

## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

As usual, the coming May issue of the *CONDOR* will contain the official membership list of the Cooper Ornithological Club. Each Cooper Club member is requested to look up his name in last year's roster, to see if that entry was altogether correct. If not, or if the present mailing envelope of the *CONDOR* be incorrectly addressed, send the facts at once to the Club Business Manager, Mr. W. Lee Chambers, Drawer 123, Eagle Rock, California.

The Arrangements Committee in charge of the Annual Meeting of the Cooper Club at Los Angeles has changed the time to April 8 to 10, instead of April 5 to 7, as first announced. Members are urged to lend their aid in insuring the success of the meeting, by their presence if possible, by participating in the program, and by advertising the occasion. The bird-loving public should be advised that the sessions are open to all, regardless of membership in the Club, and it is desirable that this fact be given wide publicity. If you wish for a place on the program, write to Dr. L. H. Miller, 6066 Hayes Avenue, Los Angeles. If you are unable to attend in person, arrangements may be made to have your contribution read for you.

Dr. Glover M. Allen's book, "Birds and their Attributes" (Marshall Jones Company, Boston, \$3.50) has been adopted as text in an "upper division" zoology course in the University of California. It is proving itself well adapted for this use, better, we believe, than would any book in ornithology previously published in the United States. The treatment deals with the general principles governing avian evolution and existence, as based upon well attested facts. The book is down to date, authoritative, scholarly in every particular. No serious student of bird-life should fail to have read it, and pondered the numerous interesting problems it touches upon.

Gilbert White of Selborne in course of some critical remarks aimed at Linnaeus, in one of his letters, dated August 1, 1771, declared himself as follows: "Faunists, as you observe, are too apt to acquiesce in bare descriptions and a few synonyms: the reason is plain, because all that may be done at home in a man's study; but the investigation of the life and conversation of animals is a concern of much more

trouble and difficulty, and is not to be attained but by the active and inquisitive, and by those that reside much in the country." Quite as good a gibe today as 155 years ago!

### COMMUNICATION

#### SPECIES VERSUS SUBSPECIES

To Cooper Club Members:

The "straw vote" is an instrument that can be appealed to to very good purpose now and then, and my appeal in this instance is to ascertain just how *CONDOR* readers feel toward the question of employing subspecific names in general ornithological literature. A great deal of objection is continually to be heard, often in no uncertain terms, to "subspecies". The undersigned, even though primarily a systematist, has a good deal of sympathy for the point of view of some of the objectors in this regard. Indeed, he himself long ago proposed (*Auk*, XXIX, 1919, p. 563) that a check-list of birds ought to be issued, minus any and all subspecies, for the use of bird students who find subspecies not only useless to them but the idea of them irritating. The very best presentation of the subject which I have seen has just been set forth as part of a review by "W. S." in the *Auk* (January, 1926, p. 119), which is as follows:

"The reviewer has no more personal use for subspecies separated on minute characters than has Mr. ———, because they do not happen to concern the work in which he is most interested; but that is no reason why he should object to others describing them or using them in their work, nor does it give him any warrant to doubt the accuracy of their work. Neither is he interested in the minute and detailed nomenclature of the muscles, nor is he able to distinguish them, but he realizes that others can do this and reach important results from their anatomical study. Why this rather general clamor against subspecies on the part of field ornithologists, collectors, oologists, etc., it is hard to understand. If subspecies do not pertain to their work, why bother with them? Let them be satisfied with the species, but do not try to hamper the work of those who can and do make use of them for the advancement of scientific knowledge."

To prove that I am in hearty accord with these sentiments, I am willing to put

out a new check-list of the birds of California, recognizing in it only full species, *providing* a vote should register sufficient encouragement of the idea. I would aim to make this a check-list of *species*, consistently so, in the sense in which this term is exemplified in the A. O. U. Check-list, exhaustive in every detail within the radius of available information—as to distribution geographically, ecologically and seasonally; but I would put all names other than the accepted ones, subspecific as well as otherwise, applying in any part to each species, in the synonymy of that species. To repeat, subspecific names would be found there, but only in synonymy, those long in the literature as well as the lately proposed ones so often stigmatized, with or without justification, as needless recognition of “millimeter races”. For, be it known that, in my opinion, no more scanty grounds for subspecific recognition are known to date than those which form the basis of, say, the “Long-tailed Chat” versus the “Yellow-breasted Chat”, and the “Calaveras Warbler” versus the “Nashville Warbler”. In these and similar cases the scientific name of the *species* will be entered to the exclusion (save in synonymy) of the name of the subspecies; and vernacular names will be chosen accordingly. A variety of difficult problems are plainly in the offing; but I believe each can be solved on some reasonably practical basis.

All this does not mean that I am personally relinquishing the recognition of subspecies. These will still find an important use in phylogenetic and geographic studies, and they will merely be reserved for employment in the more technical type of publication devoted to these particular small portions of the general field of ornithology.

Now to the point: Will each member of the Cooper Ornithological Club who has an opinion, and who cares to make it effective, please within the next 30 days drop me a card voting *yes* or *no* on the proposition: shall the next check-list of the birds of California deal with *species* to the exclusion of subspecies? It is unnecessary to go into qualifying discussion; just say flatly *yes* or *no*.—J. GRINNELL, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, March 15, 1926.*

#### PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

FORBUSH'S BIRDS OF MASSACHUSETTS AND OTHER NEW ENGLAND STATES.\*—Of all the states in the Union Massachusetts

now proves itself to be the most advanced in matters ornithological. For these many years it has not only maintained the office of Economic Ornithologist in its Department of Agriculture, but it has seen to it that very many contributions of high merit from that office have been printed in excellent style. The present volume marks the culmination of years of continuing improvement from both the ornithological and the typographical standpoints.

From the outset, Edward Howe Forbush has been the Economic Ornithologist of Massachusetts. Besides an enormous amount of lecturing and popular (newspaper) writing, he has conducted extensive economic investigations and prepared for the State press a long series of most creditable economic papers. Two large books, “Useful Birds and Their Protection”, and “Game Birds, Wild-Fowl and Shore Birds”, have come from his pen, and run through three and two editions, respectively; they are now out of print. Now comes Part I of what may be considered Forbush's “magnum opus”—unless he essays something still more exhaustive; and it is a lasting monument to his industry and scholarship as well as a thorough credit to the judgment of those Massachusetts state officials who have engineered the provision of the necessary financial backing.

This latest production of Forbush's constitutes a notable contribution to the general literature of ornithology. As such, readers of this review (presumably a good share of the Cooper Club's membership) would do well each to acquire a copy (or a set, rather, for there are to be two more volumes). We understand through a circular issued from the office of the Commissioner of Agriculture that the present volume may be had for \$5.00 plus carrying charges by applying to the Public Document Division, State House, Boston.

The illustrations are exceptionally fine, comparing favorably with those of far more expensive works. The half-tones are beautifully reproduced from first-class

\* Massachusetts Department of Agriculture | Dr. Arthur W. Gilbert | Commissioner | Birds of Massachusetts | and Other New England States | By | Edward Howe Forbush | Part I. | Water Birds, Marsh Birds and | Shore Birds | Illustrated with Colored Plates from Drawings by | Louis Agassiz Fuertes | and | Figures and Cuts from Drawings and Photographs by | The Author and Others | Issued by Authority of the Legislature | 1925. Large 8vo or small 4to (188 x 248 mm., type-bed 136 x 180 mm.), pp. xxxii + 481, 33 colored pls., 35 numbered figures on inserted plate paper (usually 2 half-tone figures to a page), and 68 unnumbered cuts from line drawings. Our copy received November 27, 1925.