

LOOKING BACKWARD.¹

BY T. S. PALMER.

REMINISCENCE and retrospection may not be considered accompaniments of progress but at times it is well worth while to pause long enough to review the past in preparation for the future. Only in some such way is it possible to measure progress in the course we are traveling. Such a point has been reached by the American Ornithologists' Union and the completion of the fourth decade of its existence affords a fitting opportunity to summarize briefly the main features in its development and, in the words of Coues, to see how successful it has been in "bearing to others the torch received in earlier days."²

Forty years ago, in September, 1883, a little group of enthusiastic bird students met in New York to form the American Ornithologists' Union. Although modeled on the lines of the British Ornithologists' Union, which had been founded a quarter of a century previously, the A. O. U. was modified to meet American conditions and at the same time built on foundations broad enough to support an international organization. While the initial meeting was held in New York, the idea of the Union first took definite form in Cambridge, the home of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, and the Nuttall Club very generously bequeathed to the Union its journal and furnished the first editor as well.

In the years that have passed many changes have occurred, new workers have taken the places of earlier leaders and new lines of work then little dreamed of have since been developed. This is not the time or place to review the history of the Union in detail but merely to outline those features which have made it what it is today.

Officers.—In the forty years of its existence the Union has had thirteen presidents, thirteen vice presidents, three secretaries, five treasurers and two editors. Thirty-four Fellows have served on

¹ Presented at the 41st Stated Meeting of the Union in Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 9, 1923.

² Dedication in 'Key to North American Birds,' 2d ed., 1884.

the Council, thirty-one by election and three ex officio and eleven of these subsequently reached the presidency. Three presidents, J. A. Allen, D. G. Elliot and John H. Sage were elected without previous service as vice president and Dr. Allen held the office seven years, Elliot, Ridgway and Cory two years, and the others three. Dr. Allen also served the Union as editor for the twenty-eight years, 1883-1911 inclusive, and his successor, Dr. Stone, has successfully piloted 'The Auk' for the last twelve years. Other long terms of service were those of John H. Sage as secretary for the twenty-eight years, 1889-1917, Jonathan Dwight as treasurer for seventeen years, 1903-1920, and William Dutcher for sixteen years 1887-1903. Dr. Merriam is the only Fellow who has filled all four offices of secretary, treasurer, vice president and president. The Council originally consisting of the five regular officers and five additional members was increased to seven additional members under the new By-Laws adopted in 1887, later still further enlarged by making all ex-presidents ex officio members, reaching its maximum of twenty-one members in 1920. Dr. Allen was elected to the Council after he had served as president and before the adoption of the provision regarding ex-presidents, and Coues and Ridgway after they had served as vice presidents. Sage, Palmer and McAtee are the only members who have not been elected directly as Councilors. While the Union has never lost any of its regular officers by death during their terms of office, eleven of the thirty-four Fellows who have served on the Council are now deceased and of these only Geo. N. Lawrence and Thomas McIlwraith died after retiring from the Council.

Members.—It is interesting to notice that the original limitations on number and qualifications of members have been preserved practically as adopted at the first meeting. The only important changes have been the substitution of the designation Fellow for Active Member, Honorary Fellow for Foreign Member and Corresponding Fellow for Corresponding Member, the addition of a new class of Members in 1901, and Retired Fellows in 1910, and the extension of the residence of Associates to include both North and South America. Several efforts to increase the number of Fellows beyond 50 have resulted in the addition of a class of Members limited to 100. The original members designated as

Founders numbered 23 and at the first meeting elected 24 Active, 21 Foreign, 20 Corresponding and 87 Associate Members. Apparently all the candidates did not qualify as the total number of members reported at the beginning of the second meeting was 143 instead of 175. Five years later the total number had doubled but not until the 10th meeting in 1892 did the membership pass 500, not until the 32d meeting in 1914 did it reach 1000, and not until the 41st meeting in 1923 did it pass 1500. The present number is about 1650. The membership has increased regularly except during four years when decreases of ten were reported in 1901, 110 in 1906, 10 in 1911 and 326 in 1916, the last decrease following a change from autumn to spring meetings and a drastic revision of the list of delinquents. The total number of Fellows elected during the 40 years has been 92 of which 49 are now carried on the rolls as Fellows, five as Retired Fellows and one, Montague Chamberlain, as a Corresponding Fellow. Twenty-nine are dead, seven have resigned and one failed to qualify. Of those who resigned, H. B. Bailey, Prof. S. A. Forbes and Dr. F. W. Langdon are still living. The total number of Honorary Fellows elected has been 58, of whom 23 are still on the roll and 35 deceased. About 150 Members have been elected of whom 21 have been advanced to Fellows, 95 are still on the roll, 12 are deceased, and the others have dropped out or failed to qualify. On the average one Fellow, one Honorary Fellow and four Members have been elected each year since these classes were established.

Committees.—The committees of the Union naturally fall in three groups, routine, service and research. Routine committees, more or less temporary in character, include those on arrangements, auditing and resolutions, which are appointed for each meeting, and the special committees on constitution and by-laws and the Audubon Monument. Service committees include those on publications, preparation of 'The Auk' Indexes, and on bird protection. A number of research committees have been appointed from time to time, some of which have been very active while others have failed to function. At the first meeting the following 6 committees were appointed on Revision of Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds, on Migration of Birds, on Avian Anatomy, on Oölogy, on the European House Sparrow and on Faunal Areas.

The committee on Nomenclature has been perhaps the most active of all the committees and its work has been most fully published. The investigations of the committees on migration, faunal areas or distribution, and the English Sparrow developed to such an extent that they soon outgrew the resources of the Union and upon the organization of the Division of Economic Ornithology in the United States Department of Agriculture the material which they had collected was turned over to that office and subsequently published. The committee on Avian Anatomy continued to make reports for several years but the committee on Oölogy apparently lapsed into innocuous desuetude. At the early meetings extended reports were made by each of the committees and their consideration occupied a considerable part of the business sessions.

Publications.—The publications of the Union include 40 volumes of 'The Auk', with two general Indexes; six separate volumes, and several smaller miscellaneous publications. 'The Auk' alone includes 19,875¹ pages (plus 1262 pages of membership lists and contents) and the entire series of publications would easily fill a seven foot shelf. The separate volumes comprise three editions of the 'Check List of North American Birds' issued in 1886, 1895 and 1910, and three reports based on the early work of the A. O. U. committees but published by other organizations, viz., bulletins on the 'English Sparrow' and 'Bird Migration in the Mississippi Valley' issued as Bulletins 1 and 2 of the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture; and Belding's 'Land Birds of the Pacific District' published by the California Academy of Sciences. These substantial reports were based on the work of the committees on the English Sparrow and Geographic Distribution. The miscellaneous publications include two editions of the 'Code of Nomenclature,' an abridged edition of the first 'Check List' printed on one side of the page, a pocket edition of the 3d 'Check List,' a presidential address by Dr. J. A. Allen entitled 'A Seven Years Retrospect,' and two early bulletins on bird protection originally issued in 'Science' and published in separate form by 'Forest and Stream.'

Publications about the Union include the series of official reports of the annual meetings which have been included regularly in

¹ The figures were carefully checked; those given on p. 717 of October 1923 'Auk' were in part estimated and the number of volumes there credited to Dr. Allen should be 28 instead of 26.—EDITOR

'The Auk,' accounts of the early meetings, some of them quite full, which appeared in 'Forest and Stream,' the 'Ornithologist and Oologist,' 'Science,' and the 'American Naturalist' and reports of recent ones in 'Bird Lore,' and of the Chicago meeting in 'The Wilson Bulletin.' An account of the Union and its work prepared by Dr. J. A. Allen was published in 'Bird Lore' for 1899 and a later one by the Secretary in the 'American Museum Journal' for 1918.

Meetings.—The meetings of the Union may perhaps be described as a general clearing house for activities in American ornithology. To these annual gatherings are brought the results of investigations already completed, accounts of investigations under way, and plans for future work. Members find the annual congress a convenient time to bring specimens, references or other material for comparison or verification in the museums or libraries. Points of contact are established which often have far reaching results in future investigations. Here the younger members become personally acquainted with men whom they have previously known only through publications and here the older men meet the younger workers and frequently improve the opportunities to select assistants or promising field collectors.

In the call for the first meeting one of the objects of the organization was well stated as "the promotion of social and scientific intercourse between American ornithologists." At first attention was so closely focused on organization and business that one of the members who attended the second or third meeting complained that there was no adequate opportunity for social intercourse outside the regular sessions. This was soon remedied by the daily luncheons, informal dinners, and later by the annual dinners. Routine business and reports of committees which at first occupied most of the general sessions have now been crowded into business sessions one day ahead of the public meetings, the meetings of the Council in the forenoon, of the Fellows in the afternoon and for elections and transaction of general business in the evening. The Friday following the public sessions is usually occupied by a field trip or visit to some point of ornithological interest which affords the members still better opportunity for social intercourse. The public meetings likewise have undergone a decided change or

evolution. The reading of local lists has been practically discontinued and papers illustrated simply by specimens have been restricted to technical sessions since the larger audiences make it impossible to demonstrate specimens satisfactorily. Still more marked are the improvements in illustration. Slides of mounted birds soon gave way to photographs of birds in the field, at first uncolored but now usually colored, then came moving pictures; until now an afternoon is usually devoted to the latest and best work of cinema artists and on the same screen under exactly the same conditions are shown the latest examples of work with the camera. On several occasions exhibitions of bird paintings and photographs have been held in connection with the meetings and have attracted unusual interest. In short every feature developed by any of the ornithological organizations has been adopted by the A. O. U. with the single exception of the extended camping outings arranged by our Australian confreres.

Looking back over the forty years the Union can well point with pride to its record in laying a firm foundation for still greater accomplishments in the future.

1939 Biltmore St., Washington, D. C.

A NEW RACE OF SPIZITORNIS PARULUS.

BY ALEXANDER WETMORE AND JAMES L. PETERS.

In a recent paper¹ the junior author referred specimens of *Spizitornis parulus* taken in the Gobernación de Rio Negro, Argentina to the subspecies *patagonicus* (described by Hellmayr from Neuquen) though at the same time it was noted that birds from Bariloche and Rio Colorado, Rio Negro, as well as specimens from Potrerillos, Mendoza did not quite agree with Hellmayr's diagnosis. We have recently assembled a representative series of *Spizitornis parulus* from various parts of its range, including several fine examples of the typical form from Chile, and two specimens from General Roca, Rio Negro which may be considered as topotypes

¹ Notes on some summer birds from northern Patagonia, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., vol. 65, May, 1923, pp. 277-337.