ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

BENT'S LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS. Two volumes. Edited and abridged by Henry Hill Collins, Jr. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1960: 8¼ × 5¼ in. Vol. 1 (Water Birds), xxviii + 356 pp.; vol. 2 (Land Birds), x + 374 pp. $5.95 per volume.

These are not life histories. They are not "the best of Arthur Cleveland Bent's monumental work on the birds of North America, abridged for convenient reading and reference," as the dust jackets proclaim. Bent's work was monumental because it was complete. Perhaps I have misunderstood the real meaning of "abridge." Consulting my dictionary, I find three definitions. The third is "to deprive; cut off." The publishers are eminently correct in using the word only if they refer to this category.

Volume 1 contains an introduction, a section entitled "Notes," which describes the editor's treatment of the original Bent material, a page of acknowledgments (and here Mr. Collins is called the "author"), a reprint of the "In Memoriam: Arthur Cleveland Bent," by Wendell Taber, which was published in the October, 1955, *Auk*, the individual species accounts from Gaviiformes through Charadriiformes, a bibliography, and a geographical and general index. Volume 2 contains further notes and acknowledgments, species accounts from the Columbiformes through the Passeriformes except the Fringillidae, the largest family in North America, and concludes with a bibliography, brief biographies of some of the contributors to Bent, and the two indices. While all serious ornithologists know that the Fringillidae are still to come in the Bent series, there is no mention on the dust jacket that this publication omits this family. One has to delve into the introductory remarks for the information.

What constitutes a life history? Mr. Bent, in the introduction to his first volume on diving birds, says, "After a few introductory remarks where these seem desirable, the life history of each species is written in substantially the following sequence: Spring migration, courtship, nesting habits, eggs, young, sequence of plumages to maturity, seasonal molts, feeding habits, flight, swimming and diving habits, vocal powers, behavior, enemies, fall migration, and winter habits."

One comparison will suffice. The first species in the Collins books is the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*). Mr. Collins devotes a page to it. One-quarter is delightful atmosphere by Bent and the remainder is a quotation describing early morning actions of a family of loons. Yet Mr. Bent devotes over eleven pages to habits under the following subtitles: spring, nesting, eggs, young, plumages, food, behavior, fall, and winter. In addition, there are two pages of photographs and one and a half of distribution records, with spring and fall migration dates from localities throughout the range of the species and egg dates.

The publishers say these volumes make the "essence" of Bent available in convenient form. How can the essence of a life history be boiled down from a dozen pages to one? The "essence," in these volumes, is the one trait in each species which the editor has decided is the most characteristic or interesting. Yet these are called life histories! The publishers further say that "This careful abridgment brings together the best of Bent for easy reference and reading. It uses full excerpts, not condensations." I find condensations in the text and totally inadequate references. I find on the back flap of the Volume 2 jacket that "John Burroughs writes from his Hudson cabin," yet under Burroughs in the bibliography are listed two books with no page references. Similarly, Olin Sewall Pettingill is listed there as having contributed his field notes, yet, under Pettingill, there are no specific references whatsoever.

One claim of the publishers is correct. These volumes do include some of the best of the prose which Mr. Bent used so beautifully. Had the publishers entitled this

abstract something which more truly described the contents, I would have no quarrel. But apparently they have deliberately chosen a misleading title and have misrepresented the contents upon the dust jackets. It is high time that reputable publishers stopped trading on old and honored book titles for the sale of their merchandise.—PHILLIPS B. STREET.

Tan Vat Road
Locust, New Jersey
23 May 1960

Dr. Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.
c/o The Editor
The Wilson Bulletin
Kalamazoo College
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Dr. Pettingill:

I am writing in reply to your review of the *Complete Field Guide to American Wildlife*, by Henry Hill Collins, Jr., published by Harper & Brothers (*The Wilson Bulletin*, March 1960, vol. 72, No. 1, pp. 109–111), in which you malign both my work and character.

I note with interest that your accusations are somewhat all-encompassing: of Harper & Brothers, you say, "the same page makeup, the same use of boldface and italic type, range maps . . . as in Peterson-Mountfort-Hollom's *Field Guide* . . ."and of Collins, "he has strived . . . to pull together between two covers as much material . . . from currently successful guides . . ." I note too you fail to name the members of the Editorial Advisory Board listed in the book. They seem to be important men in their fields; I know that they are regarded as such. I also know—and I have copious letters to prove so—that the illustrations of mine which you criticize were reviewed by the chairman of this board, corrected, and, finally, passed. I would in no way infer that the comparative quality of these illustrations reflects on those who passed them, but I am confident that plagiarism is an absurdity.

For myself, I unequivocally deny having plagiarized, or "copied from" anyone. I did, indeed, consult many authorities and have been greatly influenced by them. I used every resource, including the well-represented collection of bird skins at the American Museum of Natural History as well as studies from life and innumerable books. I will answer your accusations in terms of your reference:

Figure 7 (Collins) compared with page 10 (Peterson)

First of all, any artist not doing his own book must act under the direction of that which the supplied text demands. The artist may or may not argue certain points, but in the end his work is specifically described. In this case my directions were, "Double-crested cormorant, in silhouette, to size; one sitting, one swimming, one standing." I suggested another, standing in the spread-eagled position. My instructions were (not unreasonably) to consult, in particular, two closely competitive field guides, Peterson's and Pough's (Eckelberry), in order to check thoroughly against possible errors (which would, of course, be rechecked by competent authorities upon completion of my work). My resulting silhouette illustration does closely resemble Dr. Peterson's page 10 illustration. I certainly did check Dr. Peterson's illustration and text, noting that the elevation of the bills on my birds did approximate the angle which Dr. Peterson, as a foremost authority, gave his. There are only so many poses suitable for field identification, and in this type of work he would be a poor artist who placed artistic cleverness over common logic. Beyond that, these birds are very familiar to me.

As to your criticism, consider my position at the time: (1) I had before me Dr. Peterson's drawing, and others, which I had been advised to compare; (2) I had to work in silhouette because that was what was demanded of me; (3) I should not violate one of the rules (where possible) of book illustrations, that is, to face the subject away from the center line. You see the result, and you call it "copied." I did, as you see, face my sitting bird "in," as did Peterson, and the spread-eagled bird is the same. As you have in another sketch, you can accuse me of having "turned the swimming bird around." But what of the flying bird? And the water is, you must agree, of a different nature than is Dr. Peterson's. If "to copy" is to have four birds made from three, perhaps you are right.

Figure 26 (Collins) compared with page 67 (Peterson)

Here we have much the same problem: how to keep it from being "like Peterson." I will agree with you in this case. My turkey vulture shows a nearly identical resemblance to Dr. Peterson's. I can assure you that my "copying" was inadvertent. My effort at combining these types of flight, obviously my own effort, went unmentioned.

All of the raptorial birds shown, with the exception of the peregrine and marsh hawk, are commonly found near my home, and four of them, including the bald eagle, have nested less than a half mile away within the past year.

Figure 45 (Collins) compared with page 162 (Peterson)

You say "here and there the artist has simply rearranged the subjects and made minor alterations," giving the swallows as a case in point. I reiterate: it was not my book and I was simply following instructions: "arranged on a wire." If this should sound in any way an excuse, I do not mean it to be. Personally, I liked the wire. My actual source of reference was a photograph of martins on a wire by Mr. Wharton Huber, in Stone's *Birds of Old Cape May*, vol. 2, p. 695. From that photograph I "stole" my idea of a slack wire. I did not (and *could* not) credit Mr. Huber. But I cannot help but think that Mr. Huber would not have minded.

Figures 14, 15, 19 and 20 (Collins) Ducks.

May I say here, first of all, that your statement, "He has taken pains to have all the ducks fly in the opposite direction," seems unnecessary when a quick inspection will clearly indicate that *all* the plates in Collins' book face the same direction, i.e., to the right.

As for the ducks themselves, they are, as are Dr. Peterson's, rendered in a wash technique. There is a great similarity, I will admit, but they were in no way "copied." By a simple juxtaposition I could easily have placed the mergansers on top, or in the middle of the plate. I could have mixed them with the pond ducks or designedly have altered the wing pattern from a uniform wing (as in Peterson) to varied poses of flight. I chose to do them the way they are seen. Again, they are portrayed according to specific instructions as to which bird was to be shown. And all of these species are well known to me in life.

Plate 6 (Collins) Herons.

I have no argument whatever with your statement that all of the "illustrations in color are amateurish in the extreme." That is your opinion. And your opinion that there was "no conscientious endeavor" on my part is also your own. Your statement about the male American Redstart is pertinent. My error is obvious. I can assure you that I made others, but most were corrected in time by Mr. Collins and his advisors. But again, your insinuation that I copied Don Eckelberry's "body attitudes and views" is abhorrent. There is no doubt at all that my American Bittern strongly resembles Mr. Eckelberry's (Plate 14, Pough). However, I believe you will encounter a surprising similarity between my own attempt and that of Fuertes (Plate 23, p. 242, *Birds of*

America). The "stake-driver" is a "back yard" bird to me; he lives in the swamp below my window. I hear him and I see him. I am well aware of the length of his toes and that they will often overlap. I have, in fact, a "stuffed" specimen of him. Notice, if you will, that the inner toes of my bittern *do not overlap*. I would challenge a jury to find, upon a close investigation, exactly who copied from whom.

In regard to the "body attitudes and view" of my green heron versus Mr. Eckelberry's, I again must call attention to Mr. Fuertes (Plate 23, p. 242, *Birds of America*). You will notice that my bird, however weak you may consider the rendering, is at least stepping out with some vigor, as he daily (in season) goes soberly up and down the narrow strip of beach below my lawn.

As to the Great Blue Heron, I agree that mine somewhat closely follows Mr. Eckelberry's. However, were Mr. Eckelberry's rendering, Fuertes', and my own compared minutely, one would find that there is a similarity between all three.

My point is that there is a right reason for drawing birds in the position in which they are seen because they are typical.

I have long admired Dr. Peterson's work. More recently, I have followed Mr. Eckelberry's work with consummate interest; he is, in my opinion, a truly fine artist. I have *learned* from these very gifted artists, not "copied." You will note that my adult night heron has a similar arrangement of crest feathers to that shown by Mr. Eckelberry. You will notice that Fuertes (and many others) also used it. Surely the bird itself is in no way similar, except for its species and age. If Mr. Eckelberry (or anyone else) should tell me that all poses and attitudes which he has ever used were entirely original and did in no way reflect either Audubon, Fuertes, others, or photographs other than his own, I should be frankly amazed. You gave just praise to Mr. Richard Ryan. Can it be truly said that Mr. Ryan personally tramped the ranges of his maps, or did he borrow competent information from other authorities? I would in no way argue about your conclusions as to the quality of my illustrations but I strenuously object to your manner of attack.

Your mention of credit where credit is due suggests to me that a dual justice might be rendered. If my art work under my name is legally proved to be all that you say, you can be assured that a second edition will bear a proper recognition of its sources. But in like manner I believe it not untoward to suggest that your attitude in this manner is not entirely without prejudice. I, too, from its first edition, have owned, used and cherished Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*. My name is also Peterson. I also paint birds. Perhaps you have not noted the similarities in name and circumstance. I can assure you that Harper & Brothers and Mr. Collins have been well aware of this similarity and have never considered using my name in a manner to in any way capitalize upon Dr. Peterson or his enviable reputation. I was chosen to do the Collins book not as an ornithologist (which I am not) but as an artist who has some familiarity with birds (which I am). I have never at any time knowingly exploited this similarity in names or circumstance between Dr. Peterson and myself.

There is no doubt that your harsh criticism of my work will do me professional injury. I would in no way demand a retraction of your opinions as to the quality of my work, but I believe you have overstepped your authority in rendering a judgment on morals. I should be content with the publication of this rebuttal in the *Wilson Bulletin* that your readers may have the opportunity of checking for themselves, point for point, reference for reference, and inclusive of all references, the accusations you have leveled against me.

Very truly yours,

S/ Russell Francis Peterson

Russell Francis Peterson

THE TECHNIQUES OF DRAWING AND PAINTING WILDLIFE. By Fredric Sweny. Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York, 1959: 8½ by 10½ in., 144 pp., many illustrations in black and white and color. $10.00.

This book is an attractive, colorful, profusely illustrated guide which will probably prove stimulating to embryonic wildlife artists. The brevity and over-simplification of the text will perhaps unduly encourage young artists to go into the field under the false impression that it is a comparatively simple task to take the necessary steps to become a successful wildlife artist. Whether this is intentional or not, it probably will enhance the sales appeal for the publisher. The following understatement typifies this tendency: "The wildlife artist should first develop a thorough knowledge of the anatomy of animals, birds, and fish, their habitat and behavior, and then be very discerning in the use of that knowledge. A certain amount of field work will be necessary to achieve this informative background." Skimming so lightly over a lifetime of study and experience to gain "this informative background" impresses a naturalist as a bit misleading, to say the least. Perhaps this is legitimate, however, since the book purports to discuss *techniques* of wildlife illustrating.

Again the zoologist is a bit irritated to find the three major sections of the book entitled "Birds," "Fish," and "Animals." The author throughout the text erroneously uses the word "animal" as synonymous with "mammal," not recognizing the fact that birds and fishes are as much animals as are the mammals.

Mr. Sweny has a sweeping freedom in his sketching technique that is pleasing, and his use of gray paper with lampblack and opaque whites is very effective. I was pleased with his emphasis on abstract designs as basic to good completed paintings. His simplified anatomical drawings are good for a basic understanding of the action of different animals. However, rather serious errors appear, indicating that his observations of details are not always accurate. For example, on page 26 in the sketch of the lower aspect of a duck's wing feather arrangement, he demonstrates the impossible by correctly showing the posterior vanes of the primary flight feathers overlapping the anterior vanes, while viewed from above the same arrangement appears. Although partially explained on page 25, he apparently does not understand how the narrow stiff anterior vane overlies the wider weak posterior vane, thus giving the latter support on the down stroke while allowing the feathers to open up like check-valves on the up-beat. The Gadwall using the upper wing on page 26 would find his check-valves opening on his down-beat! On page 32 the feet of various species of birds fall far short of having the character they might due to the artist's failure to recognize the correct groupings of scutes or scales, especially at the junctions of the legs and toes and at the bases of the claws. Again, on page 112, the two halves of the deer hoof are incorrectly shown joined together at the posterior margin.

The mammal (animal) section has some very good action sketches of deer in various gaits; it goes into considerable detail in the terminology of bones and muscles; and carries a painting through all the steps that Mr. Sweny takes in completing a painting. As is often the case with artists, his completed paintings do not fulfill the promise displayed in his sketches.

It is interesting and informative to know what the oil painting procedures of Mr. Sweny are, what colors comprise his palette, the surface on which he chooses to paint, etc. It seems definitely limited, however, not to find any discussion of other materials, techniques, brushes, and canvases that other painters in oil might consider desirable. Furthermore, no mention is made of watercolor, pen and ink, gouache, and all the other techniques one might employ in wildlife drawing and painting. The elaborate table of contents and the index (5 pages of 3 columns each of closely-spaced type) are quite misleading as to the

amount of information in the volume. In this it follows the modern trend of allowing pictures to carry the bulk of the book and reducing the informative text *ad absurdum*. In fact, this book might better be entitled "The Techniques of Fredric Sweny in Drawing and Painting of Wildlife."—W. J. BRECKENRIDGE.

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUNG ORNITHOLOGISTS: BIRD BIOLOGY. By J. D. Macdonald. Museum Press Limited, London, 1959: 5½ × 8½ in., 128 pp., frontispiece, 16 pls., 20 figs., 2 tables. 12*s* 6*d* (about $1.75).

The author achieves admirably the stated purpose of this little book "to provide a brief outline of the whole life of birds" in order to satisfy the desire of bird watchers, young in years or young in the study of birds, for knowledge of birds in addition to that of identification. In a book of this size many subjects must be omitted. Twelve topics that have been included are: Preparation for Mating; Nests and Eggs and Family Care; Population; Migration; Distribution; Habitats and Adaptations; Adaptations for Flight; Feathers; Collecting and Digesting Food; Lungs and Heart; Other Anatomical Features; Variation and Evolution.

Writing is clear and concise. Previous training in biology is not necessary for understanding. Halftones and line drawings are of high quality. The table of bird weights on p. 81 may surprise readers when they learn how little birds in general weigh. The use of examples "biased in favour of British readers" lessens little the usefulness of the book to Americans.

This book should prove useful in the libraries of schools, teachers, and beginners in ornithology.—OSCAR M. ROOT.

A NATURAL HISTORY OF NEW YORK CITY. By John Kieran. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1959: 5¾ × 8¾ in., xvi + 428 pp., many drawings by Henry Bugbee Kane. $5.95.

With the publication of "A Natural History of New York City" we have another book devoted to wildlife in a great metropolis, and from an author qualified by nearly fifty years of residence. "London's Natural History" (Collins, London, 1945) was one of the first, if not the first, to take as its topic the fauna and flora of a huge city. Its author, R. S. R. Fitter, had always lived in London. "Unseen Life of New York: As a Naturalist Sees It" (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York; and Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1953) by William Beebe was a more recent contribution along the same line. In all three books the authors set the stage by first giving an historical account of the setting (Dr. Beebe devoted over half of his book to the past), but from there on their methods of presentation diverge. Mr. Fitter proceeded to discuss the effects of smoke, trade, traffic, etc. on wildlife. Dr. Beebe, under such chapter headings as "Too Small To Be Seen," and "Too Clear To Be Seen" chose to discourse entertainingly and at length on a few creatures to the exclusion of many others. Mr. Kieran, however, has undertaken to show *how* and *where* wildlife exists in a metropolitan environment. His task has been a formidable one for he has attempted to discuss *all* forms of life from plankton and protozoa. His purpose is to interest people, not to provide a compendium of information. New Yorkers and others with a fondness for the great city will relish the many personal reminiscences based on a half century of nature-walking seldom beyond the view of tall buildings. In the two chapters on birds, one-fifth of the book, the author is more at ease and loquacious, for he is dealing with his favorite subjects. Ornithologists will be interested particularly in the way such birds as the Peregrine Falcon have adjusted themselves to the world of skyscrapers. The sensitive lithographs by Henry Bugbee Kane greatly complement the text.—OLIN SEWALL PETTINGILL, JR.