

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS OF PREY. By Alexander Sprunt, Jr. Based upon and supplementary to "The Hawks of North America," by John Richard May. Published under the sponsorship of the National Audubon Society by Harper & Brothers. New York, 1955:  $6\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$  in., 227 pp., 47 plates (43 in color) by Allan Brooks and others. \$5.00.

Serious ornithologists should be grateful that popular interest in birds has increased to the point that American publishers now feel that it is worth their while to publish an average of one new bird book a week. Many fine ornithological works have been produced in recent years, and some of these have been outstanding financial successes. An unfortunate corollary to this spate of bird books lies in the temptation, to which publishers submit all too often, to jump on the band wagon with an ill-conceived, hastily produced volume, on the assumption that *anything* about birds will sell these days.

Neither the publisher nor the National Audubon Society has gained stature by the publication of the latest of Alexander Sprunt's scissors-and-paste jobs (see J. C. Dickinson's review of "Florida Bird Life," *Wilson Bull.*, 67, 1955:146-147). Once more a work widely regarded as a classic of its kind, in this case May's "Hawks of North America," published in 1935, has been replaced by a patchwork volume which is an insult to the original book.

To take up the illustrations first: all but one (European Merlin and Kestrel) of the original Brooks color plates have been reprinted, but the reproduction is mediocre, about one-third of the plates in my copy being badly out of register. Since the present volume, unlike the 1935 edition, includes the owls, colored illustrations of owls have been rounded up from a variety of sources to be reused. Four artists (Brooks, Fuertes, Horsfall and Weber) are represented among the owl plates. Although all but two species of the diurnal birds of prey are figured in color, only 10 of the 18 included species of owls are so favored.

The text, following a foreword by Roger Tory Peterson and a general introduction by the author, is organized into 10 chapters; one for the owls and one each for nine more-or-less natural subdivisions of the Falconiformes, as originally used by May. Each chapter is introduced by a short general discussion, largely paraphrased from May. The individual species and subspecies accounts begin with the English and scientific names, with a translation of the latter. Then comes a list of "local names," usually an abridgment of May's similar list. A paragraph entitled "Recognition" follows: this is again usually a paraphrased and abridged version of May's "Description" (a more accurate term, since field marks are seldom pointed out as such). No particular purpose seems to have been achieved by thus changing the original wording, and the abridgment has sometimes been detrimental; thus, nowhere in Sprunt's text is the dusky head-color of immature Turkey Vultures mentioned.

Next comes a paragraph entitled "Nesting." This is an addition to the original May material. The descriptions of nests and eggs appear to be adapted from those of Bent (1937-38. *U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull.* 167, 170), although no source is specified except for occasional direct quotations. A summary of the range follows; the useful little maps which appeared in May's book are not reprinted.

After these introductory paragraphs, the general discussion of the species (entitled "History") is presented. It is the avowed intention of the author to shift May's strong emphasis on food habits toward a more general description of the ecology of each

hawk or owl. The very detailed food analyses of the 1935 book are thus either briefly summarized or largely omitted. Much of the remainder of the text is a rehash of Bent and other standard authorities; little or no attempt seems to have been made to utilize the abundant recent literature on the birds of prey. Other than the author's own publications, only two works subsequent to Bent (1937-1938) are listed in the bibliography: Arnold on the Golden Eagle (*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv. Circ. no. 27, 1954*) and Koford on the California Condor (*Nat. Audubon Soc. Research Rept. no. 4, 1953*). There is a strong subjective vein running through the book, the author's own field experiences receiving a rather disproportionate amount of space considering the small number of pages available for each species. This is carried to an extreme in the case of the Rough-legged Hawk, a species for which much authentic life history material is available. One of the three pages allotted to the "history" of this species is devoted to a fantastic hearsay story of a supposed nesting of the Rough-legged Hawk at Lake Okeechobee, Florida, a story which Sprunt admits he has already told in print on two previous occasions!

The most inexcusable aspect of this book is the obvious haste and carelessness with which it was thrown together. The classification and nomenclature are roughly those of the A.O.U. Check-list as amended through 1954, but with dozens of errors. One species and eight subspecies accepted by the A.O.U. prior to 1954 are omitted, while five subspecies no longer admitted to the Check-list are included by Sprunt. A half-hearted attempt was apparently made to conform to purely nomenclatorial changes instituted since the 1931 Check-list, but the amount of care given to this task may be judged by the fact that the two subspecies of Elf Owl are assigned to separate generic names. The paragraphs on *Otus trichopsis* and *Otus flammeolus* appear in the middle of the list of subspecies of *Otus asio*. Typographical errors abound, especially in scientific names: *cathartes* for *Cathartes*, *fuertsi* for *fuertesi* (twice), *Haliaetos* (twice) and *Haliaetus* for *Haliaeetus*, *Asiootus* for *Asio otus*, etc. Baja California is variously rendered as Lower California, lower California, and Baja, California (the latter twice on one page). Two subspecies of *Strix occidentalis* are transferred to *S. varia*. Little attention is paid to gender within scientific names; thus, we have *Aegolius acadicus acadicus* but *Aegolius acadica brooksi* and *Aegolius junerea magnus*. The statement is made that "the Dwarf Horned Owl is not included here since it inhabits the southern part of Lower California and is not to be seen in this country," yet full treatment is allotted to one full species and three additional subspecies whose ranges are also confined to Baja California. The paragraph from which the above statement is quoted also contains a misspelled subspecific name and a verbless sentence. The list is interminable.

The book closes with a convenient summary, by Kenneth D. Morrison, of state and provincial laws relating to bird protection. There is no index.

Most book reviews end with some such sentence as "The minor errors cited above in no way detract from the general high quality of the work." Such a statement cannot be made about "North American Birds of Prey," especially when we have May's classic "Hawks of North America" as a standard of comparison. Fortunate, indeed, are those of us who bought the 1935 edition at the fantastically low original price of \$1.25. Today's buyer of bird books would be well advised to ignore the Sprunt book completely, and apply the \$5.00 price toward the eventual purchase of a set of Bent's "Life Histories."—KENNETH C. PARKES.

THE BIRDS OF MASSACHUSETTS. AN ANNOTATED AND REVISED CHECK LIST. By Ludlow Griscom and Dorothy E. Snyder. Peabody Museum of Salem, Inc., 1955: 5½ × 8 in., xiii + 295 pp., 3 maps. \$3.75.

A full quarter-century has elapsed since the publication (1925–1929) of Forbush's three-volume classic, "Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States." This period coincides with that during which "the virtuoso of field identification," Ludlow Griscom, has been associated with the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, first as Research Curator and subsequently as Research Ornithologist. As a consequence of Mr. Griscom's residence in Massachusetts since 1927, the science and the sport of recording birds in that State have achieved peaks of popularity and brilliant technique equaled in few similar areas. This has produced a great increase, quantitative and qualitative, in information about Massachusetts birds.

In the volume under review, Mr. Griscom and his eminently capable collaborator, Miss Snyder, have given us "an annotated and revised check list" which is abundantly justified by the timeliness of its appearance, the soundness of its approach, and the importance of the new material it contains (including not only the post-Forbush data, but also the hitherto-unpublished resources of various manuscripts, journals, and collections).

The student of avian faunistics who is concerned with the problem of what constitutes a valid record will find the case for the "severe school" presented ably (and at emphatic length) in this book. The long and active history of field ornithology in Massachusetts has provided the authors with an extraordinary abundance of material, ranging from data of the early 19th century to the latest spate of sight-reports. The sheer wealth of this material has permitted the authors the luxury of using the most severely strict criteria in assembling a state list based upon absolutely valid data. Just as this book is timely in meeting a need, so also does it fulfill the authors' avowed intent: ". . . to record adequately, and prove by documentation wherever possible, the true status of the forms found in Massachusetts."

This check list, then, has been compiled according to the following rules: "For every bird officially on the state list we require a specimen, a banding record by a reputable ornithologist, or a recognizable photograph on file and readily available for examination. All other forms have been placed in the Hypothetical List, without regard to the observer."

Griscom and Snyder give the number of authentic Massachusetts birds as 430 (384 species, 46 additional subspecies). The Hypothetical List numbers 51 forms; of these, there are 21 birds of which it is indicated that their identification is considered to have been correct. This latter device seems a realistic method of treating those birds which have been accurately "sight-recorded" beyond reasonable doubt, but for which no specimens, photographs, or banding records exist.

The long and active history of Massachusetts ornithology gives this book a further advantage: dimension and perspective in the changing status of various species. Thus, we are shown not only the major swings in avian populations, but also the short-term fluctuations over chronological periods which, in some cases, involve more than a century.

It is difficult to fault this book in any serious respect. There are the inevitable trivial errata. There will be raised eyebrows (particularly among Wilson Society members) over this isolated clause: ". . . since the technique of nest finding is a lost art,"—a significant statement, indicating the fact that the emphasis in Massachusetts is upon listing and recording, rather than on observing and studying. The emphasis upon such abundantly-worked areas of Massachusetts as Essex County, the Boston region, the

Cape Cod area, and the Connecticut and Housatonic valleys will serve to point the fact that, even in the 1950's and in the limited extent of the Bay State, there are considerable areas which are, ornithologically, virtual *terrae incognitae*.

Great potentialities for ornithological research, in all the various aspects of that broad science, are available in Massachusetts. (For example, recent banding studies of fall migrants, conducted by John V. Dennis on Nantucket Island, are most promising). Whatever the coming years may produce of ornithological significance in Massachusetts, future historians of the birds of that State can build with confidence on the solid facts which this book provides.—AARON M. BACC.

PRAIRIE DUCKS. A STUDY OF BEHAVIOR, ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT. By Lyle K. SOWLS. The Stackpole Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and The Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D.C., 1955:193 pp. \$4.75.

Frequently we are brought to the feeling that wildlife management is based more on the managerial practices of laymen than on science. It is such splendid works as "Prairie Ducks" that help immeasurably to make wildlife research a science of maturity and dignity. This book is a must for any serious student of waterfowl management or research, and it is equally indispensable to the layman who wishes to understand something of the problems and programs of state and federal waterfowl management.

This treatise is based on an immense amount of field observation, experimentation and study by the author, supplemented by the work of a number of able colleagues, mostly at the Delta Wildlife Research Station, Delta, Manitoba. Most of the data were obtained at the Delta marshes between the years 1946 and 1950; but much stimulation, help, and constructive criticism came from outstanding authorities in the field of waterfowl research and management.

This book gives evidence of having been developed in a scholarly and scientific atmosphere. It sets a high standard hitherto unattained in waterfowl research, and adds much to both information and techniques. The approach was an intensive study of individual birds, with particular reference to behavior, habits and ecology at different periods, and in different areas, on the summer range. Also considered are such problems as homing instincts, nesting and re-nesting, hen and brood behavior, molt, territoriality, mortality, and problems associated with fall migration.

In the main the book is well written, although some chapters seem to represent better writing than others. On a few minor points one might wish for a little additional treatment, or regret an omission of what appears to be an important point. For example, one of the greatest mortality factors is drought in the prairies. However, a discussion of this seems to have been largely omitted in this book. I believe the brief summary dealing with the food habits of predators would have been even clearer and more convincing had the standard volumetric percentages been given to supplement the information included. The brief treatment of crippling loss in the last chapter is likely to leave the inexperienced worker or sportsman with the feeling that this waste will be eliminated if only a retriever is added. While this recommendation is very worthwhile it will by no means answer the problem. A campaign to get shooters to desist from shooting so much out of range and to refrain from flock shooting would probably do much more good. These are indeed minor points as compared to the outstanding treatment of the subject as a whole.

While it is strictly scientific, the book is written in a popular style for public consumption; and all scientific names, and nearly all technical jargon, are omitted from the body of the text and are reserved for a short appendix in the back. A particularly

helpful feature that makes the book stand out is the succinct summary of salient points recorded following each of the 11 chapters.

The most attractive features of the book, which give understanding, feeling and atmosphere of prairie waterfowl habitat, are the numerous and excellent line or black and white drawings by Albert Hochbaum and the beautiful colored frontispiece which is one of Peter Scott's best waterfowl paintings. The numerous photographs, figures, charts, and tables are well done, and add much to the finished product. The book is outstanding in its attractiveness, design, readability and accuracy of subject matter treated. Certainly the author, the artists, the publisher and the sponsor are all to be congratulated for a superior job which adds an effective milepost to the uncertain road of waterfowl conservation in America. This book sets a high standard for future workers to follow.—CLARENCE COTTAM.

THE ORNITHO GEOGRAPHY OF THE YUCATÁN PENINSULA. By Raymond A. Paynter, Jr. Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, Bulletin 9, 1955: 10¼ × 7¼ in., 1-347 pp., 2 maps, 4 pl. \$9.50.

With the growth of interest in the avifauna of México and in the migration routes of North American birds, an authoritative work on the bird life of the Yucatán Peninsula is a welcome addition to the literature.

An introductory chapter of Dr. Paynter's book considers the methods used and the physical and biotic setting of the area under discussion. There follow 283 pages devoted to an annotated list of the 429 species (487 forms) reported from Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo, and their offshore islands. In each account one is oriented as to the general range of the species; this is followed by a list of specimens recorded, data on habitat distribution, and remarks. When available, weights and data on breeding condition are included. Of greatest theoretical interest is the 21-page discussion of composition, distribution and origin of the avifauna. A bibliography and an index complete the book.

Of the 429 species recorded, 285 (330 forms) breed in the area or are presumed to do so, 115 winter, 26 are transient, and three are considered accidental. Excluding marine birds and vultures, the breeding avifauna of the peninsula proper consists of 262 species, while 90 species breed on the islands; eight of the latter are not found on the peninsula.

Since the Yucatán Peninsula is somewhat isolated from the rest of México and lacks topographic diversity, the problems of speciation are different from those of the remainder of the country. For example, among the land birds one group reflects the effects of decreasing humidity which are indicated by the increasingly xeric appearance of the vegetation found in proceeding from south to north on the peninsula. This rain forest element is represented by 105 species on the mainland, but by only five on the islands, whereas corresponding totals for the other major group, species characteristic of drier habitats, are 112 and 55. Seventeen species of the rain forest have developed subspecies on the peninsula, and these differentiates are paler and, as a rule, smaller than their representatives in the more luxuriant forests to the south. No such trend is found in the peninsular subspecies of the birds of drier habitats, which are restricted principally to the northern part of the peninsula. The importance of the role of population structure is indicated by the observation that the species which form races on the peninsula are those which exhibit similar variability elsewhere in their ranges.

From the standpoint of its origin, the breeding avifauna is broken down into three categories, a widely-ranging element, a group of six species which probably arrived

from the West Indies directly, and eight endemic species. Since the major portion of the peninsula is young geologically and physiographic barriers are absent, differentiation above the level of subspecies probably has occurred there only a very few times. Hence most of the endemics must have originated elsewhere.

The faunistic analyses are handled in a thorough and convincing manner, and the taxonomy used is progressive. For example, all the wood thrushes are united in *Catharus*, the genus *Chamaethlypis* (Gray-crowned Yellowthroat) is merged with *Geothlypis*, and a monotypic genus (*Agriocharis*) is no longer retained for the Ocellated Turkey. Further study of the latter case may prove desirable.

Production of the book is generally excellent, although a few misprints appear among the generic names in the faunal analysis section. Even though the price seems excessively high, students of zoogeography in general and Mexican birds in particular will find this work an invaluable addition to their working libraries.—KEITH L. DIXON.

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