

THE CONDOR

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EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Ornithologists have always found difficulty in satisfactorily expressing the varying degrees of abundance of the species in a region. In spite of efforts to attain to an accurate diagnosis through statistical methods, no practically workable scheme is forthcoming. We still rely on various words, of very indefinite meaning to be sure, but which give to the mind some notion of numbers of individuals as compared with what they might be under ideal circumstances.

In *Science* for June 14, 1912, page 930, Mr. John Dryden Kuser calls attention to the multiplicity of words used, and misused, to designate relative abundance. He chooses a scale of eight members, as providing to his mind a workable nomenclature of occurrence. These are: abundant, common, frequent, uncommon, occasional, rare, scarce and irregular.

To our minds just four terms come nearer the ticket: abundant, common, fairly common, and rare. "Fairly common" equals Kuser's "frequent", the latter being objectionable because of equivocal meaning. Any closer definition, short of actual censuses, seems to us futile. Of course other qualifying terms may be employed to advantage. A winter visitant may be common, and either regularly or irregularly so. Another species may be rare but regular in its appearance, or it may be rare and casual (that is, "accidental", though we dislike the latter term). Uncommon, occasional, rare, and scarce, are too nearly synonymous to be serviceable all at the same time; "rare" is sufficient.

In this connection we wish to point out the flagrant misuse of the word "resident" in many lists and even authoritative text-books, where birds are described as being "summer residents" or "winter residents". Explicitly, *resident* means inhabiting a region continually, that is, throughout the year. Birds are either resident or non-resident (migrant); if of the latter class, they are either summer visitants, winter visitants or transients. A "visitant" may remain a few days in midwinter only, or it may be with us six months including the breeding season. A transient is, as a rule, a species which summers wholly north of the particular locality concerned and winters south of it; so that it occurs only during the period of migration.

The four seasonal categories of birds may therefore be correctly alluded to as resident, summer visitant, winter visitant, and transient. Relative numbers of individuals involved may be denoted by the terms abundant, common, fairly common, and rare.

Should the above suggestions have aroused difference of opinion on the part of any of our readers, we would be glad to publish open letters upon the subject.—J. G.

Mr. George Willett is spending the months of July and August in the vicinity of Sitka, Alaska, where he is making a study of the bird-life on the St. Lazaria Bird Reservation. This work is being carried on under the direction of Dr. T. S. Palmer and in the interests of the National Association of Audubon Societies.

Mr. Alexander Wetmore is stationed for the year in Porto Rico, where he is conducting investigations into the economic relations of the native birds under the auspices of the Bureau of Biological Survey. Mr. Wetmore reports a successful time so far. Porto Rican birds are relatively few in species, but many individually, and are thus important to local interests.

Pacific Coast Avifauna numbers 7 and 8 will be mailed free to Cooper Club members about August first. Number 7 is Willett's *Birds of the Pacific Slope of Southern California*; number 8 is *A Systematic List of the Birds of California* by J. Grinnell.

The Editors beg to remind Cooper Club members that short "Field and Study" notes are of usually greater interest to the average reader of *THE CONDOR*, than the longer and more formal general articles. The season's experiences should have provided each one of us with information worth contributing in this way.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

A HISTORY OF | THE BIRDS OF COLORADO | By WILLIAM LUTLEY SCLATER | M. A. [etc. two lines]. | With seventeen Plates and a Map | Witherby & Co. | 326 High Holborn London | 1912 | 8vo, pp. i-xxiv, 1-576 (Cloth, \$5.00 net).