

COMMUNICATIONS

Editor, WILSON BULLETIN: The WILSON BULLETIN for March, 1938, has just come to hand, and I have been reading it, as usual, from cover to cover.

On page 61, under the heading, "Whooping Cranes in Southwestern Missouri, 1937", there is described what is purported to be the nesting of a Whooping Crane in that section. Perhaps the editor of the WILSON BULLETIN did not read this article before it was printed; for I can not imagine why it was given space. If the description is accurate, the bird could not possibly be a Whooping Crane.

First, the bird "flew into the very top of a dead tree where I could see her perfectly, silhouetted against a green hill beyond". *Second*, further along in the article, speaking of the young birds, they were "about the size of a good big hen and able to fly". *Third*, the last paragraph of the article ends as follows: "and one can only be thankful that these birds escaped the perennial warfare of state fish hatchery employees against fish-eating birds".

Having had vast experience with the Whooping Crane when they were exceedingly plentiful; having had them in captivity, watched them at their nesting places; and having seen them disappear almost completely from our fauna, I have *never* seen a Whooping Crane light in a tree. The young of the Whooping Crane, when able to fly, are four times as large as any hen, and stand fully five feet in height; and, while Whooping Cranes will occasionally take fish, they are not and never will be fish-eaters.—E. A. McILHENNY, *Avery Island, La.*

Editor, WILSON BULLETIN: Thank you very much for sending me Mr. McIlhenny's letter. Criticism by a man of his standing and long experience certainly deserves serious consideration and reply.

There are six large, white birds that would be at all likely to occur in Missouri at any time: White Pelican, Snow Goose, American Egret, Whistling Swan, Wood Ibis, and Whooping Crane. Mrs. Cahill's bird had black wing-tips, which eliminates the swan and the egret. It had long legs, which eliminates the swan, the pelican, and the goose. It had a white head, which eliminates the Wood Ibis. Mrs. Cahill sent me a profile sketch of the head, which showed a typical crane bill, not that of an ibis, a pelican, or a heron.

The Whooping Crane is the only one left. Evidence *pro*: Size, color, bill, legs, flight with neck extended, voice. Evidence *con*: Mr. McIlhenny's statement that (1) he has never seen a Whooping Crane alight in a tree, (2) the young when able to fly are five feet high and four times as large as any hen, and (3) these birds are not fish-eaters. Discussing his points in reverse order:

(3) The fact that the birds visited the hatchery is no proof that they were eating fish. However, the "perennial warfare" does exist, and it is waged against all the large waders which are *thought* to eat fish by the hatchery men. This point seems to me irrelevant.

(2) The size of the young birds was reported one morning at dawn by Mrs. Cahill's husband. Light conditions were poor, and if his comparison re-

ferred to the size of the body, rather than the height above ground, the error seems understandable but not destructive to the other evidence.

(1) Does a Whooping Crane ever alight in a tree? I have never found evidence that it does; therefore I wrote Dr. H. C. Oberholser, who has known about this record since last fall. The following paragraph is taken from his letter of May 7:

“Your point regarding the alighting of the bird in a tree is not so clean-cut and distinctive as might seem at first hand, since all birds do strange things under peculiar circumstances, and I should not consider that this point weighed materially against the bird being a Whooping Crane. In the first place, the Whooping Crane is in general a bird of the open country where there are no trees—marshes, plains, prairies, meadows, and similar areas—and I suppose a large part of the actual field observations of cranes of this species have been made in such areas. Therefore it is entirely likely that a person even very familiar with the bird in life may never have seen one alight in a tree; but this, of course, does not prove that the bird never does such a thing. In parts of its winter range, particularly in Texas, this bird lives about ponds in the midst of woodlands or tall chaparral, where there is plenty of cover and protection, as well as on the more open areas, and I have myself seen the bird about ponds in forests of low trees. Under the circumstances it is entirely likely that the bird would occasionally alight in a tree, for it is just as able to do so as is a Great Blue Heron, which is about the same size.”

It seems to me that Mr. McIlhenny's undeniably valid criticism is not strong enough to overcome the weight of evidence on the other side, provided the evidence was reported to me truthfully. Knowing Mrs. Cahill and many of her associates at the School of the Ozarks and elsewhere, I know there is no question of this.—RUDOLF BENNETT, *University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo.*

This case is now open for discussion.—Ed.