

Proceedings of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

The third annual meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union was held in Atlantic on May 14 and 15, 1926.

The morning of the first day was set aside for registration, during which time friends renewed their acquaintance. About forty members attended the meetings. At 1:30 P. M. Mr. T. H. Whitney, President of the Atlantic Bird Club, gave the address of welcome; the response was made by Mr. A. J. Palas, of Des Moines. Reports of officers were then presented, and committees were appointed.

The first paper on the program was one by Miss Althea R. Sherman, on "Hours spent with the Rails." In the absence of Miss Sherman, the paper was read by the Secretary. Mr. Weir R. Mills, of Pierson, presented a paper describing the wild birds that come to his door-yard; this town lot is trained to grow wild, and is of unusual interest on that account. Mr. Phil Dumont, of Drake University, gave an interesting account of experiences in a marsh near Des Moines. Dr. Weeks presented a critique of Allen's "Birds and Their Attributes." Dr. F. J. Becker, of Atlantic, told how to handle the English Sparrow problem. Rev. George Bennett discussed recent efforts at wild life conservation, and explained Dr. Hornaday's plan for reducing the bag limit on game birds.

The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: President, W. M. Rosen, Ogden; Vice-President, T. C. Stephens, Sioux City; Secretary, Kenneth R. Nelson, Des Moines; Treasurer, A. J. Palas, Des Moines; Executive Committee, Dr. L. T. Weeks, Tabor; Dr. F. J. Becker, Atlantic; Weir R. Mills, Pierson.

A committee was appointed to consider the matter of a state flower. It was also voted to urge the Iowa senators and representatives in Congress to support the bill designed to effect a reduction in the federal bag limit on game birds. It was also voted to hold the next meeting at Des Moines in May. A banquet was held in the evening, following which the Union and its guests listened to an illustrated lecture.

On the following morning at five o'clock the members and friends assembled at Sunnyside Park, and then dispersed in small parties for a few hours field work. A breakfast was served by the Atlantic Bird Club at 7:30, which brought all together again for the final gathering. Comparison of notes showed that a composite list of about eighty-one species had been made. It seemed to be the unanimous opinion that the out-door session is a valuable feature of our annual meeting.

Kenneth R. Nelson, *Secretary, I. O. U.*

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

BRITISH BIRDS. By Archibald Thorburn, F. Z. S. Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd. New York and London. 1926. Demy 8vo. Volume III. Per volume \$5.50.

The first two volumes of this work were noticed in our last March issue. Volume III is now in circulation. This volume treats of the herons, ducks, geese, swans, doves, rails, shorebirds, and gallinaceous birds. Ninety-one species of birds are illustrated in the forty-eight colored plates. As in the previous volumes the colored plates are of unusual beauty. We believe that the smaller page, as compared with the earlier edition of the same work, and the smaller colored

plate exhibiting fewer species, is much more satisfactory from every point of view. The artistic work of Mr. Thorburn is remarkably clear and forceful. The backgrounds are adequate, and do not detract from the figures. The workmanship in reproducing the plates deserves a word of praise. While the plates furnish the chief interest in the work, the text is interesting and sufficient. We know of nothing on British birds that is likely to be more suitable for the casual reader than this work; and the plates are a genuine treasure.—T. C. S.

- (1) THE STATUS OF THE SUBSPECIFIC RACES OF BRANTA CANADENSIS. By J. D. Figgins. *Auk*, XXXVII, 1920. Pp. 94-102.
- (2) ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE STATUS OF THE SUBSPECIFIC RACES OF BRANTA CANADENSIS. By J. D. Figgins. *Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, IV, No. 3, Dec. 15, 1922. Pp. 1-19.
- (3) SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE TO HYBRIDS AND INTERGRADATION. By J. D. Figgins. *Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, V, No. 1, June 19, 1925. Pp. 1-11.
- (4) SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE TO METEOROLOGICAL INFLUENCES. By J. D. Figgins. *Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, V, No. 2, July 20, 1925. Pp. 1-21.
- (5) "TWICE TOLD TALES." By J. D. Figgins. *Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, V, No. 3, October 5, 1925. Pp. 1-31.
- (6) A REPLY. By J. D. Figgins. *Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, VI, No. 1, February 8, 1926. Pp. 1-7.

These papers may be said to represent an effort to show that the subspecies concept has been overworked, and that it has resulted in abuses and confusion. The discussion arising from these several papers will perhaps be of sufficient interest to our readers to justify the following resume.

(1) The author here considers the subspecies of *Branta canadensis*. In comparing *B. c. hutchinsi* with *B. c. occidentalis* he finds that they are separated by a difference in wing-length of .07 inch. Other authorities, he states, give a variation of 14 to 20 rectrices in *canadensis*, which is the same in *occidentalis*, while *hutchinsi* shows a variation of 14 to 18. Then follows a lengthy consideration of the color in the several subspecific forms, as described by various authorities. The author concludes "That it is not possible to identify a specimen as *hutchinsi* without disregarding strong evidence of its being either *canadensis* or *minima*. That such identification is largely a matter of personal preference—so-called *hutchinsi* being merely examples of *canadensis* that present one or two measurements below the minimum or specimens that are the result of a cross between *canadensis* and *minima*." Likewise, as far as measurements, number of rectrices, and color pattern are concerned, *occidentalis* is included within *canadensis*. The author concludes that *hutchinsi* and *occidentalis* are not valid subspecies, that *minima* and *canadensis* should be regarded as of specific rank, and that the "occasional 'inextricable' examples be recognized as hybrids."

A reply to this paper by Mr. Swarth¹ admits that "some of the characters first ascribed to the subspecies are unreliable", but claims that "The fact that the type specimen of *occidentalis* is not representative of the mode of that subspecies, as now defined, is obviously no reason why the form should not be

¹The Subspecies of *Branta canadensis* (Linnaeus). By H. S. Swarth. *Auk*, XXXVII, 1920. Pp. 268-272.

recognized." Mr. Swarth prefers to "regard *Branta canadensis* as a variable species, divided into four recognizable subspecies, *canadensis*, *occidentalis*, *hutchinsi*, and *minima*", as now given in the A. O. U. Check-list. Willett² also affirms the validity of *occidentalis* as a subspecies, and believes that Mr. Figgins was "misled by the erroneous nature of the characters given by many authorities as distinguishing this from the other allied subspecies."

(2) In this paper Mr. Figgins recurs to the subject of hybridism, and points out certain cases in the Flicker, in snails, and in wild sheep, which are interpretable as hybrids, and which he regards as comparable to the facts presented concerning *Branta*. The breeding ranges of the races of *Branta* are then considered, and evidence is presented to show that the breeding ranges of *canadensis* and *minima* are connected and overlapped by the breeding range of *hutchinsi*. The breeding range of *occidentalis* seems to be undetermined.

(3) This paper is called forth by Mr. Swarth's reply in the *Auk*.¹ The author here goes into the subject of hybridism rather fully, discussing the cases of the Junco, Flicker, Mallards, deer, etc. The gist of the paper is that hybridism is of frequent occurrence and doubtless explains a good many of the described subspecific forms.

(4) The author describes two localities in Colorado about twenty miles apart. One is a lake and marsh region, the other is dry and arid. Towhees (*Pipilo*) breed in both localities, and at the beginning of the breeding season the Towhees in both these areas are identical in plumage color. Later in the season the birds in the arid foothills are found to be much paler than those of the humid area. The author selected three typical specimens from the humid lake region "identical in coloration and in no respect separable from the birds of the foothills, taken at the same time." These skins he subjected to different physical conditions. Specimen No. 1 was returned to the cabinet to be used as a control. Specimen No. 2 was placed in a *moist* box and kept in direct sunlight. Specimen No. 3 was placed in a similar *dry* box, and exposed to the same light conditions. At the end of twenty-eight days Specimen No. 2 was unchanged, while Specimen No. 3 "was faded to a remarkable degree—equal to the palest birds of the foothills, at the end of the breeding season." Here, the differences in color were traceable directly to climatic causes. The author does not think such differences are of subspecific value; they are the result of external factors, while proper subspecies should depend, at least in part, upon certain internal factors. He therefore distinguishes between environmental variations, as above, on the one hand, and true geographic races, on the other hand. The remainder of this paper presents additional cases in point.

(5) In this paper the author points to a number of instances of perpetuation of erroneous identification by repetition, until finally the errors were accepted officially. The paper also contains a brief discussion of the criteria of subspecies, wherein it is urged that definite standards and units be employed in distinguishing subspecies.

One other recent paper on this subject is one by Major Allan Brooks³ in which he reviews some of the previous literature, and wherein he summarizes

²Ornithological Notes from Southeastern Alaska. By George Willett. *Auk*, XXXVIII, 1921. Pp. 127-129.

the situation in five propositions, viz., (1) "It is impossible to identify the species from the points of differentiation laid down by their original describers." (2) "The series in most museums is very inadequate, and in every one of them it is safe to say that there are birds that are wrongly identified." (3) "This is largely the result of lack of acquaintance with Geese, which have far greater variation in size than most other birds, due to age and the longevity of their kind." (4) "Both breeding and winter ranges as given in the A. O. U. Check-list are in error." (5) "Few writers on the group have studied the species in life."

Major Brooks' conclusion is that *Branta canadensis*, *Branta hutchinsi*, and *Branta minima* are distinct and separate species; and that *Branta canadensis* is divisible into two subspecies, viz., *canadensis* and *occidentalis*.

Mr. Swarth contends that *Branta canadensis* is a variable species, which is divisible into four subspecies, *canadensis*, *occidentalis*, *hutchinsi*, and *minima*, as now recognized by the A. O. U. Check-list.

Mr. Figgins' position may be summed up in the proposal that *hutchinsi* and *occidentalis* should be retired to the hypothetical list until the breeding ranges and the causes of the enormous variation between *minima* and *canadensis* are understood, *hutchinsi* being but one stage of that variation.—T. C. S.

The volume V (1925) of the Proceedings of the Oklahoma Academy of Science (Univ. Okla. Bull., April 1, 1926) contains three articles on birds. (1). "Evidence of Increase in Certain Rare Species of Birds in Oklahoma", by R. O. Whinton, in which some data are given concerning the Wood Duck, Avocet, Whistling Swan, Hudsonian Godwit, and Harlin's Hawk in Oklahoma. (2). "Some Materials Used in Nest Construction by Certain Birds of the Oklahoma Panhandle", by R. C. Tate, in which are presented notes on the materials and structure of the nests of twelve species of birds. The Magpie's nest is described as having a mud cup lined with rootlets. (3). "Some Bird Observations in Cleveland County in 1924", by Margaret M. Nice and L. B. Nice, in which notes are given on twenty-four species. The volume also contains interesting short lists of amphibians and reptiles for the State.—T. C. S.

The *Cardinal* is published by the Audubon Society of the Sewickley Valley, in western Pennsylvania. The issue for July, 1926, contains twelve pages of miscellaneous bird notes. One of the most interesting notes reports that South American Tinamus (*Nothura maculosa*) are being extensively imported into this country and used by restaurants under the name "imported quail." It seems that someone has slipped through a modification of the law prohibiting the importation of game birds; and these curious birds are being shipped into our country in quantities which seriously threaten their extermination. Some one should become interested in this matter. The leading article is a list of the mammals of the Sewickley region. The *Cardinal* is published twice a year, for which the subscription is fifty cents. Subscribers may address Mr. Frank Semple, Jr., Sewickley, Pa.

Bird Banding Notes, published by the U. S. Biological Survey and distributed to the volunteer co-operators in the bird banding work, has now reached No. 19.

³Notes on the Geese of the *Branta canadensis* Group. By Allan Brooks, Col. M. B. O. U. *Ibis*, April, 1926. Pp. 339-346.

This is a mimeographed publication which contains a large amount of valuable information—most of which is found nowhere else. For this serial, and for the very efficient way in which the bird banding work of the government is being handled, we are indebted to Mr. F. C. Lincoln. Those who receive *Bird Banding Notes* should keep it intact and complete. In time it will be difficult or impossible to obtain early numbers, and then there will be plenty of demand for complete sets.

Nature Notes from the Yellowstone Park for March, April, May, June, and July have reached our desk. This publication, if it may be so called, is also printed by the mimeograph process, and has, in the June number, been reduced to letter size, which is better. We surmise that the credit for this energetic serial belongs to Mr. E. J. Sawyer, the Park Naturalist. It includes many short notes on all phases of the natural history of the Park.

We acknowledge the receipt of the 1926 *Bulletin of the Indiana Audubon Society*. In addition to several articles pertaining to bird study and bird protection this pamphlet contains important records of the recent occurrence in Indiana of the Starling, Harris's Sparrow, and Burrowing Owl, these notes being brought together by Amos W. Butler.

The *Maine Naturalist* for March, 1926, (VI, No. 1) contains the first installment of an article on the "Birds of Brunswick, Maine", by J. Weston Walch, which is accompanied by a very excellent photograph of the Ruffed Grouse on its nest, by Dr. A. O. Gross. This creditable local magazine is edited by Arthur H. Norton, and is published quarterly at 22 Elm Street, Portland, Maine.

We have before us a set of four booklets dealing with four of the thirty-six Iowa State Parks, viz., Dolliver Memorial, Eldora Pine Creek, Pilot Knob, and the Ledges. These booklets describe the natural features of the parks, and include small maps, which in two instances, however, are rendered useless by being printed on purple cover paper. The reading matter includes a discussion of the history, physiography, and to some extent the natural history of the parks. The list of birds for the Eldora park is anonymous. No bird list is given for the Pilot Knob park or for the Dolliver park. The Ledges guide contains a list of the common, rare, and extinct birds, to the number of 204, by Carl Fritz Henning. This is a valuable list, and it should be republished with more complete annotations, because it will then make the most complete list of birds we have for the central part of the State.

NECROLOGY

On July 21, 1926, Frank M. Woodruff, Curator of the Chicago Academy of Sciences, and a well-known ornithologist of the Mississippi Valley, died at his home in Chicago. He was born at Leavenworth, Kansas, July 16, 1867. In 1884 he visited in Deer Park, Maryland, where he made a large collection of birds and mammals. In 1888 he was associated with Colonel Francis W. Parker at the Cook County Normal School, leaving there to assist in the collecting and mounting of the Illinois State Ornithological Exhibit at the World's Fair in 1893. From that time on he was connected with the Chicago Academy of Sciences. In 1907 the Chicago Academy published as a Bulletin his "Birds of the Chicago Area." He has also contributed other short papers to various scientific periodicals, including THE WILSON BULLETIN.—W. F. Worthley.