

Cooke on the Distribution of the American Egrets.¹— This circular consists of two maps showing by actual records the original distribution of the Egret, *Herodias egretta*, and the Snowy Egret, *Egretta candidissima*, with brief remarks upon their past and present range. “Fortunately,” says Prof. Cooke, “in the case of each of these species, breeding colonies still remain in the southern United States to serve as centers of distribution to the districts formerly included in the range.” So long however as States like Pennsylvania afford these birds no protection, and the pot hunter shoots at every “white crane” that strays north of the present limited breeding range, the outlook for the extension of this range to its former limits is discouraging.— W. S.

Fleming on a New Teal from the Andaman Islands.²— Mr. Fleming finds that six specimens of *Polionetta* recently received from North Reef Island, west of North Andaman, differ constantly from specimens of *P. albigularis* from South Andaman, and he proposes to separate them as *P. a. leucopareus*.— W. S.

Rubow's 'Life of the Common Gull.'³— This is an English translation of the original Danish edition already reviewed in these pages, with the same excellent series of illustrations.— W. S.

Gentry's 'Life-Histories'— A Belated Review.⁴— These volumes were not adequately reviewed when first issued, nor since, so far as the writer is aware. As if by common consent they have been very consistently ignored by American ornithologists. Although the writer believes that untrustworthiness in supposedly scientific work should be fully exposed, he has up to the present acquiesced in the silent treatment of Gentry's volumes. Now, after a lapse of more than 30 years, comes a case which shows how necessary it is for those to point out errors who are enabled to do so by familiarity with the subject or the man. It would not be necessary to discuss the character of a work so generally consigned to oblivion, were it not for the fact that it now seems to be taken seriously abroad. Mr. G. A. K. Marshall, in presenting a collection of the records of birds attacking butterflies (in *Trans. Ent. Soc. Lond.*, 1909, pp. 329-383) quotes freely

¹ Distribution of the American Egrets. By W. W. Cooke. Circular 84. Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Issued September 13, 1911. pp. 5.

² A New Teal from the Andaman Islands. By J. H. Fleming. *Proc. Biol. Soc. of Washington*, XXIV, pp. 215-216, Oct. 31, 1911.

³ The Life of | the Common Gull | told in Photographs | By | C. Rubow | Translated from the Danish | Witherby & Co. | 326 High Holborn, London, W. C. | 1911 — 8vo, [pp. 6], 25 illustrations from photographs from life.

⁴ Gentry, Thos. G. *Life-Histories of the birds of eastern Pennsylvania*. Vol. I, 399 pp. Published by the author, Philadelphia, 1876. Vol. II, 336 pp. Salem, Mass., 1877.

from Gentry's 'Life-histories,' he of course taking them for bona fide and reliable records, which they are not. A majority of Mr. Marshall's records for North America come from these books.

The writer is not the first to take exception to the quality of Gentry's works, as anyone can learn by consulting Dr. C. Hart Merriam's review of the 'Illustrations of Nests and Eggs of Birds of the United States' in the Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, Vol. VII, No. 4, Oct., 1882, pp. 246-249.

The phase of the 'Life-Histories of the Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania' with which we are at present most interested is the voluminous records of bird food which the book contains. It is averred in the preface that more than 700 stomachs of birds were examined. For many of the species of birds lists of from 20 to more than 50 specifically named vegetable and animal food items are given, and the writer is shrewd enough to give quite an appearance of plausibility to these accounts, in that they conform in a way to the commonly observed feeding habits, and the carnivorous or vegetarian tastes of the species. It is manifest, however, that an investigator cannot present lists of from 20 to 50 insects and seeds for more than a hundred species of birds from the examination of 700 stomachs. Seven stomachs per species would certainly not yield so great a variety of items in condition to be fully identified — they might yield no more than three or four. An obtrusive feature of the lists is the recurrence of the same insect names over and over again. These things are against all experience in stomach examination.

Let us examine definite cases in which our glib author goes astray. In his account of the food of the Mourning Dove (Vol. II, p. 304) he lists 8 kinds of insects specifically besides grasshoppers. One is a species of *Harpalus*, a large and hard insect which would perhaps be the last we should expect a dove to swallow. Examinations of more than 250 stomachs in the Biological Survey, and of more than 220 by Mr. E. A. Schwarz of the Bureau of Entomology, show the Mourning Dove to be almost a complete vegetarian. A list of 12 binomial "identifications" is included in the account of the Hawk Owl, a species which occurs in Pennsylvania only in severe winters, and very rarely then. On one page Gentry says he has often seen this bird feeding, while on another he says it is only occasionally met with. Lizards and *Plethodon erythronotus* are mentioned as food items, but it is not explained how this northern breeding bird would get these southerly forms which are dormant during its visits to their range. The same remarks apply to his citation of *Plethodon erythronotus* and *Pseudotriton [Spelerpes] ruber* as food of the Snowy Owl. The Rough-legged Hawk is said to feed on many snakes, frogs, shrews, moles, bats, weasels and birds, items that subsequent stomach examinations have yielded rarely, if at all.

Six species of spiders are listed as prey of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a better record than the Biological Survey has been able to get from the examination of 59 stomachs, and the assistance of the foremost arach-

nologist in the country. Gentry records several species of lepidopterous larvæ as food of nestling Chimney Swifts and Nighthawks, when in fact the food of the young of these species does not vary appreciably from that of the adults and the latter take very few caterpillars.

Twenty species of insects are recorded as food of the Olive-sided Flycatcher, a rare species in eastern Pennsylvania, almost as long a list as the Biological Survey has been able to accumulate from an examination of 63 stomachs. Suspiciously full notes are given for such rare species (in Pennsylvania) as the White-winged Crossbill, Mourning, Connecticut, and Cerulean Warblers. We may inquire also into his statements as to the occurrence of the birds themselves. For instance he says (Vol. I, p. 311) of the White-crowned Sparrow, "from the 20th of April to the middle of May it congregates in flocks of a dozen or more . . . Whilst writing, May 4, vast numbers are daily observed within our gardens and the adjoining fields." The facts are that this sparrow is rare everywhere east of the Alleghenies, and probably never have vast numbers been seen about Philadelphia.

If this work of Gentry's were scientifically accurate, it would now rank as a classic. But regarded with suspicion at first and latterly ignored, its most obvious defect is that it looks too good. Gentry even claims to have identified the eggs and pupæ of certain species of *Cratonychus* (now *Melanotus*), a thing which is to-day impossible for even the best coleopterists.

The 'Life-Histories of the Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania' must be known then as a dangerous mixture of fact and unfact. Its accuracy in some respects gives it a deceptive appearance of verity, but with regard to the records of bird food it is certain that the only safe course is to regard them as almost entirely products of the author's imagination.— W. L. M.

African Economic Ornithology.— An important paper by Austin Roberts distinguishes that writer as a pioneer expounder of the 'Economics of Ornithology in South Africa.'¹ The author considers birds in relation to grain, fruit, poultry, and stock, and also gives a list of scavengers, and of birds suggested for protection. Mr. Roberts says: "Before the advent of white men in South Africa birds affected even the primitive agriculture of the natives; the patchy fields of corn had to be guarded against the same granivorous birds which now trouble us. But the conditions of that time differed widely from those obtaining now, as the grain fields were small and easily protected . . . Soon after the settlement of the country by white men a new feature arose in the introduction of cultivated fruit. Frugivorous birds, formerly dependent upon the precarious supplies of Nature, soon learned to appreciate the better quality and greater quantity placed within their reach, and it is not surprising that they forsook the

¹ Agr. Journ. Union of S. Africa, I, No. 3, April, 1911, pp. 352-369.