeding in good old New England. Now as a matter of fact we have a wider range of conditions out here in California, and that in some cases in a section of country easily covered on an ordinary map by a twenty-five cent piece. Take for instance the San Joaquin valley where there are 300 days of sunshine and a yearly rainfall of only eight inches, with a semi-arid condition existing most of the year. Compare this with the humid coast side of the range but a comparatively short distance away with 40 inches of rainfall and only 100 days of sunshine, producing a damp, foggy climate.

When it has been shown that a *Melospiza* on the humid coast side of the range differs materially in many respects: that it is only found in a given area in the breeding season, for it has never been taken elsewhere at that time; that a partial migration occurs when in the fall and winter it scatters more or less, at which times it is taken mingled with other forms of the same genus, but always returning to breed in its chosen habitat; when all these facts have been carefully shown, one feels that there is some basis for the claim that it deserves to be recognized as a subspecies.

It is to be regretted that the very carefully prepared life zone and faunal area maps of California compiled and in use by several California workers have not been published for the benefit of those who are not in a position to realize the enormous range of conditions which exist in California owing to differences of elevation, or proximity to ocean influences. Fortunately our few systematists who are working out these problems appreciate these difficulties

and are prepared to accept with good grace the decision of the Committee, knowing that it is only a question of time when these facts will be made apparent to all.

One thing however is certain, and that is our western workers have a double task in that they not only must point out a new species or subspecies, but they must also work out its whole life history, migration etc., as influenced by the peculiar topography of California, before they can hope for a ready recognition of their claims. In other words they are confronted by the necessity of a strong educational crusade along the lines noted above. Meanwhile let us not exhaust our stock of patience but rather let us hang out the sign, that in early California days, ornamented certain thriving places of business, when the knowledge of our state as a whole was as crude as is our present knowledge of its birds,—“Don’t shoot the fiddler; he’s doing the best he can.” F. S. DAGGETT.

*Pasadena, Cal., Sept. 1, 1901.*

## A DEFENSE OF BIRD HORIZONS.

Editor THE CONDOR:—

My attention has recently been called to a review and criticism of *Wilson Bulletin* No. 33, which appeared in the March-April CONDOR. While I entirely sympathize with the critic in his efforts to guard the avifauna of his home region against misrepresentation, I cannot rid myself of the impression that the purpose of ‘A Summer Reconnaissance In The West’ has been largely misconceived in his review.

The very word ‘reconnaissance’ was chosen to indicate the rapid and necessarily incomplete nature of the work. It would have been presumptuous on our part if we had thought to vie in either accuracy or completeness with carefully prepared local lists. Indeed Mr. Jones expressly says in his introduction: “In rapid work of this kind there must be a considerable margin of error.” Some few of our identifications were based entirely upon geographical considerations. It is not possible, for instance, to tell the difference, *in the field*, between a Samuel and a Herrmann Song Sparrow.

By those who do not subscribe to the sentiment that the only good bird is a dead bird, recourse must be had to authorities on distribution; and these are often meager or deficient. In view therefore of the manifest limitations of our chosen work we must modestly disclaim any intention of clashing with the local divinities in matters of expert identification. But after all, the list of errors which is accredited to my colleague in the article under consideration is easily twice too large.

A word remains, perhaps, to be said in justification of the task as we conceived it. Without any intention of publishing authoritative “local lists” it nevertheless seemed worth

while to illustrate the opportunities of the ob-servant traveller in passing through an un-familiar region. One who teaches in one field may learn in another without thereby forfeit-ing his right to serve other learners in the pro-cess. Facility in rapid field identification is a thing well worth striving for, even at the risk of certain minor inaccuracies which the careful local student could avoid. Indeed it seems to us that the line of vital progress is right here and that the ability to distinguish forty-nine species out of fifty 'on the wing' is worth more than the ability to determine the subspecific rank of fifty dead birds. Respectfully,

W. LEON DAWSON.

*Columbus, O.*

### **Falco columbarius at Santa Clara, Cal.**

On October 18, 1900, Mr. Wm. L. At-kinson of this place collected a fine specimen of the Pigeon Hawk (*Falco columbarius*) just north of Santa Clara. The bird is a male in adult plumage, and was shot from a fence bordering a seed field, from which the hawk doubt- less secured its prey in the shape of various sparrows which frequent the field.

C. BARLOW.

*Santa Clara, Cal.*

## GENERAL NEWS NOTES.

Walter E. Bryant has returned from a several months' trip to Guatemala and Central Amer-ica.

Harry Beal Torrey of Berkeley has been appointed instructor in the zoological department of the University of California.

Prof. Leverett M. Loomis, after a vacation in the East, has returned to his duties as curator in the department of ornithology of the California Academy of Sciences.

Prof. Chas. R. Keyes has returned from a visit to his home in Mount Vernon, Ia., and is filling his chair at the University of California.

John J. Williams has spent several months at Independence Lake during the summer, en-gaging in bird work as opportunity offered.

Walter K. Fisher, while engaged in Biological Survey work in Kern and Tulare counties in August, made a side trip to the Sequoia National Park, camping on Alta Peak at 11,000 feet alti-tude.

Richard C. McGregor writes from Dutch Harbor, Alaska under date of June 28, that he is pursuing ornithology in addition to his Coast survey work, having some 300 skins and some in-teresting sets of eggs up to the time of writing.

Prof. F. E. L. Beal and W. Otto Emerson are enjoying a ten days' collecting trip at Pacific Grove. Professor Beal has covered a greater portion of the fruit districts of the state during his stay in California.

Robert E. Snodgrass has been serving as a member of a Commission specially appointed by the California Fish Commission to determine the food of the seals and sea-lions occurring along the Californian coast. Fishermen have steadily accused these interesting animals of destroying food fishes, but the work of the commission thus far has not concurred in the charge.

Mr. Arthur L. Bolton, prominently known as a member of the Cooper Ornithological Club, was united in marriage to Miss Mae Saylor at Tempe, Ariz., on July 20. Mr. Bolton formerly re-sided at Berkeley, Cal., where his earnest and unassuming method of work won for him many friends, who extend their cordial well wishes. Mr. Bolton is now permanently located at Tempe.

The occurrence of specimens of the California Vulture is always of interest, so we borrow the following from a recent letter from Mr. F. S. Daggett: "A handsome big condor lit not 50 feet from Chas. Groesbeck while he was ploughing his orange orchard. The bird did not wait long enough for him to get a pinch of salt or a gun. Now Charley plows with a full arsenal strapped to his plough. He even contemplates killing one of his horses and hiding in a pit nearby, but the Southern Division Cooper Club members have sent in so many applications for reserved seats he has decided to postpone the capture."

Miss Jean Bell of Ridley Park, Pa. has disposed of her superb collection of birds' eggs to John Lewis Childs of Floral Park, N. Y. In acquiring this collection Mr. Childs becomes the possessor of what is undoubtedly the finest private collection of North American birds' eggs in exist-ence. Miss Bell devoted much time and money to the work of building up the collection, and most of the sets of little-known and rare species taken in recent years by field workers found their way into her collection. Doubtless Mr. Childs will continue the same policy, so that the collection will not be surpassed in years to come. Mr. J. Parker Norris Jr's warbler series will likewise probably remain the finest in America.