

of wild berries and other wild small fruits. The California and other western species of quails have of course quite similar habits, but prove to be more or less destructive locally; from their great numbers, to certain farm crops, as grains and fruits, and especially grapes. They likewise destroy large quantities of weed seeds and injurious insects, but are, on the whole, considerably less insectivorous than the Bobwhites.

The Horned Larks in reference to their relation to agriculture have recently been studied by Mr. W. L. McAtee.<sup>1</sup> He finds that about 20 per cent. of their food consists of insects, ranging from less than two per cent. in the winter months to over 50 per cent. during some of the summer months. The rest is vegetable matter, consisting largely of the seeds of weeds and other useless plants, practically no cultivated fruit being taken, and the amount of grain that enters into their fare is a negligible quantity, although at some localities in California complaints have been made of their depredation upon newly-sown wheat. It is found, in fact, that the California horned larks differ markedly from those of other parts of the country in the high percentage of grain they consume, being three times that of the larks of other localities. On the whole, however, says the verdict: "So small in amount is the grain thus taken and over such restricted areas that, aside from the fact that at small expense all damage can be prevented, the loss bears no comparison to the benefits conferred. The horned lark by its services to agriculture earns a right to live, and deserves protection at the hands of man."—J. A. A.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

### On the Criticism of Heft III of 'Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna.'

TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':

*Dear Sirs:*—It has always been a pleasure to me to see that my ornithological writings have been looked upon favourably in America, and I am anxious that they are fully understood in your country, because I have a very high opinion of most of the ornithological work done in America. This is the reason why I wish to say a few words about the generally kind review of Part III of my book on the birds of the palæarctic fauna, in 'The Auk,' Vol. XXII, p. 428. The reviewer takes exception to my "conservatism" in respect to gen-

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<sup>1</sup>The Horned Larks in their Relations to Agriculture. By W. L. McAtee, Assistant, Biological Survey. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Biological Survey, Bull. No. 23. 8vo, pp. 37, 2 plates, and 13 text cuts.

era, and says that I have merged all the subgenera recognized by Hellmayr in his recent excellent monograph of the Paridæ in *Parus* and that "my treatment of this and allied families is far less satisfactory, and less consistent and rational, than the recent revision of these groups by Hellmayr." Needless to say I am not of the same opinion. The reviewer does not explain in which way my treatment is inferior to that of Hellmayr. The one point he objects to is, that I have no use for subgenera. This, however, is a matter of opinion, and the omission of subgenera does not make a work inferior. In my opinion subgenera are an unnecessary impediment. If a number of species is to be grouped into various sections, this is better done under nameless headings, such as "Blue Tits," "Grey Tits" etc., or A, B, C. but if a name is given to these sections — which of course have not generic value, or else they would be recognized as genera — it leads to some persons adopting these names, others not, and some even using both names! This inconsistent treatment may be seen every day. Every student of palæarctic Paridæ must come to the conclusion, that the genus *Parus*, as limited by me, cannot be split into full genera: nevertheless a "subgenus" *Cyanistes* (among others) is recognized by some authors. What is the result? Most authors call the "Blue Titmouse," the type of the "subgenus" *Cyanistes* as usual *Parus cæruleus*, others make use of the subgeneric name and call it *Cyanistes cæruleus*, others again call it *Parus (Cyanistes) cæruleus*. All this is avoided by not giving a name to the so-called subgenera, regarding them merely as sections, tribes or subdivisions and calling them group A, B, C, etc., or the Black-and-white group, group with yellow or without yellow, etc. I fail to see entirely for what purpose subgenera are recognized and named, if no use is made of their names; on the other hand it is not scientific to treat them as genera, because, as in the present case, they cannot be separated by any constant characters, and I object to using both names, *i. e.* that of the genus and subgenus, because it makes our nomenclatorial apparatus unnecessarily cumbersome. Ergo: my most decided opinion is that "subgenera" are unnecessary and undesirable.

Except in the absence of subgenera my work differs from that of Mr. Hellmayr in the following points: I have combined still more allied forms as subspecies, added some formerly unknown forms and corrected a few errors. I do not deny my very strong tendency to combine allied forms as subspecies. My reviewer says that I have done this "sometimes apparently without satisfactory reasons therefor, as where *Parus sclateri* of Mexico is made a subspecies of *Parus palustris*, although separated geographically by thousands of miles. . . ." This treatment is, in my opinion, only apparently, but not really "unsatisfactory." My critic has never seen *Parus dejeani* nor *Parus hypermelæna*, or he might more likely have said that they were indistinguishable from *Parus sclateri*, and *P. dejeani* and *hypermelæna* are in my opinion connected by intermediate forms with *palustris*, and therefore subspecies. All this I have carefully explained in my book. These are difficult forms and difficult questions, to the study of which I have devoted the best part of a winter, with a material never seen before by one

man at the same time, and not easily brought together again, since many museums and friends sent me whole collections and single specimens for study, in addition to the wonderful material in the Tring-Museum, the results of many years of labour and expense. I do not think that such intricate questions can be criticized and declared to be "apparently unsatisfactory," unless the critic himself has devoted months of study to the subject.

Whether my work is inferior to that of my friend Hellmayr will soon become apparent, because the latter author will before long publish a new review of the Paridæ of the world, and I am in the happy position to predict that Mr. Hellmayr will adopt practically all my alterations. In fact I have discussed many questions with him and we have finally agreed in all of them.

I have of course no objection to my kind critic's different views on certain points — in fact science is often benefited by the ventilation of various views — but I do object to the statement that there are "certain eccentricities" in my book. It is quite possible and even probable that certain of my conclusions are erroneous, for every human being makes mistakes sometimes, but my conclusions are not jumped at without critical studies, they are not combinations of "happy ideas" or the dangerous outbursts of a "brilliant mind" — but they are the logical results of careful and painstaking investigations. They may be, as I have said, erroneous in certain cases, but they are not "eccentricities," and a perusal of my book should reveal this to every ornithologist.

ERNST HARTERT.

### Subgenera, and Other Matters.

WHILE Dr. Hartert is not alone in considering that subgenera "are unnecessary and undesirable," sympathizers with this view, taking naturalists at large, are apparently few and far between, judging by their works. In faunistic papers and in ordinary references to species, subgenera are preferably ignored, even by those who believe they subserve a useful purpose. In works of a classificatory character, as monographs, manuals, and systematic treatises on the birds of a large area or of particular countries, they should be no more omitted than the higher groups, since their use in the case of a large genus serves to indicate the relative degree of relationship of its different members.

To subdivide such genera into minor groups, and label them A, B, C, etc., or by some non-technical designation, as 'Blue' or 'Green,' in lieu of giving them a name by which they can be easily referred to as groups, only half meets the requirements of the case; it is only an ineffectual attempt to 'beat the devil round the bush.'

There is, and doubtless always will be, great diversity of opinion as to the proper limits of genera. Dr. Hartert, for example, is exceedingly con-