

March, 1931

## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Arrangements for the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Club to be held in the San Francisco Bay region are being completed by the local committee of the Northern Division. Sessions for the reading of papers are scheduled for May 15 and 16, 1931, under auspices of the California Academy of Sciences and the University of California. Pleasant memories of the ever increasing gatherings at the Cooper Club annual meetings prompt the hosts of this year's meeting to invite and predict a still greater attendance, with the added stimulus to the study of birds which such numbers will inevitably call forth. Members are urged to draw up plans at once for the presentation of papers in order that early replies giving exact titles may be made on the blanks shortly to be distributed by mail. Advance suggestions as to program indicate that the sessions will contain papers of varied interest in the fields of life history, physiology, anatomy, paleontology, distribution, and systematics. A session especially designed for the presentation of papers requiring motion picture facilities is planned. Social gatherings will occupy the evenings of the days for which the scientific sessions are scheduled. This year the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in its new and ample quarters in the Life Sciences Building offers improved opportunities for the study of its bird collections. Visitors from other regions will be interested to inspect these and perhaps to avail themselves of the research facilities in ornithology provided here. The tenth annual meeting of the Board of Governors will be held in connection with the annual meeting of the Cooper Club. Further information concerning any feature of these meetings may be obtained from the Chairman of the Local Committee, Mr. Alden H. Miller, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley.

Mr. Harry Harris, author of the exhaustive biography of Robert Ridgway and several other noteworthy scientific and literary contributions, has now undertaken to gather together materials for a monographic account of the California Condor, ultimately to be published in the Pacific Coast Avifauna series. For some

years Mr. W. Lee Chambers has been gathering data on this bird, and all of his resulting notes have generously been turned over to Mr. Harris. Other Cooper Club members have done likewise, and there are doubtless yet others who will respond in similar fashion. This undertaking may thus be looked upon rather definitely as a Club enterprise. Mr. Harris will, we feel sure, welcome assistance also from any source whatsoever, to the end that his "Monograph of the California Condor" will be the last word in completeness.

Many are the inquiries that come to us as to the probable time of appearance of the new, fourth edition of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. These frequent inquiries indicate wide demand for a down-to-date, authorized set of names for our North American birds; for twenty years have now gone by since the publication of the third edition. To those of us who know of the huge amount of work necessary to the preparation of the new Check-list, far greater (by perhaps double or treble) than ever before, the seeming delay in its completion is not surprising. Furthermore, fully ninety per cent of the work of compilation, checking and rechecking, and verifying of proof corrections, devolves upon one man, namely, the chairman of the A. O. U. Committee in charge, Dr. Witmer Stone. Certainly painstaking, slowly attained accuracy in final output is of greater long-time import than speed of publication. Even so, it can now be announced that the new Check-list is entirely in corrected galley proof stage, with paging in early prospect.—J.G.

The Western Bird Banding Association announces a change to new quarters. Since its organization meeting in December, 1924, a large proportion of the active banders of the West have centered about Los Angeles, with the result that the general meetings and most of the corporate activities of the organization have taken place in Pasadena. There, the homes as well as the stations of such pioneers and organizers of the science as the Micheners and the Laws have become traditional headquarters for banders and

banding, and in many senses they are likely to remain so. More recently, however, the San Francisco Bay region has shown signs of new interest, especially in the direction of banding in relation to serious research, and since the southern group feel that for the moment further expansion may be more rapid elsewhere, the decision was made at the general meeting of February 8, at Pasadena, to accept the ready hospitality of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, at Berkeley, and to transfer the headquarters to that most advantageous point. The new slate of officers elected for this purpose includes T. T. McCabe, President; E. L. Sumner, Sr., Treasurer and Business Manager; Elinor B. McCabe, Secretary; Amelia S. Allen, Vice-president; and Mary M. Erickson and E. Lowell Sumner, Jr., Councilors. The Association may be addressed at the Museum for all purposes, including emergency banding supplies, records, and matters pertaining to the News. The Association has been appealed to by the Biological Survey, both for information to be gained through banding on the movements of the red-winged blackbirds and the American coots of California, and for the development of trapping technique to make such banding possible. This information is acutely needed in connection with agricultural problems, notably that of the Sacramento Valley rice growers. The Association is at work on these problems, corporately, and it urges banders within the State to band as many of both forms as may be possible and to correspond with the headquarters at Berkeley, either to assist by suggesting methods and localities of great concentration, or to obtain assistance through such information as has already been gained.—T. T. McC.

California Assembly Bill no. 776, now referred to the "Committee on Governmental Efficiency and Economy," is "an act to adopt the California valley quail as the official state bird and avifaunal emblem of this state." The sportsmen's attitude toward this bill is indicated in the following probably "inspired" article which appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of December 22, 1930. "It is a serious question in the minds of many sportsmen if they want the quail elevated to this honored position. No hunter will deny the fact that there is no finer game bird. But it is feared that once it is

made the State bird, the next move on the part of sentimentalists will be to have the bird taken from the game bird list. Right now, when the attention of sportsmen in all sections is being turned to improving quail hunting conditions, it would be very unwise to make the quail a nongame species, and thus lose the support of the one group that is financially interested in aiding it." It would thus appear that support for this bill to make the California Quail the state bird will have to come from "sentimentalists," such consisting of citizens whose prime interest in the birds does *not* end with the killing of them! We have no ground for prophesying at this date what the legislature will do with the bill; but it behooves each individual and group desirous of its passage to make urgent appeal in its behalf to the proper representatives at Sacramento. The bill is, of course, a wholly worthy one—the result of several years of educational campaigning in which the Cooper Club has taken an active part. The sponsors of the bill in the State Legislature are Assemblywoman Miss Eleanor Miller of Los Angeles and Assemblyman Charles W. Fisher of Oakland.—J.G.

Our comment in the January CONDOR (p. 40) upon the mockingbird's "powers of mimicry," as to whether the bird really possesses such, has stimulated some pointed enquiry. Those who wish to pursue this subject farther will find evidence and much to think about, on one side of the question or the other, in Donald R. Dickey's article entitled "The Mimetic Aspect of the Mocker's Song" (*Condor*, XXIV, 1922, pp. 153-157) and in Charles W. Townsend's article on "Mimicry of Voice in Birds" (*Auk*, XLI, 1924, pp. 541-552). As is usual in matters of debate, the critical reader must make himself sure of the exact meanings intended by the different authors in their use of words.

The Museum of Comparative Zoology announces that the first volume of a "Check List of the Birds of the World", by James Lee Peters, is now in press and will be issued shortly. The classification followed for the higher groups is that adopted by Dr. Wetmore, with the sequence of genera and species according to the author's own ideas where no authoritative treatment has been published. The first volume will contain about 300 genera and 1700 species and sub-

species covering the following orders: Struthioniformes, Rheiformes, Casuariiformes, Apterygiformes, Tinamiformes, Sphenisciformes, Gaviiformes, Colymbiformes, Procellariiformes, Pelecaniformes, Ciconiiformes, Anseriformes, and Falconiformes. The only recent attempt to list most of the species in these groups was that made in the first volume of Sharpe's "Hand-list", published in 1899 and consequently now thirty-two years old and out of date. It is expected that at least ten volumes will be required to complete the work. The second volume is in active preparation by Mr. Peters and preliminary work on others is under way. Subscriptions are now invited and may be addressed to the Harvard University Press, Randall Hall, Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Price, five dollars per volume.

The Salton Sea Wild Life Refuge has been set aside by Executive order (dated November 25, 1930) as "a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds." The area includes government lands in the southern basin of the Salton Sea, Imperial County, California, and it will be administered by the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. "It will be unlawful to hunt within the area, or to trap, disturb, or kill any wild animal or bird of any kind; to take or destroy the eggs of any wild birds; [etc.]" We understand, further, that a move is now under way to make Death Valley, Inyo County, a National Park, to be administered under the same system as Yosemite, Sequoia and other National Parks. All of which is in the right direction in the interests of wild animal conservation and betokens success on the part of persons and agencies who are working quietly but effectively toward the realization of high ideals.

#### PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

NOTES ON A COLLECTION OF BIRDS FROM ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO, by Harry C. Oberholser. (Scientific Publications of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, vol. 1, no. 4, December 31, 1930, pp. 83-124, pl. [colored] XVIII.)

In years past Dr. Oberholser has produced a series of systematic treatises upon various groups of birds which have been rightly regarded as among the highest in that type of study and which serve

today as bases for any further investigation in the genera and species concerned. I, myself, have so habitually consulted his papers whenever they touched upon my own work that it was with the liveliest interest and anticipation that I opened the present "Notes" upon the birds of a region with which I am thoroughly familiar. And, most regretfully be it said, the paper was laid down with a feeling of sadness and disappointment—surely we have a right to expect more from the studies of one of our leading systematists. This annotated list might have been acceptable forty years ago as a report from virgin territory, but at the present time and from the regions covered it is a futile piece of work. Only as the product of an acknowledged authority is it deserving of attention.

In the introduction it is said that the Huachuca Mountains are "the classic collecting ground of Arizona," a phrase better applied to the Santa Catalina range; but nowhere in the paper is there the slightest recognition of other peoples' labors. The author's whole concern is with certain assemblages of specimens, which either are or are not representative of "good subspecies" and which file before him in hasty array to receive sweeping and final judgment as they pass. There are many statements throughout the paper that may be cheerfully accepted, yes—but these, too, are generally exasperating; for, like the Katydid, "Thou sayest undisputed things in such a solemn way!" It is needless to go into detailed criticism, of the stately approval of long-settled questions; of the kaleidoscopic shifting of names which must inevitably remain in the debatable class and eventually be applied according to some accepted compromise and not by condescending assertion; or of the arbitrary "rearrangement" of difficult groups here so lightly and impossibly re-classified.

My feelings are these: That in our North American avifauna we have pretty nearly enough names to go with any remarks we wish to make; that, of greater importance, there are underlying facts and deductions for the statement of which names should act as the vehicle, which are deserving of close study and which are assuredly of enthralling interest. Arizona in the past has been a rich field for such studies and it is childish to put forth a brief but formal and authoritative-appearing synoptic paper that ignores and