

RECENT LITERATURE.

Bent's 'Life Histories of North American Petrels and Pelicans and their Allies'¹—This constitutes the third volume of Mr. Bent's great work on the life histories of North American birds, the preceding issues covering the Auks, Grebes and Loons; and the Gulls and Terns.

In character and method of treatment it follows exactly the earlier volumes and the author maintains the standard of excellence that he established at the commencement of the work. The amount of research that he has undertaken and the accuracy and satisfactory character of his accounts can only be appreciated after continued use of his volumes and we can better understand the benefits that we are to derive from the present work by having had its predecessors at our elbow for constant reference since the time of their appearance. We are delighted to find the paper used for both text and half-tone plates of better quality and more opaque than that formerly employed which makes a book more worthy of the valuable matter that it presents. For some reason not stated the color plates of eggs which formed a prominent feature of the first and second volumes are entirely omitted. Whether these are to be omitted from the future parts we do not know but they will be greatly missed by oölogists.

Having spoken of the character of the work and the make-up of the book, for both of which we have only praise, it remains to comment on the nomenclature. Heretofore as the author states he has adhered strictly to the 1910 edition of the A. O. U. 'Check-List' but in the present volume "it seems best to adopt the names that will probably appear in the new check list, so far as they are now understood by the author."

This statement is to say the least astonishing as no member of the committee has at the present time any knowledge of what names will "probably appear" in the new list, except as regards those contained in the two supplements that have been printed, and it is hardly to be supposed that any member would suggest his own preferences as those likely to be adopted. Yet without some suggestion from the committee we are at a loss to understand how Mr. Bent can form any idea of what their action will be. He makes a number of changes without a word of explanation as to why he does so or whose action he is following. For instance, *Oceanodroma socorroensis* of the 'Check-List' appears as *O. monorhis socorroensis* but when we read the text to ascertain why the author thought that the A. O. U. Committee would make this change we find that Godman considered *socorroensis* and *monorhis* as synonymous but that the author "has not been able to examine sufficient material to warrant hazarding

¹ Life Histories of North American Petrels and Pelicans and their Allies. Order Tubinares and Order Steganopodes. By Arthur Cleveland Bent of Taunton, Massachusetts. Bulletin 121. United States National Museum 1922. pp. I-XII + 1-343. pll. 1-69. For sale at the Government Printing Office. Superintendent of Documents at 80 cents per copy.

an opinion on the matter". Making a change under such circumstances seems utterly unwarranted and it is just such action that causes much of our confusion in nomenclature. So also we find *Sula leucogastra* changed to *S. leucogastris* with no word of comment although this seems to be an innovation of the author and should at least be accompanied by some explanation.

In only a very few cases does Mr. Bent give definite reasons for the changes that he makes usually contenting himself with the statement that "this name is now generally recognized." This is to be regretted since it would have been of inestimable assistance to the A. O. U. Committee to have had his reasons for every change. In some instances the use of a new name is positively misleading to the reader; *Puffinus cuneatus* for instance appears as *P. pacifica* in the heading and index but our author calls it *cuneatus* in the text and makes no reference to or explanation of the name *pacifica*.

Frankly we regret to see nomenclature dragged into a work of this kind where in our opinion it is entirely out of place, the changes confuse the average reader while the lack of explanation leaves even the expert in the dark as to why they have been made.

In running over the pages of Mr. Bent's work we are struck with the number of species whose North American status rests upon Townsend specimens alleged to have been taken off the coast of Oregon. As is well known Townsend returned by way of Cape Horn and collected specimens off the coast of Chile and at other points in the southern seas, several of these were described as from Oregon and the probability that these specimens of Tubinares came from more southern regions has always seemed to us very strong.

Every student of American birds will look forward to the appearance of Mr. Bent's succeeding volumes with the greatest interest and will agree with us, we are sure, that this work will rank as one of the most important of those which deal with the North American avifauna.—W. S.

Sachtleben on the Birds of Lithuania.¹—This report, which constitutes the bird portion of Stechow's 'Natural History of Lithuania and Adjacent Country' is a minute study of the characters and variations exhibited by the birds inhabiting the region. The subspecies are worked out with great care and an abundance of measurements is presented based mainly upon a collection made during 1918 and many individual specimens are discussed at length under the heading of "variation."

There are also tables showing the subspecific forms of many species in six different districts extending across Europe from Russia to the British

¹ Beiträge zur Natur- und Kulturgeschichte Lithauens und angrenzender Gebiete, von E. Stechow. Vögel von Dr. H. Sachtleben. Mit. I Tafel. Abhandlungen der math.-phys. Klasse der Bayer. Akad. der Wissenschaften. Supl.-Band. I. Abhandlung. pp. 1-232. Munich 1922.