

A Criticism of Certain "New" Subspecies.—In the Murrelet for September, 1933 (vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 78-79), there is an article by R. A. Cumming entitled "Descriptions of a proposed new race of song sparrow and of a hermit thrush" that calls for adverse comment, as embodying some of the most objectionable of current practices in ornithological taxonomy. A song sparrow is named from the Queen Charlotte Islands, a hermit thrush from the vicinity of Vancouver. The "descriptions" are severely brief, and deceptively authoritative in their technicalities. Yet these birds are named, not from remote, unexplored parts of the world, but from a region that is well known ornithologically; and they belong to species that have been carefully studied by others.

As meeting criticism of such publication, it has frequently been pointed out that anyone has the right to name anything he pleases. The existence of human "rights" of any sort is a debatable question, but it may be conceded here, at least in the sense that such action cannot be stopped. However, conscientious people exercising assumed rights should recognize accompanying responsibilities. The obligations in the case at issue include familiarity with, and recognition of, previous work by others (whether agreed with or opposed), and the labor of ascertaining and explaining the meanings that may be attached to observed variations. There have been all too many "descriptions" that append a barely diagnosed name to a bird or mammal, leaving it to others to work out the underlying principles and conditions that alone give any point whatever to the study.

When Major Brooks and myself prepared our "Distributional list of the birds of British Columbia" we aimed at more than a perfunctory compilation of records. Group after group of birds received as thorough revisionary study as was practicable, and the song sparrows were given careful attention. We assembled a large series in which the Queen Charlotte Islands bird had ample representation, and we found no grounds therein for a separate name for the song sparrow of that region. The study of this particular group was published as a separate paper (Condor, 25, 1923, pp. 214-223, map), a paper that, obviously, Mr. Cumming has not seen.

The western hermit thrushes have recently been subject matter for careful and detailed study by Thomas T. McCabe and Elinor B. McCabe, as appeared in the Condor (34, 1932, pp. 26-40), again a paper that, clearly, Mr. Cumming had not studied. Not one word of explanation is given for the naming of a subspecies of hermit thrush from Vancouver, when the type locality of *nanus* is Fort Vancouver, Washington, such a relatively short distance away and also in the humid coast belt.

The wording of the "ranges" ascribed to both song sparrow and hermit thrush is sufficient evidence of the scanty material the writer had at his disposal. My impression of Mr. Cumming's mental procedure is about as follows: That he acquired certain song sparrows and certain hermit thrushes that appeared to him to be different from certain other song sparrows and hermit thrushes in his possession, and that the ones that were unfamiliar to him were regarded as necessarily "new." The upshot of the matter is that he has added two more synonyms to an already over-stuffed literature.

As previously implied, any person's "right" to name subspecies is limited only by his ability to find a medium for publication. It seems to me, therefore, that a sensible policy to pursue, by editor, society, or whomever controls a given journal, at least as pertains to a region as well known ornithologically as North America, might lie in the discouragement of the publication of subspecific descriptions except when they appear as by-products of studies that incidentally disclose the actual need of new terms.—H. S. SWARTH, *California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, November 1, 1933.*

NOTES AND NEWS

Shortly following the appearance of this issue of the *Condor*, members of the Cooper Ornithological Club will convene in San Diego for the Ninth Annual Meeting. Attention is called to the precise dates of the meeting, which will be March 30 to April 1, hence not beginning on March 29 as

stated in an earlier notice. Sessions for the presentation of papers will be held on Friday the 30th, and on Saturday the 31st. The Board of Governors will meet on Sunday, April 1. Evening entertainment will be announced on the opening day. The San Diego Museum will consti-

tute headquarters for the meeting, and its staff will act as hosts. Out-of-town members may confidently look forward to a repetition of the high measure of success that marked the Third Annual Meeting held under the same auspices in 1928.—A. H. M.



Fig. 17. George Willett, Ornithologist at the Los Angeles Museum, Member of Cooper Ornithological Club since 1905, Member Board of Governors C. O. C., author of Pacific Coast Avifauna Numbers 7, 20 and 21.

Irrespective of the propriety of the main points in Mr. Swarth's sharp criticism (page 90 of this issue of the *Condor*) of a certain article in the *Murrelet*, there is one implication with which we do not agree. This is that the Editor of the *Murrelet* should be held responsible for the tenability of the "new" subspecies in the article criticised. We have examined the article in question and find it to show the results of care in the chief matters which an editor customarily attends to; namely, good English and clean typography. As to whether or not every fact and conclusion in that article will stand the test of current and future scrutiny, only God knows! Just think of the load of responsibility accumulated to date by the editors of the *Condor* and the *Auk*, if they are to be held to account for the

tenability of every subspecies ever proposed in those magazines! The idea is grotesque.—J.G.

JOHN HOOPER BOWLES was born in Boston, Massachusetts, March 15, 1875. He died February 2, 1934, at Tacoma, Washington. His early rise in ornithology was rapid and thorough, under guidance of such masters as William Brewster and E. A. Capen, so that, before he came west he had gained much knowledge of the habits and lives of the eastern birds. The family came west in 1896 to Tacoma, where Jack spent the greater part of his life. The forests and fields of western Washington supplied most of the material that built his wonderful egg collection. This collection, containing some 970 species and subspecies of North American nests and eggs, has been given to the Ferry Museum of Tacoma. It is doubtful if any collection in the country, of its size, is as authentic and correct in identification. No set with the slightest doubt was ever added, and some of the small gaps could easily have been filled if Jack had cared to take a chance. Bowles was an active member of the A. O. U., an active member for thirty years of the Cooper Club, and Vice-President of the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Society since its founding some fifteen years ago. Many of his articles appeared in the various ornithological journals; his greatest work, however, was in co-authorship with W. L. Dawson on the "Birds of Washington." Bowles never married, and he leaves two brothers, A. Gordon Bowles and C. W. Bowles, residing in California.—E. A. KITCHIN.

Here in California there is a flare-up of "vermin"-eradication contests under the auspices of local sportsmen's organizations and encouraged by the newspapers. Even boy scout troops are being prompted to participate in drives "to eradicate predatory birds." The origin of this sort of movement is not far to seek. One such "campaign," reported from Salinas under date February 8, 1934, is being marshalled by a "local taxidermist" and a local "sporting goods store owner" for the alleged purpose of "killing off blue jays, jim crows, hawks and other animals which *exact their huge annual toll* from the ranks of the game birds and animals [*italics ours*]." While the immediate motive here is not difficult to guess, for the prime stimulation we can go farther—to

the recent widely distributed pamphlet entitled "More Game Birds by Controlling Their Natural Enemies." The power of propaganda, in this case utilizing man's instinctive urge "to go out and kill something" (with double objective, the game in season and then the assumed enemies of game out of season) is again illustrated. The continual publicity issuing from high places, which employs such phrases as "predatory animals" and "enemies of game," promotes and renews this natural tendency of mankind to destroy whatever is imagined to be injurious to his immediate interests. Fortunately, in the present instance, certain Cooper Club members find themselves in position to expend personal effort toward stemming the local wave of anti-vermin activity. Among the conservationists in west-central California who are right now putting their convictions into practice, by bringing the facts and proper interpretations of natural history before the sportsmen's and other organizations concerned, are Mr. C. B. Lastreto, Mr. Laidlaw Williams, Mr. Dudley S. DeGroot, and Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell. It is to be hoped that some if not all of the announced "prize contests" will be given up.—J.G.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

Edward L. Caum has summarized in a paper entitled "The Exotic Birds of Hawaii" (Occas. Papers Bishop Mus., 10(9), 1933, 55 pp.) the results of attempts at bird introduction in Hawaii. About 90 species have been tried, of which 32 are established, and 19 because of too recent importation or other factors are of uncertain status; the others failed. The risks of bird introduction are discussed, but the author seems in agreement with other residents that Hawaii needs more birds and should try for them regardless of risks. The species successfully established are about half game birds, doves, and pigeons, and the remainder a variety of passerine birds. One of them, *Munia nisoria*, "does considerable damage to green rice"; *Acridotheres tristis*, while frequently a nuisance, is deemed to do more good than harm; *Passer domesticus* "is, if anything, rather useful"; and *Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis* has not proved destructive. The publication is a valuable record and of great interest for its bearing on a highly controversial subject.—W. L. McATEE.

Das Sterbende Moor, by Otto Ehrhart-Dachan (Munich, Drei Masken Verlag, 1930, 152 pp.), is a poignantly beautiful tale of a wild and lovely moor where birds and beasts and water things found a safe haven among woods and streams. With masterly skill and fidelity to nature the author interprets the "humble happiness" of the fishes, telling of the lives of an ancient pike and a mighty carp. Thousands of birds—herons, storks, ducks, birds of prey and countless others—nested in the hidden swamps undisturbed by man. But man has so little love for beauty and for his harmless fellow-creatures that this sanctuary was made desolate through drainage and deforestation. It is a book that moves one to love of the gentle wild folk and to pity of their sad plight, as homeless and persecuted, they seek in vain a refuge on the earth.—MARGARET M. NICE.

VALENTIN HAECKER ON RACIAL DIFFERENTIATION (Haecker, Valentin. Phänanalytische Untersuchungen über Hochgebirgs- und Tieflandsvögel, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schilddrüse. Zeitschrift für induktive Abstammungslehre, 43, 1926, pp. 121-170, 2 pls., 2 charts, numerous line drawings).—With the voice of more or less depreciative criticism rather too often raised against the honorable profession of avian systematics as practised, and with the near-despair of the scientific systematist himself over the problem of extracting adequate data from limited and protean series which are jumbles of ages, sexes, plumages, localities and conditions, the suggestion of a new angle is very welcome, especially when it lays emphasis on cause rather than effect and brings reassuring evidence that our orthodox racial differentiations are more than "skin deep." Hidden as it has been in an unfamiliar German periodical, the work of the late Valentin Haecker on the crows of Germany and Switzerland in particular, and of the world in general, is far too little known. Haecker, who died in 1927, had since 1888 combined with a multitude of other zoological studies a persistent interest in ornithological problems, notably in the fields of the mechanism of song-production, feather color, and color races. Görnitz began his work on climate and color races, and Glasewald his work on the melanins, as dissertations under the