

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE COWBIRDS. A STUDY IN THE BIOLOGY OF SOCIAL PARASITISM. By Herbert Friedman. Published by Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois. 1929. Pp. i-xviii+1-421. Pls. 1-XXVIII, figs. 1-13. Price, \$6.00.

In 1893 Major Charles Bendire published a paper (in Report of U. S. Nat. Mus.) on "The Cowbirds," which summarized the knowledge of the subject in thirty-five pages. Dr. Friedman's monograph now collects and collates the vast amount of material which has been published in all sources during the past third of a century, and contributes a very considerable amount of new field observation. The Preface states that "The present work is a complete report on all the Cowbirds, based on five years of uninterrupted work; three breeding seasons were spent in central New York State, one in Argentina, and one on the Texan-Mexican border."

There has been a good deal of rearrangement in the taxonomy and nomenclature of the Cowbirds since Bendire's time. Friedman recognizes three genera, viz., *Agelaioides*, *Tangavius*, and *Molothrus*. The genus *Agelaioides* is South American, and contains two species and three races. *Tangavius* with its two species and four races occupies the coastal plains of Mexico and Central America, barely extending over into southwestern United States. *Molothrus* with three species and ten races spreads over the greater part of both North and South America.

The author is able to give very complete information on many of the topics concerning the various species, including distribution, migration, courtship, mating, eggs and egg-laying, young, food, plumages and molts, enemies, etc. Consideration of the genus *Molothrus* occupies about four-fifths of the book, with *Molothrus ater* receiving the lion's share of treatment and *M. bonariensis* and *M. rufo-axillaris* ranking second and third. We need not doubt, however, that all the forms are adequately treated in the light of present knowledge.

In the discussion of the North American Cowbird we find a list of the species which are known to have been victimized, including 195 species and subspecies—undoubtedly the longest list ever compiled. Hereafter, bird students will look to this list for the status of any species as a Cowbird victim.

The egg-laying habits of the Cowbird are very fully discussed, but these problems still remain a splendid field for study; and the amateur ornithologist is just as likely as anyone to make some important discovery at this point.

The last chapter in the book is a speculation on the origin of the parasitic habit of the Cowbirds; it is a complete and critically prepared discussion, but can hardly be said to solve the problem. Briefly told, the author believes that the parasitic habit has arisen in Cowbirds as a result of a "lack of attunement between the territorial instincts of the male and the egg-laying instincts of the female." "This lack of attunement seems to have been caused by the diminution of the protecting territorial instincts of the male and this diminution seems in turn to have been started by the reversal of the territorial and nest-building instincts in the stock from which the Screaming Cowbird evolved," viz., the *Agelaioides* group. Parenthetically we may make note of a misplaced line, line 32 from the top on page 354, which destroys the meaning at a critical point.

An extensive bibliography and an index complete the volume. The illustrations include various maps of distribution, numerous pictures of nests with

Cowbirds' eggs, and a very noteworthy series of photographs of *Molothrus ater* in courtship poses.

This volume covers a most interesting and important subject, and one which for some time has needed just such an exposition. The author has succeeded admirably in his task; we willingly concede it to be a "major contribution to ornithology." The publishers have succeeded no less in their task of mechanical execution. On a back fly-leaf the publishers have made an interesting statement concerning the workmanship, which we believe will be an appreciated innovation.—T. C. S.

BIRDS OF NEW MEXICO. By Florence Merriam Bailey, with contributions by the late Wells Woodbridge Cooke. Published by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Santa Fe, 1928. Pp. i-xxiv+1-807, pls. 1-79 (25 in color), figs. 1-136, maps 1-60. Price, \$5, in buckram.

We look upon the present volume with admiration. The text is voluminous and most carefully prepared. The illustrations are abundant, attractive, and instructive. The work has been published through the generosity and patronage of Mr. and Mrs. George Deardorff McCreary, Jr., of Silver City, New Mexico. It is always a pleasure to express our appreciation to the patrons of science. The volume is largely the outcome of the researches carried on by the United States Biological Survey. The work apparently had its inception as far back as 1889, when Mr. Vernon Bailey was sent to New Mexico to make collections for the (then) Division of Ornithology and Mammalogy. Mr. Bailey, accompanied by Mrs. Bailey, later spent several seasons in the State on field work for the Bureau. Before his death Prof. W. W. Cooke undertook to prepare the available data for publication. Under the administration of Dr. Nelson the task of bringing the material up to date and making a complete state book was assigned to Mrs. Bailey, whose experience in the study of western bird life is well known.

A perusal of the acknowledgments convinces the reader of the vast amount of effort which has helped to produce this very complete and authoritative volume. The "Introduction" contains, besides the acknowledgments, a discussion of the zonal distribution of birds in the State, with lists for each of the six zones; an enumeration of the State and Federal wild life refuges, and the State organizations concerned in the conservation of wild life; a list of birds first discovered and described from New Mexico—a surprisingly large number; a list of the bird collections from New Mexico.

A unique feature of this work is a chapter on itineraries and reports of field work in the State (pp. 15-36), and another chapter giving an alphabetical list of localities visited by all reliable observers (pp. 37-68)—both by W. W. Cooke. Every field worker in ornithology from 1540 to the present time is mentioned; his work is briefly described, with citation to his publications on New Mexico birds.

The descriptive catalogue proper, by Mrs. Bailey, is included within pages 73-762. Three hundred and eighty-one forms are credited to the State, while fifteen additional hypothetical forms are listed, the latter being included in the body of the catalogue and indicated by brackets. Typical treatment for each species includes paragraphs on: Description, Range, State Records, Nest, Food, General Habits. Numerous maps help very materially in showing the distribution of species within the State.

Of the many first-class bird books which have appeared in recent years only a few approach the present one in the beauty, originality, and quantity of illustration. The maps, while not especially attractive, are none the less desirable and useful. Many of the halftones are from excellent original photographs by various field photographers; a few others are photographs of habitat groups in the Colorado Museum of Natural History. Most of the black and white plates are reproduced from paintings by Fuertes, though the plate of the Bald Eagle is by Robert Ridgway. One colored map shows the life zones of the State, and was prepared by Vernon Bailey. The colored plates by Allan Brooks form, of course, the outstanding pictorial feature. We are unable to make any comments that will do justice to these beautiful pictures. And as these gaily colored pages embellish the work and fascinate the eye, awakening new aspirations and bringing to us a new world of bird life, so with their mention we bring our review to its climax.

At the close of nearly every specific account several references are given to other important descriptions. Besides this a very full bibliography is given at the end of the book. Unfortunately, this is more than a bibliography of New Mexico ornithology, and seems to be an alphabetical assemblage of the "literature cited" in the body of the book.

The avifauna of the great Southwest is so very different from that of other parts of our country, that this work, treating essentially of the desert life, will supply a desideratum in many an ornithological library; it will be indispensable to those who wish to do field work in the southwest country, and now becomes the most valuable reference work extant for the general area treated. A limited edition bound in leather, and autographed by the author, was made available at \$10. Our sincere congratulations are offered to the author and all concerned in the production of this work.—T. C. S.

A GUIDE TO THE WINTER BIRDS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA SANDHILLS. By Milton P. Skinner and Dr. John Warren Achorn. Albany, N. Y., 1928. Sold by the Science Press Distributing Company, Grand Central Terminal, New York. Pp. i-xiv+1-301. Pls. 31 in black and 13 in color. Price, \$4.00.

The Science Press Distributing Co. seems to be a new adjunct to the Science Press Printing Co., of Lancaster, Pa., and it has a long list of scientific works. The book here reviewed has been prepared by Mr. Milton P. Skinner, whose recent papers in the WILSON BULLETIN will be remembered. Mr. Skinner spent two winters, 1925-26 and 1926-27, in the field in the Sandhills region in order to procure first-hand information for this volume. Ninety-seven species are described, including the English Sparrow, which comprise the winter avifauna of the North Carolina Sandhills. The account of each species is given under the heads of "Field Identification," "Description," "Distribution," and "Habits."

The list of birds described looks almost like a spring migration list to us of the north. Especially full accounts are given of the two vultures, Blue Jay, White-throated Sparrow, and the Mockingbird. The Wild Turkey is still to be found in many parts of this State, and it is stated that, "In the Sandhills there are two or three groups totaling perhaps thirty birds in all." The author thinks that with adequate protection this grand bird would increase again over practically every suitable part of its old range.

Many of our own northern birds are found to have a sort of dual personality when we come to know their behavior in their winter quarters. The Cowbirds,

for example, in the Sandhills do not associate with cattle; they also flock together, and with other species, in a manner hardly characteristic of them in the north.

The thirteen colored plates are by Mr. E. J. Sawyer, and each plate depicts eight or ten birds. Mr. Sawyer is very skilful in producing these small-sized bird portraits. The volume is presented as a memorial to the late Dr. John Warren Achorn, from whose pen the three last chapters of the book were prepared.—T. C. S.

BIRDS OF WESTERN CANADA. By P. A. Taverner. Second Edition (Revised). Bulletin No. 41, Biol. Series, No. 10, National Museum of Canada. Published by the Canada Department of Mines, Ottawa, 1928. Pp. 1-379, 84 colored plates, 315 text figures. Price, \$2.00 in cloth.

The WILSON BULLETIN carried a notice of this volume about two years ago (XXXVIII, 1926, pp. 250-251). It is gratifying to see that a new edition is needed so soon. The book contains no preface to inform the reader what changes may have been made in the revised edition. Upon cursory examination it is difficult to find a great deal of revision, except in the pagination in one or two places. A slight revision is noted in the account of the Sprague's Pipit. The illustrations remain the same. We are disposed to be somewhat critical of the plate of the common Bittern. Taking into account the perspective, the sedges or cattails in the far background seem to project too far skyward, being almost tree-like in height. There is the possibility of similar criticism in the Sora Rail plate. This book deals especially with the Canadian birds to be found west of Ontario, but probably also includes most of the birds of the northern states within the same longitude. It is thus not only a regional manual, but a very useful book of reference for ornithologists in general, being far more than a compilation.—T. C. S.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A RECORD? By Frederick C. Lincoln. Reprinted from Bull. Audubon Soc. of N. H., Vol. 8, No. 2, December, 1928.

Discussions of this matter of field identification can not be other than helpful in developing greater scientific caution and discrimination on the part of all who do field work. The author is satisfied with nothing less than a preserved skin or a museum record of a skin. Years ago Chapman (*Bird-Lore*, IV, 1902, pp. 166-7) laid down certain rules for safe-guarding the accuracy of field identification. Griscom (*Bird-Lore*, XXIV, 1922, p. 230) defends the possibility of identifying birds by ear. Ganier (WILSON BULLETIN, XXXV, 1923, pp. 216-9) believes that birds may be safely identified by means of their mannerisms and habits. Griscom (*Auk*, XXXIX, 1922, pp. 31-41) has also pretty thoroughly considered the value of sight records, with the conclusion, we believe, that field records may be valid under certain restrictions. There is no doubt that certain species may be recognized in the field under certain conditions and by certain observers, sometimes by color, sometimes by song, sometimes by attitude, sometimes by habits; but credibility is probably established more by the personal equation than by any rules of procedure. And, therefore, we can hardly favor going so far as to discard all field records. The same field ornithologist might make a worse mistake in handling the skins; and who will say that the laboratory man is beyond error? Is not the fault with the observer rather than with the method?—T. C. S.

BIRDS OF ILLINOIS. By Orpheus Moyer Schantz. Conservation Publication No. 6 of the Department of Conservation, Springfield, Illinois, 1928. Pp. 1-132, numerous figures, 1 colored pl. Free.

The Illinois Department of Conservation has put out this booklet for the purpose of developing an interest in bird life—knowing that as knowledge is acquired interest develops. In many respects few of the western states have done more in developing a knowledge of bird life than has Illinois; we need only to recall the work of Forbes, Ridgway, Cory, Nelson, Gault, and a host of younger writers.

There seemed to be a need for such an abridged list. The state list by Mr. Gault, published seven years ago by the Illinois Audubon Society, listed 339 birds, with brief critical annotations on each form, but without description or field marks. Mr. Schantz gives a list of 292 birds, with various common names, length, distributional status within the State, and field marks. In a sense the two lists are complementary. We do not attempt to critically appraise the list under consideration, but assume that the work has been carefully compiled. It might have been more acceptable if the map showing the life zones could have been shown in the conventional colors now generally used for this purpose. The booklet may be obtained free of cost by applying to the Illinois Department of Conservation, at Springfield.—T. C. S.

A REVIEW OF THE BIRDS OF THE ISLANDS OF SIBERUT AND SIPORA, MENTAWI GROUP (SPOLIA MENTAWIENSIS). By J. H. Riley. Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., Vol. 75, Art. 4, pp. 1-45, pl. 1. Washington, D. C. 1929.

This paper is based on a collection of birds from several islands off the west coast of Sumatra. A check-list of 95 forms is given. Descriptive remarks are made on about 81 forms. The birds of these islands appear to be, for the most part, non-migratory; and hence there is a tendency for each island to have its own geographical race of a given species. For example, we find listed on page 23 the following:

- Hypothymis azurea consobrina* Richmond, Simalur Island
- Hypothymis azurea amelis* Oberholser, Nias Island
- Hypothymis azurea isocara* Oberholser, Banjak Islands
- Hypothymis azurea ponera* Oberholser, Batu Islands
- Hypothymis azurea leucophila* Oberholser, Mentawi Islands
- Hypothymis azurea richmondi* Oberholser, Engano Island

Ability to see that non-migratory birds may become more quickly and definitely isolated into races on islands is not limited to taxonomists; and where such races can be clearly recognized by constant variation, some of the objections to trinomial designation will not apply with equal force. The same admission might be made concerning non-migratory forms which inhabit mountain valleys.

But there seems to be uncertainty as to the validity (value?) of even these island races among the experts themselves. Thus, the author (page 21) in speaking of *Calypomena viridis siberu* Chasen and Kloss, says, "This appears to be a very good race. It is much darker, less yellowish green than *C. v. continentis*; it also appears to be somewhat larger." We may conclude that the author is uncertain whether it is a good race, and whether it is in reality larger. And while in this quotation the author merely comments on the work of others, yet we are disposed to point to this uncertainty and indefiniteness as typical of

much of the modern taxonomic work. This vagueness and indefiniteness is the inevitable result of the subspecific refinement; to put it the other way around, the subspecific concept and trinomialism lead to vagueness and careless work which clutters up the literature, to the confusion of all who follow. On page 13 the author says, "*Loriculus galgulus lamprochlorus* Oberholser from Nias is not different enough to warrant recognition in my opinion." Thus is one expert guess offset by another expert opinion, and where are we? The fact of the matter is that we are losing confidence in the taxonomic work of our time.—T. C. S.

A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE NESTING HABITS OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE. By Joseph R. Slevin. Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th Series, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 45-71, pls. 4-7. 1929.

This is a narrative account of a search for eagles' nests, and the collection of their eggs, through the years 1916 to 1922. Twenty-one sets were collected, affording a very good opportunity for a comparative study which was not undertaken. The eagles were found to replace a set of eggs when removed. They had a peculiar habit of placing leafy branches of the eucalyptus tree in the nest, possibly in an effort to conceal the eggs.—T. C. S.

A NEW BIRD FAMILY (GEOSPIZIDAE) FROM THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS. By Harry S. Swarth. Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th Ser., Vol. XVIII, No. 2, pp. 29-43, 6 figs. 1929.

The California Academy of Science made a very large collection of birds (over 8000 skins) in the Galapagos Islands in 1905-06. Most of the smaller birds had not been studied until Mr. Swarth undertook the task in 1927. The author proposes to unite the "ground finches" (genus *Geospiza*) with the creepers (*Certhidea*) to form a new family to be known as Geospizidae, confined to the Galapagos Archipelago and Cocos Island.—T. C. S.

1. A PRELIMINARY WILD LIFE AND FOREST SURVEY OF SOUTHWESTERN CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, N. Y. By Victor H. Cahalane. Pp. 9-144.

2. A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE TROUT STREAMS OF SOUTHWESTERN CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, N. Y. By Wilford A. Dence. Pp. 145-210. Both articles in the Roosevelt Wild Life Bull., V, No. 1, March, 1928.

The first paper by Mr. Cahalane presents a very full discussion of the bird life of the area, with special attention to the ecological distribution of birds. The local status of two game birds, Ruffed Grouse and pheasant (*P. torquatus?*), is also considered. The second paper by Mr. Dence deals with fishes, but makes a very brief reference (p. 197) to birds as fish enemies.—T. C. S.

We have before us a few mimeographed pages constituting "The Flicker" (Vol. I, No. 2, April, 1929), the official organ of the Minnesota Bird Club. We learn that this Club was organized on March 15, 1929. The subscription price of "The Flicker" is \$1 per year (Mr. Charles Evans, 3250 47th Ave., S., Minneapolis). The present number contains an article by E. D. Swedenborg which endeavors to determine what is the "typical winter bird of Minnesota." We wish prosperity to this young organization. With similar state organizations already active in Nebraska and Iowa, we would be glad to see other neighboring states take a similar step.