

other winters it does not occur at all. It is not wary, and does not even know enough to keep out of the way of dogs along the shore. It is well named the "Foolish" Guillemot, for both its habits and appearance deserve this appellation. In fact it looks like a perfect idiot, swimming over on one side as if one leg were broken, and staring vacantly at its enemies without attempting to escape. Its *tout ensemble* is stupid and gawky.

During the winter of 1875 they were so exceedingly abundant that Mr. Comeau shot about a thousand for their feathers, and his dog caught over fifty. They were all in very poor flesh, some being little more than animated skeletons, and a great many died and were washed ashore.

147. *Utamania torda*. RAZOR-BILLED AUK.—Not common here, but breeds on the Mingan Islands.

Recent Literature.

THE COUES CHECK LIST AND ORNITHOLOGICAL DICTIONARY.*—The April number of the Bulletin contained (p. 111) a brief preliminary notice of this work, prepared from advance proof sheets. It was not published until June, and therefore too late for the appearance in our July number of a satisfactory review. As stated in the title the work is a second edition of the "Check List" which originally appeared in 1873 and was reissued in 1874 in connection with "Field Ornithology," as a reflex of the classification and nomenclature of the "Key to North American Birds" (1872), though containing a few additional species. The original List gave 778 names; the present one gives 888, subtracting 10† and adding 120.

"In revising the List," says the author, "for the main purpose of determining the ornithological *status* of every North American bird, the most scrupulous attention has been paid to the matter of nomenclature,—not only as a part of scientific classification, determining the technical relations of genera, species, and varieties to each other, but also as involved in writing and speaking the names of birds correctly. The more closely the matter was scrutinized, the more evidences of inconsistency,

* The Coues Check List of North American Birds. Second Edition, Revised to Date, and entirely Rewritten, under Direction of the Author, with a Dictionary of the Etymology, Orthography, and Orthoepy of the Scientific Names, the Concordance of previous Lists, and a Catalogue of his Ornithological Publications. [Monogram.] Boston. Estes and Lauriat. 1882. 1 vol. imp. 8vo. pp. 165.

† The 10 species retired are: *Egiothus fuscescens*; *Centronyx ochrocephalus*; *Sphyrapicus williamsoni*; *Lampornis mango*; *Agyrtria linnæi*; *Momotus caeruleiceps*; *Ibis thalassina*; *Ardea wuerdemanni*; *Sterna "longipennis" (S. pikii Lawr.)*; *Podiceps cristatus*. The list of added species (too long to print here) is given on pp. 6-8 and 10 of the Check List.

negligence, or ignorance were discovered in our habitual use of names. It was therefore determined to submit the current catalogue of North American birds to a rigid examination, with reference to the spelling, pronunciation, and derivation of every name—in short, to revise the list from a philological as well as an ornithological standpoint."

"The purpose of the present 'Check List' is thus distinctly seen to be two-fold: First, to present a complete list of the birds now known to inhabit North America, north of Mexico, and including Greenland, to classify them systematically, and to name them conformably with current rules of nomenclature; these being ornithological matters of science. Secondly, to take each word occurring in such technical usage, explain its derivation, significance, and application, spell it correctly, and indicate its pronunciation with the usual diacritical marks; these being purely philological matters, affecting not the scientific status of any bird, but the classical questions involved in its name" (pp. 3, 4).

The analysis of the two editions shows that of the 120 additions to the old list the large majority are *bona fide* species, and actual acquisitions to the North American list, being birds discovered since 1873 in Texas, Arizona, and Alaska, together with several long known to inhabit Greenland, which had never been formally included in the "North American" list at the time Dr. Coues's first Check List was issued, though the Greenland Fauna, even then, was generally claimed and conceded to be North American. Beside these, the increment is represented by species or varieties named as new to science since 1873, by a few restored to the list, and by two (*Passer montanus* and *Coturnix dactylisonans*) imported and now naturalized species.

The author states that the list includes the names of some twenty or thirty sub-species which "my conservatism would not have allowed me to describe as valid, and the validity of which I can scarcely endorse," but which are retained because "I preferred, in preparing a 'Check List' for general purposes, rather to present the full number of names in current usage, and let them stand for what they may be worth, than to exercise any right of private judgment, or make any critical investigation of the merits of disputed cases." In view of this declaration, however, we fail to understand why such names as *Carpodacus purpureus californicus*, *Chondestes grammacus strigatus*, *Picus villosus leucomelas*, *Bubo virginianus subarcticus*, *Bubo virginianus saturatus*, and *Oreortyx picta plumifera* should have been denied a place. Nor can we approve the exclusion of certain Audubonian species "not since identified," as well as some of Giraud's, which, there is no good reason to doubt were actually taken in Texas. "A few Cape St. Lucas birds have been so long in the 'North American' list that it is not thought worth while to displace them"; but does not this consideration apply with equal force to many of the Mexican species which are excluded? Our present southern boundary is a political, not a natural one, but this is all the more reason why it should be rigidly adhered to if followed at all. As Dr. Coues remarks, however, it would be far more satisfactory, from a scientific standpoint, to ignore the present

arbitrary line and include the whole "Nearctic Region," thus taking in the table lands of Mexico nearly to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

To the analyses and comparisons succeed "Remarks on the use of Names," ten pages being devoted to the principles which have guided the author in his philological researches so far as the etymology, orthography, and orthoepy are concerned. This portion of the work has something more than an indirect value, for it forms a condensed, readily available grammar of the subject to which it pertains. The assistance here rendered by his literary associate, Mrs. S. Olivia Weston-Aiken, is fittingly acknowledged in the Introduction.

In the body of the Check List the names are printed in bold type, both English and Latin, and are numbered 1 to 888. Sub-generic names are entirely discarded, as is the sign of "var." between specific and sub-specific terms. The nomenclature of sub-species is therefore trinomial, without the slightest disguise. The technical name is followed by the name of the original describer of the bird, and by that of the authority for the particular combination adopted. The "concordance of previous lists," mentioned in the title, is effected by referring by number to Baird's List of 1858, Coues's Check List of 1874, and Ridgway's Catalogue of 1880, in the case of every species.

On each page the names are duplicated in smaller type, divided into syllables marked for quantity and accent, and their pronunciation therefore shown, according to the system of orthoepy advocated. The most important point secured, however, is the etymology or derivation of the scientific words. "On the whole," say the authors of this part of the work, "it has not been our intention to go beyond a good fair definition of these Greek and Latin words, considering that all practical purposes are thus subserved." The etymologies are really, however, traced far back in many cases. "Nothing of the sort has been done before, to the same extent at any rate, and it is confidently expected that the information here given will prove useful to many who, however familiar they may be with the appearance of the names on paper, have comparatively little notion of the derivation, signification, and application of the words, and who unwittingly speak them as they usually hear them pronounced, that is to say, with glaring impropriety. No one who adds a degree of classical proficiency to his scientific acquirements, be the latter never so extensive, can fail to handle the tools of thought with an ease and precision so greatly enhanced, that the merit of ornithological exactitude may be adorned with the charm of scholarly elegance" (p. 4).

The Check List proper is concluded with "a list of words defined," alphabetically arranged, and therefore serving as an index to the work.

The volume finishes with a chronological list of Dr. Coues's writings on ornithology.

Aside from modifications which affect the ornithological or scientific status of the "Check List," the changes in nomenclature are numerous and radical. Under our accepted, but in certain ways pernicious, system of ornithological nomenclature most of these were probably necessary;

but we have little sympathy with the recent upheaval in this respect, nor do we believe that the names at present advocated will prove more stable than those which have preceded them. Stejneger has lately shown* that neither Coues nor Ridgway reached the foundations; and doubtless some one of an equally enquiring mind and with an imagination still better adapted to interpreting ancient descriptions of uncertain application, will yet come forward and work fresh havoc. The trouble with this kind of investigation is that sufficient regard is rarely paid to the rule that a description must be clearly defined, and that "definition properly implies a distinct exposition of essential characters." We have not forgotten Mr. Allen's eloquent protest against the adoption of certain Bartramian names, and there can be no doubt that his objections will apply equally well to the descriptions of many other early authors. Moreover, while we distinctly disclaim any personal application of such a thought, we cannot help believing that if *the practice of giving the authority for the arrangement of names* were discontinued, there would be less of this meddling with nomenclature. At all events the evil is a terrible one, and it must be stopped, even if the whole code has to be thrown overboard and a new one instituted. So extreme a course, however, is probably unnecessary, for some simple statute of limitation can doubtless be devised which will answer all the required ends. Dr. Coues's recent suggestion,† that fifty years of unchallenged usage shall fix a name forever, is an excellent one, but the time of probation might, with advantage, be reduced to twenty-five years. Such a provision, with one requiring all proposed changes to be referred to a tribunal composed of not less than three prominent ornithologists, who might meet for the purpose at intervals of say once in four years, would effectually prevent any further tampering with a system which should be sacred, but which has become a mere football.

With respect to genera we are sorry to notice that Dr. Coues has abandoned certain old-time principles and adopted many of the sub-divisions which he rejected in the edition of 1873. Chief among these are *Actodromas*, *Arquatella*, *Pelidna*, and *Ancylochilus*, in *Tringa*; *Symphemia* and *Rhyacophilus* in *Totanus*; *Herodias*, *Garzetta*, *Hydranassa*, *Dichromanassa*, *Florida*, and *Butorides* in *Ardea*, and *Chroicocephalus* in *Larus*. *Turdus*, however, is retained for all the Thrushes of the sub-family *Turdinæ*, and *Vireo*, in its euphonious simplicity, stands for all the Vireos. While we would not be understood as condemning all the above changes, we consider the majority of them arbitrary, and hence uncalled for. The ever increasing tendency to institute new genera on differences of structure which in other classes of Vertebrates would be considered no more than well-marked specific characters, is one of the banes of modern ornithology. Our systematists seem to have lost sight of the uses for which genera were primarily intended. Of this

* Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., June, 1882, pp. 28-43.

† This Bulletin, Vol. VII, pp. 178, 179.

school, however, Dr. Coues is perhaps among the more conservative members.

Having fulfilled our duty of critic by finding all possible fault with the "Coues Check List" we turn to the much pleasanter task of mentioning some of its many good qualities. Of its several departments the introductory chapters may be characterised as terse, practical, and to the point; the Check List proper as carefully and in the main wisely framed; the "dictionary" as an exhaustive treatise of high scholarly excellence and of unquestionable utility. Concerning the whole work we can say nothing stronger than that it is in every way worthy of its brilliant and distinguished author, who has evidently made it one of his most mature and carefully studied efforts. Its favorable reception can be a matter of no uncertainty, for it fills a field of usefulness peculiarly its own, and one which need in no way conflict with that so ably covered by Mr. Ridgway's recent "Nomenclature."*—W. B.

GENTRY'S NESTS AND EGGS OF BIRDS OF THE UNITED STATES.†—It is now several months since the appearance of the twenty-fifth part, the final number of this work, which was published by subscription. The text is written by Mr. Gentry himself, while the plates were executed by Mr. Edwin Sheppard, "subject to the suggestions and dictations of the author." The title is misleading, for instead of treating of all the species found in the United States, it deals with but fifty—less than one-fifth the number known to occur within this area.

The typography and press work are good, but the plates fall far short of deserving the same praise. In the early numbers the nests and eggs were generally figured alone, but the author soon acceded to the popular demand and furnished colored representations of the birds on all plates commencing with the seventh part; with the final number appeared four extra plates, on which were shown the birds that were omitted in the first six parts.

* While it is unfortunate that there should be two check lists of North American birds, Dr. Coues's right to publish his views in this form was undeniably established when his first list was issued and accepted. Moreover, we see no reason why others should be debarred from the same privilege, and we fancy that a third list, representing a different and more conservative school of thought, especially in the matter of nomenclature, would have a large following. As regards a choice of names, in the comparatively few cases where the present authorities differ we should weigh well before accepting either. Many persons, doubtless, have neither the time nor the inclination to do this, and such, necessarily, must be guided by individual preferences in favor of one or the other author. In all cases of publication, however, a simple statement of the authority followed will be sufficient to prevent any confusion or misunderstanding.

† Illustrations of Nests and Eggs of Birds of the United States, with Text, by Thos. G. Gentry. Philadelphia: J. A. Wagenseller, Publisher, No. 23 North Sixth Street. Copyright by J. A. Wagenseller, 1881. [4to, parts 1-25, pp. 1-300. 54 col. chromolithographs, and chromo-portrait frontispiece of the author. Price, \$25.00. 1880-82.]

In a general way it may be said of most of the plates that the perspective is very bad—if not absent altogether; that a large number of the nests look as if temporarily balanced, like so many saucers, upon the branches on which they rest, and from which they seem ready to tumble on the slightest jar; and that nearly all have the appearance of cheap chromo-lithographs, while none attain to the degree of excellence essential to first-class workmanship. In order to give the subscribers as much paint as possible for the money, the artist has endeavored to supply backgrounds to many of the plates. Some of these seem intended to represent distant mountains, but the greater number consist of dense, and sometimes shapeless masses of solid green. At other times we are treated to glimpses of the sky and ocean that rival, in depth and intensity of color, the rich ultramarine-blue of the head of the Nonpareil.

Turning now to the letter-press let us examine its claim to rank among the contributions to ornithological literature. A few brief quotations will suffice to show both the scope of the work and the author's estimate of its value. In the preface he says: "Especial pains have been taken with the text. The aim of the author has been to present a short, plain, and detailed account of the habits of each species described. . . ."

"Throughout the work, considerable prominence has been given to those interesting and curious phases of bird life which are present during the breeding period, and which have been the principal study of the author for many years. Extraneous matter has been sedulously omitted, and nothing permitted to appear about which there could be serious doubts of accuracy.

"With these few preliminary remarks, we send this beautiful book out into the world, trusting that it may meet with a cordial reception everywhere."

That the work does not contain anything approaching a complete "detailed account of the habits" of a single species is evident from the most cursory examination of the biographies. On the other hand, we are given an amount of detail and exact data, concerning some of the most inaccessible points connected with the breeding habits of birds, that excite, first, admiration (for the author's extraordinary acuteness of observation); next, astonishment (at the possibility of attaining a knowledge of certain peculiarities mentioned); and finally, incredulity (regarding the reliability of the author's statements).

To be more explicit: Not only does Mr. Gentry tell us the exact number of days consumed in building the nest, in depositing the eggs, in incubation, the period the young remain in the nest, and the length of time they are afterwards fed by the parents; but he goes further and states how much time is devoted to courting, gives the period of mating and the duration of the honeymoon, and tells us how many days are spent in the selection of a suitable and satisfactory site for the nest, not omitting, in some cases, to mention which sex governs in making the choice. A few citations, in the author's own words, will suffice to demonstrate his unparalleled perspicacity in these matters.

Speaking of the Wood Pewee he says: "The assumption of matrimonial relations, however, is not a matter that is entered into without more or less consideration. . . . The ceremony of mating being over—which business is ordinarily of short continuance, seldom lasting for a greater period than two days—the newly-wedded pair now set out to discover a suitable place for the building of a home. This is a matter of considerable moment, often requiring the performance of long and extended tours of observation and exploration. These reconnoissances generally last for a week, The site being mutually agreed upon, the happy pair proceed with all possible dispatch and diligence to construct a domicile: the male to collect and bring in the necessary materials; the female to fix them in their proper places, Having finished their home, only a day or so intervenes when oviposition becomes the controlling instinct. The female now proceeds to deposit her complement of four eggs, which she does on consecutive days, at the rate of a single egg daily. This is followed, on the day succeeding the last deposit, by the trying duty of incubation. Upon the female devolves this arduous and irksome labor."

Of the nesting of the Cat-bird he tells us that "ordinarily a week or ten days are spent in making a choice of locality."

With the Orchard Oriole "Mating does not occur," he says, till "more than two weeks after the advent of the sexes. The sexes having come together in a wise and business-like way, with little or none of the bluster that is customary on such occasions, a conference ensues, which results in a temporary separation for mutual good; one bird going in one direction and the other in an entirely opposite course. The selection of a suitable spot for a home is the *vera causa* of this divergence. In five or six days from the time of the assumption of matrimonial relations the nest is started, and through the united efforts of both birds for the period of a week is brought to completion."

Of the Hummingbird he writes, "The sexes, tired as it were, of the riotous and luxurious lives they have been leading, come together by mutual agreement, and enter into matrimonial relations. This being accomplished, they separate for a brief period, and each proceeds to scour the country for miles around in quest of a suitable tree in which to locate. When one is selected by either bird the other is summoned to the spot to talk over, in true bird language, the merits thereof. Should the parties differ as to the advantageousness of the site, no quarrelling or bickering is indulged in, but, in the most friendly manner, they separate and renew the search until one is found which gives satisfaction."

In his biography of the Chewink occurs the following: "The females wholly entranced, yield to the persuasions of their would-be lords, and conjugal relations are entered into. But the happy couple are not yet ready to begin nest building. They must needs celebrate the occasion of their marriage. Accordingly they set out on a wedding trip, so to speak, visiting adjoining lots and thickets, and enjoying the delights and scenes around them. This continues for four or five days, when the lovers, thoroughly surfeited, return and quietly settle down to prosy life."