

RECENT LITERATURE.

Sharpe's Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum—Volume X.* —Ornithologists are under obligations to Mr. Sharpe for another exceedingly welcome volume of a pre-eminently useful series. Volume X considerably exceeds in size any of its predecessors, it containing nearly 900 pages, and twelve colored plates. It treats of the following five families of nine-primaried Oscines: the Flower-peckers (Dicæidæ), the Swallows (Hirundinidæ), the Waxwings and their allies (Ampelidæ), the American Warblers (Mniotiltidæ), and the Wagtails (Motacillidæ). "In the present volume 448 species are described, represented by 4590 specimens." Only 52 of the species are still desiderata to the collection of the British Museum, while 88 are represented by the original types. In addition to the material in the British Museum, Mr. Sharpe has had the assistance of valuable collections kindly loaned him by various eminent ornithologists for use in the preparation of the present monographs. The British Museum series of Neotropical birds has been rendered wonderfully complete by the addition of the collections of Dr. Sclater and Messrs. Salvin and Godman"; and acknowledgment is also made of numerous North American birds received from the United States National Museum. Mr. Sharpe's facilities for the preparation of his various monographs are enviably complete, and without doubt elsewhere unequalled.

The Dicæidæ, numbering 19 genera and 95 species of a strictly Old World group, occupy the first 84 pages, and are illustrated by two beautiful plates. To the Hirundinidæ, with 11 genera and 83 species (*plus* 18 subspecies), are allotted 125 pages, and a single plate. The great family Mniotiltidæ, of such special interest to American ornithological collectors, occupies nearly 250 pages, numbers 21 genera and 127 species, besides numerous subspecies. Of the species 36 fall under *Dendrocæca*, 32 under *Basilæuterus*, and 15 under *Setophaga*. Of the 64 species of Motacillidæ, 33 are ranged under *Anthus*, and 23 under *Motacilla*.

In respect to subspecies, we regret to see that Mr. Sharpe has reverted to his former practice of designating them simply by binominal appellations, with usually no further comment on their status than is implied by the prefix 'Subsp.' followed by a Greek letter.

We also regret to see our author so firmly opposed to "radical changes in nomenclature" as to prefer to "follow custom" in cases where he is convinced that the 'radical changes' are in accordance with strict nomenclatural rules, through fear that the "change is too great and the risk of confusion too assured" (p. 85) for him to venture in the footsteps of the rash reformers who persist in pointing out the narrow way which leads

* Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum, Volume X. Catalogue of the Passeriformes, or Perching Birds, in the collection of the British Museum.—Fringilliformes: Part I. Containing the Families Dicæidæ, Hirundinidæ, Ampelidæ, Mniotiltidæ, and Motacillidæ. By R. Bowdler Sharpe. London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1885. 8vo, pp. xiii + 682, pll. xii.

to stability and consistency in things nomenclatural. It is certainly poor philosophy, and worse principle, to go wrong because the majority of one's associates or predecessors have missed the right path. While Mr. Sharpe seems to have by no means warmly embraced the *auctorum plurimorum* principle of one of his eminent confrères, he shows a tendency to lapse in that direction. If rules of nomenclature are to be otherwise than worse than useless, they must be followed systematically and on all occasions, whether their immediate results chance to be agreeable or the reverse.

In monographs of such extended scope it is doubtless too much to expect that the monographer's rulings will be equally sound at all points, his conclusions necessarily depending upon the amount of his material in each particular case. Again, specialists having the same material before them may reach different conclusions, consequent upon what may be termed theoretical bias, which may lead to a different interpretation of the same facts; although experience shows that experts working with the same material, and particularly if working together and comparing notes as they proceed, may frequently arrive at practically the same results. It is not, therefore, on the whole surprising that Mr. Sharpe should differ now and then from other authorities in the same field, even in cases where his material is comparatively limited.

As some of Mr. Sharpe's rulings respecting American birds may be presumed to be of special interest to the the readers of 'The Auk,' they are here presented. Our Barn Swallow (*Hirundo erythrogastra*) is made a subspecies of the European Chimney Swallow (*Hirundo rustica* Linn.), the American form being found to extend across Asia to Lake Baikal, and to winter in Burmah. Our bird would therefore stand, in a trinomial system of nomenclature, as *Hirundo rustica erythrogastra*. Mr. Sharpe recognizes four subspecies of *Hirundo rustica*, besides the *H. rustica* proper. Our Cliff Swallow is *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* (Vieill.), Mr. Sharpe following Sclater and Salvin (1873) in identifying Vieillot's *H. pyrrhonota* (1817) with Say's *H. lunifrons* (1823).

Passing to the Warblers, *Helminthophila lutescens* is considered a thoroughly good species, and surprise is expressed that the "trinomial name of *H. celata lutescens* should be given to it"; but two possible explanations are offered (p. 245). The ten specimens at Mr. Sharpe's disposal are not deemed by him sufficient to settle the alternatives raised, namely, whether *lutescens* is a thoroughly good species or whether the bird breeds in the yellow plumage of the first year. In respect to the generic name *Parula*, Mr. Sharpe observes that if the name *Parula* must be suppressed because there is a previous genus *Parulus*, then "*Pica* must be suppressed on account of its resemblance to *Picus*." *Parula* and *Parulus* are known to be the same word, with simply different terminations indicative merely of gender. *Pica* and *Picus* may have the same relation, as some authorities claim, while others maintain that the two words are etymologically different. At all events the two cases are not quite parallel, *Pica* and *Picus* having been long used in classical Latin to denote respectively

Magpie and Woodpecker before they were introduced into technical zoölogy, whatever may have been primarily—a point doubtless impossible to strictly determine—their etymological affinities.

Dendraca dominica albilora is denied status, even as a subspecies, since in many specimens Mr. Sharpe can “trace a tiny shade of yellow in the eyebrow,” even in authentic specimens received from our National Museum; yet the alleged differences pretty constantly characterize the birds of a certain geographical area. The race *hypochrysa* of *D. palmarum* is also not recognized. *Peucedramus* is admitted as a full genus (by the way, subgenera seem a round in the ladder of classification Mr. Sharpe does not appear to find use for!), while *Helinaea*, a much more distinct form, is referred to *Helminthotherus*. The substitution of *Micrologia* by Mr. Cory for his *Ligea* does not appear to be taken note of, even in the ‘Aidenda,’ presumably printed nearly a year after the change was published.

In *Geothlypis trichas* the male in winter is said to assume the dull garb of the female, losing the black mask, and is thus figured (pl. ix, fig. 1), although in fact the male never loses the black mask after it has once been acquired, and which it obtains at the second moult. Only young males of the first year wear the garb of the female. But Mr. Sharpe should not be too harshly dealt with for this lapse, since the same mistake has been made by several of our own leading authorities, Messrs. Maynard and Cory being apparently the only writers who have escaped this error. This singular mistake seems to have originated with Baird (Birds of N. Am., 1858, p. 241), who says the male in winter is “without the black mask.” In the ‘History of North American Birds,’ by Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway, it is said (I, p. 297): “Male in winter, and the female, without the black mask.” Coues, in ‘Birds of the Colorado Valley’ (p. 311), says: “The adults, in fall and winter, are similar to each other, . . . as at that season the peculiar black and ashy markings of the head are wanting.” The same statement is repeated in the second edition of his ‘Key.’ Maynard, however, in 1874, in describing the adult male (Birds of Florida, p. 66) says: “There is no change of plumage in autumn, . . .” Mr. Cory in his ‘Birds of the Bahamas’ (1880, p. 72) says, in italics, in describing the winter plumage of the male, “a broad black line passing from the sides of the neck through the eye and over the forehead.” The older authors, as Wilson, Nuttall, and Audubon, are not explicit in their statements on this point, but *do not* say that the adult male in winter lacks the black mask, while the opposite is inferrible, at least in the case of Nuttall, who, as well as Audubon, was familiar with the species in its winter haunts. To any one who has collected the birds in winter in Florida, or elsewhere in their winter haunts, the *perpetuation* of such a gross error is almost incomprehensible, especially since the material in at least several of our museums is sufficient to render it evident, even to the ‘closet’ naturalist.

In the collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy is a large series of adult males taken in Florida by Messrs. Maynard, and Henshaw,

and the writer of this review, at frequent intervals from early in December till into March, which differ not in the least in respect to the black face-markings from summer specimens. And similar examples are, to our knowledge, in various collections, both public and private, notably in those of Messrs. Brewster, Cory, and others, and that of Princeton College.

Four beautiful plates illustrate Mr. Sharpe's monograph of the Mniotiltidæ, in which are figured the heads of eight species of *Geothlypis*, while full-length figures are given of *G. speciosa*, *Parula pitaiyumi*, *P. nigrilora*, *Teretristis fernandina*, and *T. fornsi*.

The genus *Polioptila* (with 13 species) is noticed in an 'Appendix to the family Mniotiltidæ' (pp. 440-445), the group having been omitted by Mr. Seebohm from the Sylviidæ, where authors have generally placed it. Mr. Sharpe believes that their most natural position is "in the vicinity of the Muscicapine genus *Stenostira*."

In the family Motacillidæ, the Field Wagtails, usually separated as a genus *Budytes*, are placed with the Water Wagtails under the single genus *Motacilla*, there being "certain intermediate species . . . which unite these two supposed genera." Yet he considers it expedient to continue the generic separation of *Anthus spraguei* from *Anthus* proper, under the genus *Neocorys*. As already noticed (*antea*, p. 290, footnote), our Titlark is made a subspecies of the Old World Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta*, (*spinoletta* Linn., and 'auct. plur.'), under which it stands as "Subsp. *a*. *Anthus pennsylvanicus*." A similar disposition of it was made previously by Mr. Seebohm (Hist. Brit. Bds., II, 1883, p. 248). The adoption of 'radical changes' in specific names, when called for by nomenclatural rules does not seem to inspire in our author, we are glad to see, the same degree of dread as 'radical changes' in generic names, though we fail to trace any principle of consistency in such diverse action under similar contingencies.—J. A. A.

Turner's List of the Birds of Labrador.*—While Mr. Turner's 'List' is very valuable, and will prove very useful, it is at the same time disappointing and unsatisfactory, owing largely to the faulty plan of its construction. Mr. Turner spent nearly two years and four months (from July 15, 1882, to October 5, 1884) in Labrador; his investigations being made chiefly "in the vicinity of Fort Chimo, situated about 27 miles up the Koksoak River, flowing into Ungava Bay, which is an immense pocket toward the eastern portion of the south side of Hudson Strait," where he "remained from August 6, 1882, to September 4, 1884." His list includes about 207 species, only a few more than one-half of which appear to have come under his own observation. Quite a number of the others are

*List of the Birds of Labrador, including Ungava, East Main, Moose, and Gulf Districts of the Hudson Bay Company, together with the Island of Anticosti. By Lucien M. Turner. Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., VIII, 1885, pp. 233-254. Published July 13, 1885.