

While but little wreckage remains long on Henderson, due to the cliff-encircled shores, one has but to glance at the up-turned bottom of a large ship on Ducie Island lying east of Henderson, or to read the Pitcairn Island records of the seven ships known to have been lost on Oeno Island a couple of degrees west of Henderson, to realize the probability of similar future happenings on Henderson.

For the peace of mind of THE CONDOR objector and the questioning English gentleman, I might mention that, before debarking the ruminants, I tested for three days the forbidding character of the surface configuration of the island, and then unhesitatingly decided that the possible benefit to future ship-wrecked crews would completely overbalance possible damage to the few species of animal life occurring there; and I am prepared to maintain, with further facts, if necessary, that not a single plant or animal species is destined to be exterminated by my thoroughly considered action in liberating three goats on Henderson Island.—R. H. BECK, *Suva, Fiji Islands, June 18, 1924.*

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

SLATER'S SYSTEMATIC LIST OF THE BIRDS OF AFRICA.*—A bare list of species is not generally thought of as a thing of thrilling interest. Especially forbidding might seem a list of birds of a continent which the reader had never visited, and consisting of names of species of which museum specimens, even, had never been given particular attention.

We recall Bradford Torrey's most engaging essay on "Reading a Check-list" (Field-days in California, 1913, pp. 160-169). Yet Torrey, in making his case so appealing, had the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list before him, and had the background of intimate knowledge of many of the species and places concerned. Let us see what an American can find of interest in a "Systema Avium Ethiopicarum."

* Systema Avium Ethiopicarum. A Systematic List of the Birds of the Ethiopian Region. By William Lutley Slater, M.A., M.B.O.U. Prepared in conjunction with Special Committees of the British and American Ornithologists' Unions. Published by the British Ornithologists' Union and sold by Wheldon and Wesley, Ltd., 2-4 Arthur Street, New Oxford Street, W. C. 2. [London] 1924 [our copy received by purchase June 5]. Small 8vo, paper, pp. iv+304 (=part I).

In the first place, be it known, the list in question is the first offering in the projected series of bird lists, to be prepared on a standard, unified plan for the whole world. A joint committee representing both the British Ornithologists' Union and the American Ornithologists' Union has been working several years on the problem. The B. O. U. is held primarily responsible for the several Regions of the Old World, the A. O. U. for the Nearctic and Neotropical regions.

The present volume deals with the "first half of the list of the Birds of the Ethiopian Region." This Region is defined as that portion of the continent of Africa and corresponding portion of the Arabian Peninsula which lies south of the Tropic of Cancer, including also various islands in the Atlantic and Indian oceans. The system of classification adopted is based chiefly on the morphologic studies of Gadow (from the ostriches part way through the woodpeckers); and the nomenclature follows as strictly as possible the Rules of the International Zoological Congress.

The present list thus becomes of importance to an American, in that in it, we may assume, is adopted the general style of presentation which will be followed by the two American lists to be prepared for the same series in the future. The Nearctic list will supplant the present A. O. U. Check-list as the standard authority.

With regard to scientific names, very few indeed happen to be of species familiar to the reviewer. Naturally, there are very few birds that are the same in Africa and North America. The Fulvous Tree-duck is perhaps the only breeding species common to the two continents, aside from introductions. There are several other water-fowl, mostly ducks, in the migratory category.

Where there are the same genera in Africa and America we find that Slater's names differ in some cases from those authorized heretofore by the A. O. U. Committee. Since we have Slater's assurance that his manuscripts and "proofs have all been seen and approved by the committees in England and United States," we may conclude that the nomenclature of the African list will be adopted in the new American lists.† If this inference proves

† Since the above sentence was written, our confidence in this regard has been somewhat upset by reading in the July, 1924, *Auk* (p. 495) a statement by "W. S." to the effect that the proofs of the African list were *not* seen by the American committee!

correct, then we will return again to the inclusive duck genus *Anas*, for *Mareca*, *Chaulelasmus* and *Nettion* as well as the Mallard group. This is a very desirable thing, in our mind. We have had altogether an unreasonable degree of generic splitting in the Anatidae, as well as in some other Families. Furthermore, *Falco* is, in Slater's list, the inclusive genus for the Sparrow Hawks (in the American sense), the Pigeon Hawks and the Duck Hawks. Evidently the recent raising of *Cerchneis* from sub-generic to full generic rank, as was done by the A. O. U. Committee, was unwarrantable. We note that *Proctopus* is given as the genus name to include the Eared Grebes.

Mr. Slater had a large contract on his hands in providing vernacular names for all the great array of included species. For the most part, we think he has followed a consistent system. But he has slipped up in some places, in dealing with a series of subspecies, by giving the first subspecies a group name and the subsequent subspecies the same name with modifying terms; thus, Hairy-breasted Toothbill, Nigerian Hairy-breasted Toothbill, etc. Of course, logically, all in the group are Hairy-breasted Toothbills and the first should have been given an additional modifying designation along with the rest. We note a number of names that strike us as a good deal better than those in common use in the A. O. U. Check-list, for example, Lily-trotter for Jacana. For the most part, geographical names are used for subspecies—which is, as a rule, a helpful custom. There are rather too many personal names among the vernaculars. To a foreigner, some of the vernacular names are meaningless, though perhaps unavoidably so; for example, Kivu Lourie and Aldabra Coucal. Many of the names are intriguing: Fernando Po Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Angola Yellow-beaked Hornbill, Sahara Chanting Goshawk, etc.

In a few cases, vernaculars on the African list are the same as those long employed in other parts of the world for other species. For instance, Africa has a Black Oyster-catcher, but it is *Haematopus moquini*. Duplication of vernacular names ought to be avoided in a world series of check-lists.

Finally, while English and German systematists figure by all odds most importantly in the nomenclature of African birds, we find the names of several Amer-

ican systematists, appearing in about the following order of frequency: Cassin, Mearns, Oberholser, Ridgway, Chapin, Bangs, Stone, Elliot, and Chapman.—J. GRINNELL, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, June 19, 1924.*

HOWELL'S BIRDS OF ALABAMA.*—In this report 314 species and subspecies are listed, not a large "state list" as compared with certain western ones, but of decided interest nevertheless by reason of its being both thorough and authoritative. Furthermore, Alabama is representative of quite a group of South Atlantic States which have been relatively backward in their ornithological development. The present exposition is a straightforward digest of all that is known to date about the birds of Alabama—state records or local distribution, seasonal occurrence, general habits, and food habits—just the information that an enquiring resident of that state or an all-round student of North American birds would want at command.

Of special interest to the latter type of reader are the facts Mr. Howell records with respect to the change in status of species within historical times. As is the case in nearly every other state, most of this change is in the direction of depletion, even if, as is the case with a few species, actual extermination has not already come to pass. We were particularly interested in the accounts of the Swallow-tailed and Mississippi kites, Carolina Paroquet, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and "Southeastern" Raven, all of which are now nearly or quite gone.

The nomenclature is outstandingly down-to-date, reflecting the activities of the priority sharp and genus splitter to the *n*th degree. It is too bad that unsettled cases have to figure in connection with practical, every-day treatises on birds, such as is the present. A saving grace is the fact that the equivalent names on the A. O. U. Check-list are given in footnotes, with, also, accurate citations to the published places where discussions of

* Birds of Alabama [by] Arthur H. Howell | Assistant Biologist, Bureau of Biological Survey, | United States Department of Agriculture | Issued in co-operation with the | United States Department of Agriculture | Bureau of Biological Survey | Edward W. Nelson, Chief of Bureau | by the | Department of Game and Fisheries of Alabama | I. T. Quinn, Commissioner [seal] | Brown Printing Company | State Printers and Binders | Montgomery, Ala. | 1924. Large 8vo, paper, 884 pp., 7 pls., 31 text figs. Our copy received May 21, 1924.