

THE CONDOR

An Illustrated Magazine
of Western Ornithology

Publisht Bi-Monthly by the Cooper Ornithological Club of California.

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EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

The Editor is in a quandary. Within the past three months he has been roundly scored by a few persistent conservatives for his employment of simplified spelling on the pages of THE CONDOR. It is asserted that he is diverting the magazine for public exploitation of personal whims; that he is doing this contrary to the wishes of the "great majority" of members of the Cooper Ornithological Club, to whom this magazine belongs; that simplified spelling is so offensive to "many" of our readers as to render an otherwise pleasing magazine an actual eyesore (!); and finally that if he would only consult the wishes of his constituents there is no doubt but that he would be compelled to reinstate old-fashioned spelling.

On the other hand it will be remembered that the present Editor has already put this very question to a vote of Cooper Club members (see vol. IX, 1907, pp. 61 and 112). By a vote of more than 2 to 1 he was instructed to use simplified spelling! Furthermore we have received quite as many letters of commendation for our adoption of it as remonstrances against it. Our own personal feelings are strongly in favor of it; we are convinced that it is a sensible reform in the direction of economy and consistency, and that its universal adoption is only a matter of time. Why not be a little ahead of the trend of improvement, contributing to its advancement, rather than in the rear, retarding it?

The arguments put forth against simplified spelling, as far as we have heard them, are so weak as to be pitiful. The reasons for its adoption are overwhelming. If any of our readers are not familiar with the latter, an authorized list of simplifications, and other literature relating to the movement will be furnished gratis upon application to the Simplified Spelling Board, 1 Madison Avenue, New York City.

Now, in order to placate our militant remonstrants, and to give opportunity to those favorable to progress to again state their preferences in this matter, we propose to invite an expression of opinion by vote, and we hereby affirm that we will bide by the majority decision, whichever way it turns, beginning with the first issue of volume XIII (January, 1911).

Write on a postal card "Simplified Spelling, *yes*" or "Simplified Spelling, *no*", sign your name, and mail it to the Editor of THE CONDOR, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California. Voting will be ended December 10, 1910, thus giving over two months for consideration on the part of those who wish to familiarize themselves with the proposition.

Of course only votes of Cooper Club members will be considered. With over 300 members, and voting being by mail, there should be a very large response, much more significant of the Club's wishes than if the vote were restricted to those present at a meeting. The result will be announced in our January issue.

To repeat, the Editor *hopes* that he will be authorized to *retain* simplified spelling; but if the reverse happens, he agrees to defer meekly to the will of the majority, and thenceforth conduct our magazine accordingly. This is, to be sure, a magazine of *ornithology*, and not of etymology or orthography. Mode of spelling may not appear very closely related to its field. But ultimate success in an undertaking often depends upon a score of incidentals not less than upon the main issue. Progress, improvement, reform, are in the air.

A movement is on foot to organize a Central Division of the Cooper Club in the Fresno district of California. There are already enuf Club members in that region to ensure a beginning. But it is of course desired that the demand for such an organization be evinced by as large an initial gathering as possible. All those interested will please write to Mr. John G. Tyler, 1114 Belmont Avenue, Fresno, stating their views as to how and where such organization may be best effected.

Under the direction of Professor C.F. Hodge, of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, organized efforts have been made the past two seasons to ascertain whether or not the Passenger Pigeon still exists. Large rewards were offered, aggregating over \$1000.00, solely for information of location of undisturbed nestings, so that steps might be taken, if any such were discovered, to secure safety and perpetuation of the free, wild pigeon. We regret to say that up to July 1, 1910, no authenticated case had been reported. Several reports coming from Cali-

fornia, Oregon and Washington, as might have been expected proved to be based on our Band-tailed Pigeon. As far as is known the Passenger Pigeon never occurred west of the Rocky Mountains. It appears now to be wholly extinct everywhere.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

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We object to such a statement as this, under *Prioniturus cinereus*: "accidental once off coast of California." "But one record", would have been better, as the latter phrase implies limitations rather upon our own knowledge. "Accidental" is an unwarranted assumption of what in many cases proves to be untrue, as when a species, previously unknown, upon closer observation, or exploration of new localities, is found to be of regular occurrence within the region under consideration. Then, too, an unusual visitant may make its appearance under circumstances quite apart from any *accident*. The term is not a well-chosen one.

In the matter of classification, as we have already remarked, there is no change. It is extremely regrettable that a new classification, based on Gadow, which, we are informed in the Preface, Ridgway and Stejneger had undertaken to prepare for this Edition, was not finally adopted and installed thruout. Instead, the classification and sequence is that of the original A. O. U. Check-List, issued 25 years ago!

Ornithology is wonderfully fortunate in that it offers a field of pleasurable interest to the amateur scientist, whose numbers increase year by year. We rejoice in this. At the same time there is clearly threatened the danger that the serious science itself will suffer. This appears all the more imminent when its few trained and professional constituents begin to defer to popular (amateur) preferences. The A. O. U. Committee "on Nomenclature and Classification" is looked to from other fields of science as a representative body, to be expected in its publications to present the very latest results of ornithological research. The committee admits that the modern system of classification, adopted in most of the standard ornithological works of today, is desirable; yet it adheres to the system of 25 years ago because of feared *inconvenience*. While any system, of any period, may be expected and *hoped* to change, as knowledge increases, it is certainly due to amateurs and professional students in all fields alike that authoritative treatises, such

as is the A. O. U. Check-List, provide in all respects an up-to-date exposition of its subject.

In the statuses of species and subspecies there appears to be a sad lack of consistency as to rank of the lesser differentiated forms. An extreme example is "*Thryomanes leucophrys*," of San Clemente Island. Why not *Thryomanes bewicki leucophrys*, and thus unify the treatment of all of the various isolated forms inhabiting the Santa Barbara islands? Evidently there is no regularly-adhered-to criterion for subspecific status. Note the following: *Passerculus beldingi* and *Passerculus sandwichensis bryanti*; *Junco aikenii*, *Junco hyemalis hyemalis*, *Junco hyemalis oregonus*, and *Junco bairdi*; *Corvus caurinus* and *Corvus brachyrhynchos hesperis*; *Creciscus jamaicensis* and *Creciscus coturniculus*; *Rallus levipes* and *Rallus obsoletus*; *Arquatella maritima maritima*, *Arquatella maritima coeui* and *Arquatella maritima ptilocnemis*; *Leucosticte griseonucha*, *Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis* and *Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*. After all, is consistency in this regard attainable until we return to the old-fashioned but non-ambiguous pure binomial system of nomenclature? There are cases where to revive a former usage is in reality a step forward.

Referring now to the employment of vernacular names, we are disappointed to observe that the useless possessive is retained in personal names. For instance, we are again forced to read "Cooper's Tanager", instead of the more euphonious and truthful Cooper Tanager; "Samuels's Song Sparrow" for Samuels Song Sparrow. It would seem that here, in the matter of vernacular names, the convenience and preferences of the majority of popular bird-students might have been consulted to better purpose than in the system of classification adopted.

Then, too, we might have well been permitted to call our California Condor by that name instead of California "*Vulture*"; Intermediate Sparrow instead of "Gambel's" Sparrow; Sierra Junco instead of "Thurber's" Junco; Western Kingbird instead of "Arkansas" Kingbird; Tawny Creeper instead of "California" Creeper; Spurred Towhee instead of "San Diego" Towhee, and Mountain Towhee instead of "Spurred" Towhee. A still more flagrant case is the retention of "House Finch" as against California Linnet, even tho the latter had been announced (*Auk*, 1909, p. 303) as chosen.

A distinctly unhappy error seems to have been committed in not providing subspecies with separate qualifying terms. For instance, there is Song Sparrow (for *Melospiza melodia melodia*), Desert Song Sparrow (for *M. m. fallax*), Mountain Song Sparrow, etc.; Bluebird, Azure Bluebird, Western Bluebird, etc.; Crow, Florida Crow, Western Crow, etc.; Gold-