

# THE CONDOR

A Magazine of  
Western Ornithology

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## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Of more than ordinary interest to the ornithologist of studious turn of mind is the recent book by W. H. Mullens and H. Kirke Swann entitled "A Bibliography of British Ornithology from the Earliest Times to the end of 1912" (The Macmillan Company). This is much more than the usual bibliography in that a large share of the space is devoted to biographical accounts of the principal writers; and since a great many of these writers on British ornithology wrote also on general ornithology or the birds of other parts of the world, interesting facts concisely expressed and authoritative as to detail, are provided in regard to many whose names we frequently see in our American literature. Among such names are: Albin, Butler, Clarke (W. E.), Dresser, Edwards (G.), Evans (A. H.), Eytton (T. C.), Godman, Gurney (J. H., Jr.), Harting, Jourdain, Keulemans, Leach, MacGillivray, Millais, Newton, Pennant, Salvin (O.), Saunders, Sclater (P. L.), Seebohm, Selby, and Gilbert White. It is a satisfaction to learn something of the varied histories of these different men.

There has been some criticism of the Editor of THE CONDOR for his failure to publish reviews of all papers and books sent him. It proves impossible for him or his associates to review everything sent in, and anyway our magazine could not afford so much space as would be needed. We must therefore state that we cannot guarantee to give notice to anything sent us. Only a portion of the current titles can be mentioned; and on the other hand we may give notice to some things not sent us directly at all, provided we happen to have access to copies through other channels.

Mr. Alexander Wetmore, of the United States Biological Survey, has been assigned for the summer to a study of the breeding waterfowl in the lake region of northern New Mexico.

Mr. Joseph Mailliard chose the Feather River region of the northern Sierra Nevada for bird study during May and June. Very little has ever been reported concerning the birds of this district and we look forward with interest to the results of his enquiry.

Mr. A. B. Howell, accompanied by Mr. Luther Little as assistant, is carrying on field work this summer for the United States Biological Survey in Yuma County, Arizona.

The Cooper Club membership roster published in the present issue was compiled by Mr. J. Eugene Law, who requests that any corrections or changes be reported to him. There are now 600 names in the list.

Messrs. Joseph Dixon, Richard M. Hunt, and Halsted G. White have been doing field work this season for the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in the San Joaquin Valley. While their attention has been largely centered on economic problems having to do with rodent control, it has proven possible to devote time now and then to birds, with some results of more than passing interest.

## PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

THE CROW AND ITS RELATION TO MAN, by E. R. KALMBACH, Assistant Biologist (=United States Department of Agriculture, Bulletin no. 621, Contribution from the Bureau of Biological Survey); February 16, 1918; pp. 1-93, 2 plates, 3 text figures.

In its preparation and general make-up, this bulletin reaches the high standard set by the other recent economic publications of the Bureau of Biological Survey. Mr. Kalmbach has done an excellent piece of work, and has arranged and digested the great amount of data available on the subject in an interesting and convenient manner.

The Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos* and its subspecies) is the subject of the paper; and in gathering the information presented, 3000 letters of inquiry were sent to observers all over the country and in Canada, and 2118 stomachs, 778 of which were of nestlings, were examined. As one would infer, most of these were obtained where crows are most abundant, namely, in the states north of Virginia and east of the Mississippi River. No comprehensive paper on the subject has appeared heretofore since 1895. To the farmers, of the east especially, this report will be of great value, for it treats in much detail, and under many separate headings, of the food of crows during each month of the year. Kansas is the only state west of the Mississippi from which more than a very few stomachs were available for study, and from the three Pacific states, a total of only 13 was received. This is a pity, in view of the general comprehensiveness of the paper. But then, there are comparatively few localities in the west where the crow is really an economic factor.

Destruction of the eggs and young of other birds by crows is the point which proves to be of greatest interest to ornithologists. Although several instances of such destruction are cited, we cannot help but feel that Mr.

Kalmbach has underestimated the economic significance of this corvine trait. The reviewer was born and raised in Maryland, which is a veritable crow paradise, and he had abundant opportunity of observing the havoc wrought by crows during the nesting season. Lack of space precludes an extended account of this or other interesting points, so suffice it to say that the destruction of only a few insectivorous birds by a crow, means that in order to be beneficial, his crowship would have to spend the balance of his life in pursuing noxious insects!

Valuable tables are given, and an interesting feature is a chart showing the percentages of the different classes of foods consumed during all months. Specifically distinct items to the number of 656 have been discovered on the crow's menu, which is rather large even for such an omnivorous appetite. In fact, it is well-nigh impossible to recall anything biological to which the crow is not partial. The most serious offense of which the black robber is guilty, is the destruction of great quantities of corn, especially just after planting, and this grain forms the principle single item of food, amounting to 65 per cent of the stomach contents during December. Other grains are eaten in smaller amounts; and lesser deprivations, in the way of destruction of fruit and vegetables, poultry, beneficial insects, reptiles, and even small pigs and lambs, are listed. Against this is the consumption of harmful insects (including many grasshoppers), weed seeds, some small mammals, and carrion, in the control of which last the crow is no mean rival of the buzzards. Mr. Kalmbach thinks that the harm which the crow does is almost counterbalanced by its good traits, but this seems still to be an open question, and one which will be vigorously argued by the farmer who has lost an entire crop of melons or a planting of corn in a short time. Whether we catalogue him as an undesirable or not, the crow is here to stay, for no destructive agency yet devised by man is capable of removing him, and the long black ribbon of his followers, from an eastern winter sky.—A. B. HOWELL.

Included in the "SUMMARY REPORT OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DEPARTMENT OF MINES, FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 1916" [Ottawa, Canada, 1917] there are several "Divisional Reports" treating of collections of birds, by P. A. Taverner or R. M. Anderson. Those by the first mentioned author pertain to collections made near Barkley Sound, Vancouver Island, in midwinter (pp. 355-357), at mainland points in British Columbia during the summer months (pp. 359-368), and in Manitoba (pp. 371-374). The Barkley Sound list is of especial interest from the time of year at which the collection was made, and doubtless the mainland reports also contain records of value, but the feature of the three

papers that calls for special comment is the rather startling innovation in style introduced by the author.

Subspecies are ignored in all the headings. The scientific name of the *species* is given in binomial form, and the English name is that applied to the whole specific group or else to the eastern race. Thus, although the Cassin Vireo is the form of that particular species occurring in British Columbia, it is entered as "Solitary Vireo, *Lanivireo solitarius*." As, in the present state of our knowledge of the ornithology of the northwest, the value of such a report as this one lies largely in the exact subspecific determination of the various forms at the points at which specimens are taken, the procedure here followed seems most decidedly a move in the wrong direction. In nearly every instance the author's comments upon the specimens examined treat of the racial peculiarities exhibited, and in the many cases where he has evidently made up his mind as to the subspecies represented there seems to be no good reason why the proper subspecific name should not be placed plainly as a heading. There is no evident gain in the procedure he has followed, but there is, on the contrary, throughout all three reports, an atmosphere of vagueness and uncertainty that detracts greatly from their value. Certainly there are many "records" incorporated therein that can be used by no one else, at least in any study of geographical distribution, without re-examination of the specimens listed.

The author seems to be rather pessimistically inclined towards most western subspecies, and while no one could criticize him on that score were his objections clearly stated and his evidence in orderly array, the vague, and in a general way, deprecatory remarks directed against many subspecies now quite universally recognized by other bird students, are of such unconvincing character that for the most part they were better left unsaid until they could be more logically and strongly presented. They are the "dribbling protests" to which Osgood (CONDOR, XI, 1909, 107) once rightly took exception.

As an example in point, the treatment accorded the Western Goshawk may be cited. It is entered as "Goshawk, *Astur atricapillus*", with the following comment: "The fineness of the breast vermiculations seems to be more an indication of age than geography; younger birds being more coarsely marked than old ones." Now this may be very true, and it is, of course, a point worthy of careful consideration; but one would like to see some supporting evidence for the conclusion reached. It is an easy matter to make a selection of specimens representing various steps between two extremes, but it does not necessarily follow that any one in-