

EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Doubtless many bird students join us in our feeling of dismay regarding the very great number of new names and combinations of names being proposed in current literature for the birds of western North America as well as for the rest of the world. Very many of these changes are due to the splitting of genera or else to the introduction of trinomials on the ground of supposed intergradation through individual variation. Both of these practices are of a sort to be closely dependent upon personal opinion and not upon well definable conditions in nature. We believe we are right in urging that purely nomenclatural questions, such as these, had best *not* be followed in current literature until passed upon authoritatively by vote of some qualified body of professional ornithologists such, for example, as the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature. It is true that the body just referred to has been relatively inactive now for nearly ten years and that an enormous number of cases await its consideration when it does get into action. Some may doubt whether adequate consideration can ever be given so great a number of questions by any "committee". But in cases of a nature where arbitrary decisions must be made, some method of voting to secure decision, and this by some authoritative body, is the only way we can see of solving the problem of permanency of nomenclature. We must not be understood here as in any way slighting the importance of the recognition of subspecies; that is part of *ornithology*. But this other thing is merely a matter of the mechanics of nomenclature.

It is a source of gratification to those who have given time and energy in promoting the welfare of the Cooper Club to learn that several of the members, in an unofficial capacity, some time ago started an endowment fund for the Club. A committee, consisting of J. E. Law, W. L. Chambers and A. B. Howell, has now been elected to take charge of the soliciting of contributions to this fund, and investing the money, the interest on which is to be used for the purpose of enlarging *THE CONDOR* and publishing *Avifaunas*. We learn that the appeal is meeting with a hearty and substantial response and that contributions are being received not only from those who were anticipated benefactors, but also from many who were supposed to take only a moderate interest in ornithology and in the Cooper Club. If well managed and well supported, a movement of this kind is cumulative in effect and should meet with very large success, but only providing that the membership at large is sufficiently in sympathy with it to lend the full

weight of their approval, both moral and financial. In this connection it is proper to make it known that the plan was first formulated by Mr. A. Brazier Howell and by him carried out to a point where its practicability was assured.

The December bulletin of the California Nature Study League, which is sent out by Mr. C. M. Goethe, 720 Capital National Bank Building, Sacramento, contains a very readable account of the Sparrow Hawk. It refers to early-day falconry in pleasant vein, and rightly emphasizes the capacity of the bird as a devourer of grasshoppers. This bulletin may be had by C. O. C. members regularly without cost, upon personal request to Mr. Goethe, as above. Mr. Goethe's efforts are being directed, and with good results, toward the spread of interest in nature study among school children. What the country needs is a citizenry that can see clearly and interpret accurately. Natural history provides a splendid vehicle for education in this direction.

A meeting of men interested in mammalogy was held at the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, on the evening of Thursday, January 8, 1920, for the purpose of perfecting a local organization devoted to various aspects of the study of mammals. Fourteen individuals were present, and coyotes and kangaroo rats formed the topics of discussion. It was decided to petition the recently formed American Society of Mammalogists for the formation of a Northern California Section of that society.

A new museum has been opened at Yellowstone Park, Wyoming, for the preservation and exhibition of all sorts of natural history specimens of the region such as will help tourists to understand the problems of nature in that wonderful region. The National Park Service has appointed Mr. M. P. Skinner to be in charge of this museum; and Mr. Skinner extends a hearty invitation to his fellow C. O. C. members who happen to visit the Yellowstone National Park to look in at the museum and to avail themselves fully of its facilities.

The Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California has received an endowment of \$200,000, the proceeds of which are to be used henceforth and exclusively for its maintenance. This sum was offered to the University by Miss Annie M. Alexander on December 5, 1919, and was accepted by the Regents for the purposes specified on December 9. Miss Alexander in this way insures the permanence of the scientific work which she started twelve years ago. West

coast ornithology has increased in rate of growth markedly with the development of this Museum, and we may reasonably expect the institution to continue to serve in this field usefully throughout the future. A special condition of the endowment is that the first attention of the staff must be devoted to the proper care of the collections of birds, mammals, etc., so as to preserve them safely against the numerous dangers which continually beset museum materials. Another condition is that the Museum's collections be made easily available for study by responsible investigators, not only in Berkeley, but anywhere else.

Mr. Harry H. Sheldon, for some years connected with the United States Biological Survey, is now back in California, having taken up ranching at Carpinteria.

Mr. Leon L. Gardner, of Claremont, California, carried on some interesting experiments last summer under the direction of the United States Biological Survey, in Klickitat County, Washington, in an effort to control the plague of crows which was menacing the almond crop of that section. Green almonds poisoned with strychnine were found to be a satisfactory bait.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN DIVING BIRDS—ORDER PYGOPODES. By ARTHUR CLEVELAND BENT. United States National Museum, Bulletin 107, pp. xiii+245, pls. 1-55 (12 colored); 1919 (our copy received September 2).

Ever since formal announcement was made in 1910 that Mr. A. C. Bent was to take up the work left unfinished by Major Bendire on the "Life Histories of North American Birds" the ornithological public has been waiting the results with keen anticipation. The appearance of the first volume, giving the life histories of the Pygopodes, fully justifies the long wait which has intervened.

The present contribution differs from the volumes issued under the pen of Major Bendire in several respects. In place of the unwieldy quarto we have the standard government octavo which lends itself to more convenient use, and the data pertaining to each species are segregated under subject heads, while quoted material is rendered in smaller type than the body of the text.

The account of each species is prefaced by a paragraph which introduces the reader by way of some striking incident or habitat description to the subject of the chapter. Then follow, in more formal style, para-

graphs relating to "habits", involving discussions of spring behavior, courtship, nesting, eggs, young, plumages, food, and behavior (excluding courting antics but including voice). Where pertinent, notes on fall and winter behavior are given. Under the general heading "distribution", which follows the account of habits, are given breeding range, winter range, spring migration, fall migration, casual records and egg dates.

In endeavoring to make each chapter as complete as possible the author has made free use of the published writings of other observers and in some instances material covering one specific point is quoted from several sources. But Bent's own travels and field studies have been extensive enough to enable him to contribute directly and importantly to almost every species chapter. Two chapters, those on the [Atlantic] Puffin and Great Auk, are entirely from the pen of Dr. Charles W. Townsend.

The sequence in which the species are treated and the nomenclature are both of the A. O. U. 1910 Check-list. The artificiality of the mixed assemblage here dealt with ("Order" Pygopodes) is brought out with striking clearness in this work where *life* characters are described in detail. But this is no criticism of the author's work; his is but another contribution to the already large mass of evidence accumulating which will eventually force a change in the arrangement of certain major groups in our American check-list.

It is impossible in the space available here to pass judgment upon the merits of the individual species chapters and it would be presumptuous for any one to attempt such an assessment of value without having himself been over much of the ground which the author has covered. We restrict ourselves therefore to comments upon some of the more general features of the work.

The use of "titles" in connection with authors' names in the text appeals to us as misleading, in that it tends in some cases to give greater authority to the items quoted. In many instances the authors involved received these "titles" long after the accounts in question were written. The surname alone, with initials only where necessary to distinguish between two individuals with the same surname, is much to be preferred. The term "references to bibliography" on page 225 is misleading; "literature cited" would be more applicable. And the titles are too brief; references to articles in periodical literature ought to give inclusive page