

CORRESPONDENCE.

EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':

Anent "sight" records, the following has come to my attention and seems to be worthy of presentation. It is not a joke, but we have here the untrained observer who is sure of what he has seen and records the details minutely. I quote the letter verbatim, written under date of December 11, 1917:

"On the 9th of December between 1:30 and 2 o'clock, under bright sunny conditions and with temperature around 10 or 15 degrees above zero, I was taking photographs in the village of —— Rockland County. Mr. ——, artist, of —— and Mr. ——, farmer, of —— were with me at the time and support my statement from their own independent observations.

"We saw several times, two male scarlet tanagers. They did not seem to be disturbed by the cold but flew around from tree to tree apparently seeking food. There could be absolutely no mistake as it was in an open country with only scattered trees and a fresh fall of snow on the ground that brought their bright plumage out in strong contrast. . . . I wish to emphasize the fact that there could be no doubt as to these birds as I am familiar with the birds, seeing them almost yearly in the woods around —— in the spring of the year and I saw them several times that morning for a period of twenty minutes to half an hour and at a distance varying from fifty to a hundred feet. Mr. —— and Mr. —— will be very glad to submit statements if you care to have them. You can do what you care to with this statement."

Comment is almost superfluous. The writer did not know that the Scarlet Tanager in autumn changes his red coat for a yellow-green one so that the birds he saw could not have been of this species. Most of us can guess what he really did see, but that is just what is the matter with so many "sight" records. Truly "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Yours truly,

JONATHAN DWIGHT.

New York, Feb. 1, 1918.

[The undersigned has already presented the "sight" record problem to the readers of 'The Auk' (1917, p. 373), and to the members of the A. O. U. at the last stated meeting. He hoped for some suggestions — some approval or criticism of the tentative solution he offered, but no one seems inclined to discuss the question. Even Dr. Dwight in presenting this interesting and instructive example, fails to offer any advice. It should not be difficult for any editor to reject this record but there are others just as erroneous where the fault is by no means so easily detected.— W. S.]