

Foolish Introduction of Foreign Birds.—On March 4, 1905, a specimen of the European Chaffinch (*Fringilla cœlebs* Linnaeus) was obtained at the Presidio of Monterey, California. Chaplain Joseph Clemens, who has become well acquainted with the native birds of the vicinity during his several years' residence at Monterey and Pacific Grove, caught the peculiar call-note of the stranger, and after assuring himself that this was no ordinary bird, hastened to secure a weapon. The bird was finally re-located in a pine and was shot, the skin being forwarded to me by Mr. Clemens for determination. I was completely non-plussed, as nothing like it had ever come into my collecting experience, and I was also unable to place it from the keys in any of my books on American birds. Moreover, it showed no marks of captivity nor any abnormal feature of the plumage.

I finally sent the bird to Dr. Richmond of our National Museum at Washington, and he promptly cleared up the mystery by informing me that 'it is a Chaffinch, sometimes called Bachelor Finch, *Fringilla cœlebs* Linnaeus. It is an abundant European species, and extends to central Asia, or thereabouts, but does not occur in China or Japan [that is, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean]. Although the specimen shows no evidences of cage life, it has no business to be at large in this country, particularly on the Pacific Coast, and I have no doubt it escaped from captivity, or was purposely liberated, probably with other species. Not many months ago we received for identification a Chinese Myna, shot in British Columbia, which had every appearance of being a wild bird.'

Dr. Richmond's suggestion that the chaffinch at Monterey could be easily accounted for as a bird purposely liberated by some person or society, at once appealed to me as the best explanation of the occurrence. It reminded me of the occasional notices we see in newspapers to the effect that Mr. So-and-So, or Such-and-Such Society 'has recently liberated an importation of foreign songsters, which is a great public benefaction in that it will doubtless add to the bird-life so sparse in California.' (!) It occurs to me that bird students should take pains to curtail the popular spread of this idea that the importation and release of foreign birds is desirable. It may even be dangerous.

The matter is so important that it has been the subject of special legislation by our Government. I wrote to Dr. T. S. Palmer of the U. S. Department of Agriculture on this subject and he replies as follows: "You may be interested to know that in South Australia the chaffinch, which was introduced some years ago with other European birds, is now considered such an undesirable species that under the game law of 1900 it is included in the list of injurious birds and denied protection.

"So far as I am aware there is no law to prevent any one from liberating birds already in his possession, but the matter can be readily regulated in another way. Section 2 of the Lacey Act requires permits for all foreign birds imported into the United States and prohibits the importation of such as the Secretary of Agriculture may declare injurious. By withholding permits or declaring injurious to agriculture species which are known to be destructive, importation of certain species can be stopped at any time. But as we do not wish to resort to extreme measures unless absolutely necessary, several birds are now admitted as cage birds which might not be if the practice of liberating them became general."

Now we of the Cooper Club as observers and students of our native birds should take particular pains to guard against any such calamity as the establishment within our limits of any foreign species. The examples of the myna in the Pacific islands, the starling and chaffinch in Australia, and the English sparrow in America should be reminders of the possibly direful results of transplanting species. Liberation of foreign birds can be but lost labor anyway. Of course in the great majority of cases the birds die harmlessly within a longer or shorter time on account of the radically new conditions of food and climate which they are physically unable to meet. But the occasional exception which actually thrives and becomes established is bound to crowd out some native species. For we may safely presume that there are just as many birds in any locality as the food-supply at the season of extremest shortage can support. There would be a larger population if there were more to eat at all times of the year here, or, in the case of migrants, here and elsewhere.

I, for one, do not want to see our native avifauna disturbed any more than the cultivation and settlement of the country necessitates. Personally, I would try my best to shoot any interloper I should meet with, simply to destroy it. This may be purely an æsthetic viewpoint. But there is the practical economic side, as well.

Dr. Palmer (U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.) would be pleased to hear from anyone who knows definitely of either the contemplated or accomplished importation of birds from anywhere for liberation.—J. GRINNELL, Pasadena, Cal.