

RECENT LITERATURE.

'A Practical Handbook of British Birds.'— So rapidly does ornithological knowledge increase that new books upon the birds of any country seem to be always in order. Even in England with its wealth of ornithological literature there seems to be a need for a new general work on the bird life, and this being the case none are better able to produce the desired volume than the authors who are associated in the present undertaking.¹

From the introductory note we learn that the work is to consist of keys to the species, subspecies and higher groups; full descriptions prepared on a uniform plan and covering all the plumages and molts, the resources of Lord Rothschild's collections and those of the British Museum having been drawn upon, in this connection. Field characters are also to be described as well as breeding habits, food, geographic distribution and migration; the various authors dealing with the subjects upon which they are authorities.

The present part deals with the Corvidæ, Sturnidæ, Oriolidæ and part of the Fringillidæ. The nomenclature follows that of the 'Hand List' for which several of the authors are responsible, and there are references to the original description of each species as well as to several of the standard works on British birds. Then follows a very complete description with a short paragraph giving the names and characters of the allied continental races, but where two races occur in the British Isles they are both treated at length under separate headings. Under breeding habits are given a brief description of the nest and eggs, with measurements; a statement of the breeding season, length of incubation, fledgling period, etc. The food is briefly summarized and the character and extent of the migratory movement is given, with average and extreme dates. The definiteness and compactness of the whole treatment are admirable and only those who have attempted to collect such information about even our commonest birds can appreciate the difficulty and the labor that are involved. In spite of the vast amount of published matter relating to American birds we doubt if such a compilation on the North American avifauna would be possible today. Let any one make the attempt regarding the birds of his own neighborhood and he will be surprised at the many points about which information is lacking.

Part I, the editor tells us, was printed before the war, but its issue was suspended, so that certain additions are necessary to bring it up to date.

¹ A Practical Handbook of British Birds. Edited by H. F. Witherby, F. Z. S., M. B. O. U., Editor of British Birds (Mag.) Authors of the Various Sections; Ernst Hartert, Ph. D. M. B. O. U., Annie C. Jackson, H. M. B. O. U., Rev. F. R. C. Jourdain, M. A., M. B. O. U., C. Oldham, F. Z. S., M. B. O. U., Norman F. Ticehurst, M. A., F. R. C. S., M. B. O. U., and the Editor. Illustrated with Colored Plates and Numerous Text Figures. London, Witherby & Co., High Holborn, W. C. 1. In Eighteen Parts. Part I (pp. 1-64). March 3, 1919. Price 4s. net per part.

The Shetland Starling is added at the end of the introductory note and other emendations are made on the cover, all of which will be properly incorporated in an appendix in the last part of the work.

Illustrations are numerous but are intended, as is explained, solely as an aid to identification. They are mainly line cuts of heads, bills and feet, etc., and there is one excellent colored plate of the "juvenile" plumages of various finches.

We shall look forward with interest to the succeeding parts of this important work which should easily become the authoritative book of reference upon the British avifauna.— W. S.

Harris's 'Birds of the Kansas City Region.' — Mr. Harry Harris, already well known to the readers of 'The Auk' through his historical articles on Auduboniana, Harris's Sparrow, etc., has prepared an admirable annotated list of the birds of the vicinity of Kansas City, Mo.,¹ where he has resided for many years. The list treats mainly of Jackson County, Mo., but includes also Clay and Platte Counties in that state as well as Johnson County, Kansas and some notes from other adjacent territory.

Under each species is given a brief general statement of the character of its occurrence and then follows an account of its distribution, migration, etc., and some information upon habits, running sometimes to half a page or even more. At the end is a list of species arranged according to time of occurrence, with migrants in order of their arrival in the spring; and also an excellent bibliography.

Mr. Harris's writings are characterized by their high literary quality and great care in editing, and we only wish that all writers would follow his example in these respects.

The paper is a welcome contribution to the ornithology of a region that has not received much detailed attention in the past and it should do much to stimulate bird study throughout the Kansas City region. As a composition and a piece of printing it may well be taken as a model by those contemplating similar lists.

There is one point which calls for comment and that is the quotation of the names given in the 'Lists of Proposed Changes in the A. O. U. Check-List' which are published each year in 'The Auk,' although the author is to be commended for giving them only as alternates to the names in the last edition of the 'Check-List.' Curiously enough he seems to have entirely misunderstood these lists and quotes the names as "proposed" at the dates on which the lists were published. They are simply changes "proposed" by various writers at various times prior to the issue of the list, but usually during the previous year, and are brought together simply for the convenience of the A. O. U. Committee and others who wish to

¹ Birds of the Kansas City Region, Harry Harris. Transactions of the Academy of Science of St. Louis. Vol. XXIII, No. 8., pp. 219-371. Issued February 27, 1919. With an introduction (pp. 213-218) by Ralph Hoffmann.