

NOTES AND NEWS

The Cooper Ornithological Society is developing plans for holding its annual meeting of 1954 at Tucson, Arizona. The ornithologists of the Tucson area through Allan R. Phillips and Joe T. Marshall, Jr. have extended an invitation for April 22-24. Later, official announcement from the Board of Directors will be made, with designation of the local committee in charge of the meeting. Such a meeting should prove most attractive to members of the Society, as the rich desert avifauna is at the height of its activity in April. Also the organization is anxious to meet at this important ornithological center.—A.H.M.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

BIRDS OF MEXICO, A GUIDE FOR FIELD IDENTIFICATION. By Emmet Reid Blake, illustrated by Douglas E. Tibbitts. University of Chicago Press, xxx+644 pp., many figs. (unnumbered), colored frontispiece. 1953. \$6.00.

This is the first true field guide to the birds of México and as such is of distinct importance and usefulness at this juncture in the development of the ornithology of that country. México has a large avifauna which includes approximately 1000 species, 750 of which are resident. Moreover it includes a large proportion of tropical species and therefore this guide will prove to be of much service in adjacent Central America.

The descriptions and keys properly are for species, not subspecies, and they emphasize, rather well in the main, the conspicuous features likely to be detected in the field. Such information as can be added on habitat and song aid further in field identifications.

Vernacular English names are developed for species, and we are thankful to note that they are omitted entirely for subspecies. The species names largely reflect the endeavors of Eugene Eisenmann who has sought to build up a logical and accurate set of names for Central American birds. Much as we are in sympathy with this effort, we see no reason for Blake and Eisenmann to view with such complete disfavor certain patronymics and geographic designations. For example, the Sclater or Mexican Chickadee has long borne the latter name. No confusion would result from either of these names. The species is essentially Mexican in distribution and is more typically Mexican than any other chickadee or titmouse. What is to be gained, then, by calling it Gray-

sided Chickadee, a not inappropriate name, but an innovation that is hardly necessary?

About one-third of the species are illustrated with black and white sketches. Many of these adequately serve the purpose of aiding in identification, but there are many that are poor. Obviously the artist has worked under the handicap of not having had a chance to see the species in the field. For example, Californians will be especially disturbed by the appearance of the Wren-tit; the bill of the White-breasted Nuthatch seems to be only about half as long as it should be; the Saw-whet Owl apparently is a Pigmy Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*), judging from tail position (correctly described in the text), tail barring, flank markings, and spotting of the crown.

With respect to the genus *Junco*, the reviewer hesitates to register an objection since Blake should certainly be free to voice his own opinions in dealing with this complicated group. We recognize room for differences of opinion on the question of whether the partial reproductive isolation of *J. hyemalis* and *J. oregonus* is enough to call for a species separation; a related doubt may be entertained about *J. oregonus* and *J. caniceps*. But Blake does some queer reasorting, perhaps influenced by Hellmayr's much earlier (1938) and admittedly tentative treatment. Thus the Mexican Junco (*J. phaeonotus*) is termed the Yellow-eyed Junco but included in it is the brown-eyed form *dorsalis* which has been shown to be racially related to *caniceps* and not to *phaeonotus*—facts that have not been challenged so far as I am aware. At the same time, *bairdi*, the yellow-eyed form of the Cape district of Baja California is placed in the brown-eyed species *J. oregonus*, thus quite obscuring its affinities with the forms of the central Mexican highlands and Chiapas. Incongruous with his mergers is his maintenance of *hyemalis* and *oreganus* as separate species. A field guide and the review of it are not, however, the places for a new revision of the genus *Junco*.

Even though one does find errors, some technical aspects to challenge, and obvious lacks in information, the general value of Blake's book is not impaired and it serves its chief purpose well. Indeed as a pioneer venture in comprehensive guidance to the Mexican avifauna it is greatly to be admired. Blake can not be held accountable for the marked imperfection that persists in our aggregate knowledge of the birds of this fascinating country.—ALDEN H. MILLER.