

# THE CONDOR

An Illustrated Magazine  
of Western Ornithology

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## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

The task of the reviewer is not one that attracts the average ornithologist. We have asked a number of well-qualified persons to write reviews of current books and articles for this magazine, but we are invariably met with either outright refusal on one ground or another, or subsequent evasion. The review of all current ornithological literature, especially that pertaining to Western North America, would be a valuable feature of THE CONDOR. It would furnish to our readers an index of whatever else is being done in our field, and it would give them an estimate (at least from the standpoint of the reviewer) of the current articles outside of our own magazine. Furthermore, such recognition of their work is due all authors.

The present editors of THE CONDOR have at times in the past endeavored to present notices of all relevant publications. But we are now becoming convinced that it is impossible for us alone to adequately handle this phase of the work. Moreover, it is not to be expected that a single individual have the time or appropriate knowledge to enable him to digest and summarize (let alone critically analyze) brochures pertaining to all phases of the subject. The ideal would be for one person, who is himself working in that field, to handle the literature on life histories, another to handle systematic papers, another, paleontological, and so on. WANTED: REVIEWERS.

In connection with the foregoing we take this opportunity of calling attention to the very great value to American ornithology of the review department in *The Auk*. We who have constant need for securing information as to the gist and appraisal of articles not immediately at hand, have only to refer to our files of *The Auk*. We have come to feel assured that practically nothing has escaped notice in its review columns; and if the review notice that we are after and do find, is critical and above the initials, "J. A. A.", with what close attention is it read.

We owe the profoundest gratitude to Dr. J. A. Allen for his thirty years and more of tireless, consistent reviewing, not merely from the bibliographical standpoint, but because of the wide-reaching influence he has exerted in maintaining a balanced advance in American ornithology. How fortunate that such a facile pen, and the opportunity for reviewing, should have been backed up by the philosophical mind and the wide general knowledge. We believe we make no mistake in referring to Doctor Allen as the most powerful exponent of ornithology among Americans during the past twenty-five years. And it has been in very large measure thru his reviews that current opinion has been tempered, perhaps directed in some cases. Certain publishd works have appeared which were distinctly on the wrong track in their conclusions, and it devolved upon *The Auk* reviewer to give the mass of more or less amateur ornithologists the cue. Only one abreast of and ahead of, the times, could serve in such a capacity, without proving a hindrance rather than an incentive to progress. To Dr. J. A. Allen we owe a very great deal. No small proportion of his service lies in those thirty years of reviews.

We confess that we may be rightly accused of editorial inconsistency in this issue. But we beg to offer the excuse that said inconsistency is the result of the granting of the special request, by the author of the article in question, that old-fashioned usage in the matter of possessives and spelling be retained. From the editorial standpoint it is, of course, desirable that authors conform to our custom in all regards. The general appearance of our magazine demands this, too.

The Southern Division of the Cooper Club has decided that hereafter their monthly meetings be held regularly (excepting during June, July and August) on the last Thursday evening of each month, in room 1 of the City Hall, Los Angeles. This will make it possible for distant members who might find it convenient to attend, to know far in advance when and where to expect to find the club in session.

Mr. John Rowley has recently been appointed Curator of Mammals in the California Academy of Sciences. His work will lie chiefly in the preparation of habitat groups of large mammals, this to be the main feature of the exhibit to be installed in the new building for which plans are drawn up. Mr. Rowley will also begin the accumulation of material towards the formation of a research collection of mammals.

We are pleased to announce the addition of a new name to the list of active bird men resident in California. Mr. J. H. Bowles, late of Tacoma, Washington, has removed to Santa Barbara, which he will make his home. As a result of his bird work in the vicinity we may expect some ornithology along new lines, at least for that region. Mr. Bowles is an intensive student of life histories, and an accurate and vivid writer.

#### PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

A second new fossil bird from the asphalt beds near Los Angeles is described by Mr. LOVE HOLMES MILLER in a paper entitled *TERATORNIS A NEW AVIAN GENUS FROM RANCHO LA BREA*.<sup>\*</sup> The species is, of course, new, as well as the genus and is called *Teratornis merriami*, in honor of Professor John C. Merriam of the University of California, thru whose efforts the Rancho la Brea fossil beds have been brought to the attention of paleontologists.

The description is based on coracoids, sternum, and nearly complete skull. The fragments so far secured represent at least four individuals. The bird is related to the Birds of Prey, and was of immense size, much greater than any existing flying bird. It is found difficult to assign the new form to any existing family, the vulture-like characters predominate. Since the limb bones and feet are still unknown final conclusions as to relationship are postponed; yet it appears probable that a new family will have to be established for it. This discovery is in the greatest degree of importance and interest, probably more so than any previous one among fossil birds for two decades.

In the same paper there is also described a new species of vulture, larger than the Turkey Buzzard, closely related to the Black Vulture of the South Atlantic States. This is called *Catharista occidentalis*. As Mr. Miller's work on the fossil birds of the Rancho la Brea beds continue, we may expect further discoveries of extreme interest in the light that they shed on the history of the avifauna of southern California.—J. G.

*THE HABITAT GROUPS OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS IN THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.* By FRANK M. CHAPMAN, Curator of Ornithology. (= Guide Leaflet Series, no. 28, New York, February, 1909, pp. 1-48).

As indicated in the title, this is an explanatory manual of the beautiful series of habitat groups of North American birds now on exhibition in the American Museum. Each one is figured, and to nearly every one about a page of text is devoted, explaining the figures in the group, and the mode of life of the species treated. A map indicates the localities represented—"From the Bahamas to the Gulf of St.

Lawrence, from the Atlantic to the Pacific"—and each group, we are told "is the result of a special Museum expedition in charge of the Curator of Ornithology." The subjects are well chosen, and, judging from the illustrations, the work is magnificently carried out. He is indeed a fortunate man who can bring an undertaking such as this to a successful conclusion.—H. S. S.

Mr. ERNEST ADAMS has recently published a local list of decided interest to Californians entitled *LAND BIRDS OF PLACER COUNTY* (=Placer County Institute Research, October 12, 1909, pp. 27-46).

In this paper 158 species are formally mentioned, and brief notes are given as to relative abundance, seasonal occurrence, and local distribution. Of particular interest to the reviewer is the record of two Cedar Waxwings in the County as late as June 19. The author does not, however, give his opinion as to whether or not this may indicate the nesting of the species in the region. It seems probable, in our mind, that it is merely a late date of departure. Another record of note is that of the Phainopepla, on September 8.

The list is a large one, for the land birds of a single county; but it must be remembered that Placer County includes a transection of the Sierra Nevada from the western lowlands to Lake Tahoe. All of the life zones with their characteristic species, are thus represented in the County.

Lists, of the nature of the present one, are always of value locally. School teachers and others interested in an amateur way will find Mr. Adams' list of decided aid. And further, those more advanced bird students interested in general distribution will find in this paper much data of value.—J. G.

*THE BIRDS OF NEW JERSEY.* By WITMER STONE, Curator, Academy of Natural Sciences, of Philadelphia. (=Annual Report of the New Jersey State Museum, Part II, Trenton, N. J., 1909, pp. 11-348, pl. 1-84). The object of the present report is "to present keys and descriptions that will enable anyone to identify birds that he may see, to give a brief sketch of the more characteristic habits of the common species, and at the same time to include such facts and records on the distribution of all species as will make the report a thoroughly up-to-date list of the birds of the State." All this it appears to do, clearly and concisely, while the author's name is sufficient guarantee of the care and accuracy with which the work is carried out. There are chapters on the destruction and protection of birds, and on distribution and migration, while the report closes with a bibliography of the principal books and papers treating of New

<sup>\*</sup>Univ. Calif. Publ. Geology V, pp. 305-317, figs. 1-11; issued Sept. 10, 1909.