

**Ohio Notes.**—The Red-headed Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) have practically deserted this section. Prior to 1899 they were numerous, but during the past three years they have become less and less common, until now they are almost extinct as far as this locality is concerned. Formerly almost every telegraph pole contained one or more nests, but this year I examined poles extending over sixteen miles but found only eleven nests.

The only cause that can be assigned for their disappearance is the erection of new poles which were, perhaps, too solid for the construction of nests. The other species of woodpeckers, which usually nest in trees, show no decrease.

There has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of Baltimore Orioles in the past two years and now they are as common as Catbirds and Bluebirds. The Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) have decreased to some extent, but are still common. Cowbirds have deserted this immediate vicinity, while ten miles west they are numerous.—NAT S. GREEN, *Camp Dennison, Ohio.*

**Birds Killed by Hailstones.**—On September 20, 1902, we had in 'The Highlands' of this city a severe hail-storm, lasting from 6.00–6.25 P. M., during which time hail from  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. in diameter fell hard and fast. On the following morning, when the storm had cleared away, beneath the tall cottonwood trees at the intersection of West Twenty-fourth Avenue and Boulevard F, lay scores of little bodies of feathered dead. There were beneath fourteen trees eighty-four birds by actual count, one tree alone, the largest of them all, spreading its arms above the forms of twenty-five sleeping songsters. House Finches and English Sparrows, that on previous days had battled among the branches above now lay side by side, with half a dozen Robins interspersed.—A. H. FELGER, *Denver, Colo.*

**Vernacular Names of Birds.**—In the present number of 'The Auk' (pp. 38–42) Dr. Edwin W. Doran proposes certain rules for the construction of vernacular names of birds, relating mainly to the use or non-use of the hyphen in certain classes of names. If the use of the hyphen could be permanently regulated by the formulation of a set of rules, how great a boon would be conferred upon writers, and particularly upon editors! As, however, the use of the hyphen varies within wide limits, in accordance with the radically different rules enforced by editors or publishing houses, from its practical non-use to its employment to connect remote elements into a compound word, there is little hope of securing a uniform system of hyphenization in the construction of bird names. Every observing person knows that many of the current magazines have adopted what may fairly be termed an anti-hyphen fad, this greatly abused but very useful sign being practically tabooed by them as a connective between the

parts of compound words. Or, to put it still better, compound words are either printed as a single word or their elements are treated as separate words, generally the latter. But in publications which allow the hyphen its time-honored function, great diversity is met with in the manner of its use in just the class of cases to which Dr. Doran has called our attention.

In discussing this matter by letter with Dr. Doran, I stated that I should greatly prefer current usage to his rules, and write Gyr-falcon and Sparrow Hawk instead of Gyr-falcon and Sparrow-Hawk. I should also write not only such names as Redpoll, Yellowthroat, and Bluebird without the hyphen, but also Kingbird, Nighthawk, and Meadowlark in the same way, as against King-bird, Night-Hawk, and Meadow-Lark, as required by his rules.

This, of course, brought up the question of what is 'current usage'; and Dr. Doran replied that he would determine current usage, or "good usage," or "general usage" by such authorities as the 'Century Dictionary,' the 'Standard Dictionary,' Murray's great 'English Dictionary,' and Newton's 'Dictionary of Birds,' and states, no doubt correctly, that his rules conform to those employed in these authoritative works. In other words, hard-and-fast rules are followed for the determination of what phrases are properly to be written as compound words, requiring the use of the hyphen. The 'Century,' he admits, writes 'Kingbird' while all the others write 'King-bird.' "One can hardly," he says, "be said to go counter to good usage, with such authorities as these on his side; there are no better in the English-speaking world."<sup>1</sup>

But is there not another side to the subject? The form words finally take in a language is reached by a process of change, or through 'evolution,' by the survival, perhaps not of the fittest, but of the form most favored. Many compound words now almost universally printed as one word without a hyphen, were originally used as two separate and distinct words, and later as a hyphenized compound word, and later still as a single word without any hyphen. For example, the word handbook is still current in three forms—hand book, hand-book, and handbook, though the first is now rare. Many similar cases must occur to everyone, especially among words that are comparatively new, owing their origin to recent inventions and discoveries requiring the coining of new terms to indicate new processes, forces, and substances.

Frequency of use of a compound word has obviously much to do with its form. It is common to write 'forehead' 'fore-neck,' and 'hind neck,'

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<sup>1</sup> I trust there is no breach of courtesy in thus referring to a private correspondence. Dr. Doran has expressed the hope that a subject so important will be fully discussed, and for this reason preferred to publish his criticism of the A. O. U. Check-List vernacular names in 'The Auk'; and has furthermore had the kindness to suggest that I should publish my views on the subject in the same issue of this journal.

the frequency of their use being indicated by the order in which they are here written. Forehead is a common everyday word in constant use; fore-neck is in less frequent employ and is a more special term, while hind neck is comparatively infrequent; but in modern descriptive natural history writing, where all are in frequent use, the tendency is to give all the same form, writing each phrase as a single word without the hyphen. In the same way we have, in the same class of descriptive writing, 'toothrow,' 'underparts,' and 'upperparts,' although the dictionaries treat each as either two separate words, or as requiring the hyphen. It is thus the users of words and not the dictionary makers, with their fixed rules based on 'language-principles,' that determine the form of much-used compound words. When 'general usage' has established the form of a word, contrary to the ruling of our 'standard authorities,' they later usually fall in line, as shown abundantly by the history of many common word-forms.

In the case of bird names (and other animal and plant names as well), it is more common to blend an adjective and a noun, as in bluebird, than two nouns as in nighthawk; and in the treatment of both these classes of words, our 'standard authorities,' the dictionaries, are more or less inconsistent, for the reason just stated. For example, 'flycatcher' is almost universally written without a hyphen, while 'gnatcatcher' and 'oystercatcher' are almost as uniformly written with a hyphen. In the Check-List, and almost universally, except in the dictionaries and in English publications, we have Barn Owl, Orchard Oriole, and Marsh Hawk, instead of Barn-Owl, Orchard-Oriole, and Marsh-Hawk, etc. In the Check-List, we have Meadowlark and Nighthawk, on the ground that in the one case the bird is not a lark and in the other, is not a hawk; and the name in each case is written solid as one word for the purpose of indicating the fact by making a new name.

The rule requiring the compounding and hyphenizing of such bird names as Ivory Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Duck, Night Heron, Clapper Rail, Stilt Sandpiper, Mountain Plover, Passenger Pigeon, Wood Ibis, Song Sparrow, Cliff Swallow, Tree Creeper, etc., is a purely arbitrary, dictionary 'language principle,' so long as Gray Gull, Green Heron, Brown Creeper, Painted Bunting, Varied Thrush, and all similar bird names are treated by the same 'language-principles' as composed of two separate words. The practical inconvenience of enforcing the dictionary rules in such cases is considerable, since in indexes, in looking for Ivory Gull, Herring Gull, and similarly with other names, we would find our gulls scattered under half-a-dozen different letters of the alphabet, and our pigeons, sparrows, pewees, warblers, etc., similarly dispersed. In the case of the Ivory Gull, ivory is just as much a descriptive adjective as gray, or black-backed, referring to its color (inaccurately of course), and not indicating that it is made of ivory or has anything to do with ivory. 'Water-Thrush' is thus written in the Check-List especially to indicate that it is not a thrush, and 'Quail-Dove' to indicate a group of

pigeons that, superficially at least, have a resemblance to both quails and doves. It would be better to write the first waterthrush, in conformity with meadowlark and nighthawk.

In short, the whole matter resolves itself into a question of convenience, since convenience determines use, which in turn is 'current usage'; and current usage as already said, is not necessarily established by our 'standard authorities,' but by the people to whom the words are most necessary, and by whom they are hence most used. In British English many words are spelled differently from what they are in American English, and hyphens are used in the former much more freely, as a rule, than in the latter. In American publications of all sorts, except dictionaries, the names of birds, animals and plants are written, as regards hyphenized words, practically in accordance with the system followed in the A. O. U. Check-List. By the British method, and by Dr. Doran's rules, we should lose most of our sparrows, gulls, plovers, rails, etc., and should have, in their places, Song-Sparrows, Tree-Sparrows, Field-Sparrows, Sage-Sparrows, Vesper-Sparrows, and similarly hyphenized gull-names, plover-names, rail-names, and so on to the end of the list, producing little short of a revolution in the arrangement of our bird names in indexes, and in the use of the hyphen in vernacular names of animals in general, and the introduction of a method entirely contrary to present tendencies in American English. Better a little inconsistency than hard-and-fast rules that tend to inconvenient and cumbersome word-forms without any adequately offsetting advantage. — J. A. ALLEN, *Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., New York City.*

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## RECENT LITERATURE.

Ridgway's 'Birds of North and Middle America.' Part II. — It is with great pleasure that we record the appearance of Part II<sup>1</sup> of Mr. Ridgway's 'Birds of North and Middle America.' In reviewing Part I (*Auk*, XIX,

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<sup>1</sup> The Birds | of | North and Middle America: | A Descriptive Catalogue | of the | Higher Groups, Genera, Species, and Subspecies of Birds | known to occur in North America, from the | Arctic Lands to the Isthmus of Panama, | the West Indies and other Islands | of the Caribbean Sea, and the Galapagos Archipelago. | By | Robert Ridgway, | Curator, Division of Birds. | — | Part II. | Family Tanagridæ — The Tanagers. | Family Icteridæ — The Troupials. | Family Cœrebidæ — The Honey Creepers. — Family Mniotiltidæ — The Wood Warblers. | — | Washington: | Government Printing Office. | 1902. = Bulletin of the United States National Museum, No. 50. Part II. — 8vo, pp. i-xx + 1-834, pll. i-xxii.