

eral supplements to the American Ornithologists' Union's "Check-List" and upon the revised edition of the latter that it is planned to publish, you are required to pass upon many generic changes which of recent years are being proposed in increasing number. We, the undersigned, wish to protest against the general adoption of those changes resulting from the division of genera of long standing, of convenient size and of real usefulness, into several smaller groups, often into several monotypic genera. We believe the function of the genus is to *show likenesses* quite as much as to emphasize differences. We believe the limits assigned to a given genus to be largely a matter of convenience, and they are usually, therefore, a matter of opinion; we do not believe that a host of monotypic genera serves any purpose of *convenience* to the great majority of working ornithologists.

Apparently the many changes of the nature indicated, that are being urged, are the work of a few individuals. Judging from the comments of many writers, the majority of the working ornithologists of North America are opposed to the practice, and, in this belief, we adopt this means of concentrating these scattered objections and giving them more force.

In this petition, which must be of a general nature, it is not desirable to state explicit objections to any particular genus or genera lately proposed. We urge, however, that, in general, the Committee on Nomenclature and Classification use the utmost conservatism in the adoption of generic changes of the nature above indicated.

We suggest further for your consideration that in connection with the listing from time to time of proposed generic changes (which has been done together with other proposed changes), the Committee adopt some means of eliciting opinions from the working ornithologists of North America. It might be desirable for the Committee to issue at intervals in mimeograph form lists of proposed changes upon which they desire the opinions of others. The generic changes above referred to might well be influenced by such a vote.

Harry S. Swarth
Joseph Mailliard
Barton W. Evermann
J. Grinnell
H. C. Bryant
J. Eugene Law
W. K. Fisher
Leverett Mills Loomis.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

WESTERN BIRDS. By HARRIET WILLIAMS MYERS. Macmillan, New York, 1922. Cloth, 12mo, 392 pp. with 53 pp. of illustrations. \$4.00.

The author, in her Foreword, states that she is dealing with the song birds of the west coast, and that she has followed the A. O. U. Check-List. By song birds, Mrs. Myers evidently means all but water and game birds, and birds of prey. Beginning with the Roadrunner, the most common birds are considered. The wish of the author is "to have the information so plain and simple that the most unscientific of readers may enjoy and become more familiar with our feathered wild life."

That this wish is being fulfilled is evidenced by the fact that many people not otherwise interested in birds are reading this book, and saying "we all feel we want to study the birds." (Mrs. Foote, reviewing for the Highland Park Ebell Club.) Members of the California Audubon Society are pleased with the fair presentation of economic value, with the nice balance so justly maintained between the economic value and the aesthetic enjoyment suggested, and with the amount of descriptive statement.

The appearance of the book is tempting; the many original photographs, the good paper, and the large type are appreciated. Indeed, the type is almost disconcertingly large. The student, accustomed to find his identifying descriptions in fine print and italics, scarcely realizes that he is being given a scientific description until it is all over. Looking again, he often discovers family characteristics described; then one member and another are distinguished, and the student is assured that the identity of this particular bird is unmistakable. Mrs. Myers gives what Lynds Jones calls single characteristics, thus gently leading the beginner to the attainment of powers of discriminative study. The comparison of western with eastern forms is also helpful.

Mrs. Myers does not expect Cooper Club members to find much that is new in the book. For one reason, much of the material has already appeared in THE CONDOR. The writer recalls Dr. Grinnell's comment on the Rufous-crowned Sparrow material, to the effect that we need more such biographies. Serious students are commending the book, however, for its wealth of personal observations expressed in the author's happy con-

versational style, and also for the dependable quotations. Educators also are welcoming the book, and are ordering copies for use in the schools.

It is unfortunate that the book is not letter perfect. How much misstatement is due to "printers' conspiracy" perhaps those who have had things printed can tell.—HELEN S. PRATT, *Secretary, California Audubon Society, January 13, 1923.*

"A CHECK LIST OF THE BIRDS OF ILLINOIS"* BY BENJAMIN T. GAULT, has recently been brought out by the Illinois Audubon Society. As with previous publications of that Society, this list shows every evidence of care in its preparation. Mr. Gault's extensive knowledge of the birds of Illinois, acquired through many years of field work and observation, combined with painstaking accuracy in the preparation of his materials, has resulted in a most creditable publication, one that will be useful to bird students of the state.

The publication is a "Check List," a pocket manual, and, as such, condensed to the utmost; the necessity of such condensation forestalls any criticism of the system of symbols, otherwise rather irritating to the reader who has to master their meaning. Broad margins are left for any notations by those using the list.

An interesting feature is the map of Illinois showing life zones, by Robert Ridgway. Transition, Upper Austral, and three sections of Lower Austral are figured, divisions that have been noted by the reviewer with considerable interest. Some years ago the writer chanced to be doing field work in Will County, just within the area here considered as Transition. Red-bellied Woodpecker, Cardinal, and Mockingbird were nesting there, as well as some other southern species that we do not associate with the Transition zone; but, on the other hand, the Saw-whet Owl was there in summer, and a litter of Red Foxes was discovered. Zonal lines are hard to indicate in such a region; obviously they can not be given as definitely as in most sections of the west. There is probably no one who

understands local conditions affecting animal life in Illinois better than Mr. Ridgway, and his map of the life zones of the state is certainly of value as expressing his opinion of the manner in which such divisions should be indicated in this part of the Mississippi Valley.—H. S. SWARTH, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, January 6, 1923.*

Since the above paragraphs went to press the reviewer has read Mr. Taverner's criticism of the same publication (*Canadian Field-Naturalist*, vol. 36, 1922, p. 179) with the utmost surprise at the severity of his strictures upon it. Some of his generalities are true enough, such as his objection to "the implied assumption that present day ornithological experts knew as much about birds in their youth as they do today", and the accompanying caution as to the acceptance of their early records; but these are not criticisms to be levelled at Mr. Gault's publication. This is a *pocket check list*, with information condensed to the utmost. There are more voluminous and more pretentious books (not dating so very far back, either) dealing with the same state and with surrounding territory (Kumlien and Hollister, *The Birds of Wisconsin*, 1903; Anderson, *The Birds of Iowa*, 1907; Woodruff, *The Birds of the Chicago Area*, 1907; Cory, *The Birds of Illinois and Wisconsin*, 1909), containing detailed information regarding the species questioned by Mr. Taverner. Those are the authors who should have sifted out the bad records from the reliable ones, and if they have failed to do so they are open to criticism to that extent. In the face of their acceptance of certain species the compiler of this condensed check list certainly could not omit those names without laying himself open to just as severe, and more deserved, criticism than that voiced by Mr. Taverner. The space at his disposal forbade discussion of doubtful points.

In connection with Mr. Taverner's objection to the sequence of species in the list of 200 common birds, beginning with the thrushes rather than the grebes, it is gratifying to learn that he feels that tinkering with the accepted system "is, to any one taking an active interest in modern ornithological literature, an exasperation rather than the assistance it is claimed to be." There are others who have felt the same way about certain other departures from current usage.—H. S. S.

*Check List of the Birds of Illinois, together with a short list of 200 commoner birds and Allen's Key to Birds' Nests. Published by the Illinois Audubon Society, 10 South La Salle Street, Chicago, 1922, 80 pp., 1 fig. (map).