

The necessity of death to maintain life, the inevitable tragedy of life are brought out in every chapter, and the lesson is clear that man, in these respects, is one with his small brethren—although the play may be longer drawn out. Despite this kinship, man, who has at least the possibilities of thought and consideration, harries, maims, and destroys the wild things often at the very height of their loves, and seals the doom of the young for which they were so gallantly striving and sacrificing. The book should touch all hearts capable of sympathy and should help to bring about more tolerant and kindly relations between man and his Sun Brothers.

The scenes of the book are in southwestern England. Nine of the tales relate to mammals, seven to birds, one to a weed, and one to an unknown (a ghost that was a dream). They exhibit much ingenuity of plot, and evidence literary craftsmanship throughout. Unusual words seem a hobby of the writer, and a glossary of them would have been a help.—W. L. M.

**The Buff-backed Egret** (*Ardea ibis* L., Arabic *Abu Qerdan*) **as a Factor in Egyptian Agriculture.**<sup>1</sup>—The paper named contains an exposition under the numerical system of the contents of the stomachs of 139 Buff-backed Egrets. The economic status of the various food items is discussed, an estimate made of the kind and quantity of food, and a balance sheet given of credit and debit food items of an individual of the species for the year. The paper is by an entomologist and was planned to prove the fallacy of Bonhote's statement<sup>2</sup> that crops to the value of two or three million pounds are saved by these birds in Egypt in one year is "enormously exaggerated." Having chosen his windmills the author soon emulates Don Quixote. While he considers "all indiscriminately predacious insects as beneficial" (p. 17), he fails to apply the same criterion to the Egret as it so well deserves, and does not recognize the compensations there are for larger predators feeding on smaller ones. He credits predacious insects and spiders as being beneficial although it is hard to understand how this can be under his criteria when their food must be drawn from the ranks of insects in general like those eaten by the Egret, most of which he gives some such annotation as "not known to be of economic importance," "not known to cause any appreciable damage," etc. If these things are true of the Egret's prey they are much more likely to be true of the smaller and less well known prey of the beetles and spiders. The Egret is debited with a considerable annual consumption of beneficial diptera, yet at the same time it is said of the disease carrying house fly, "the few millions destroyed by *Abu Qerdans* can hardly make any difference in the incredibly large fly population of the country" (p. 21). Nevertheless, he says that the *Syrphus* flies "are extremely beneficial insects, their larvae destroying immense

<sup>1</sup> Kirkpatrick, T. W. Bul. 56, Tech. & Sci. Service, Ministry of Agriculture, Egypt, 1925, 28 pp.

<sup>2</sup> Reviewed in *The Auk*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Jan. 1923, pp. 162-163.

numbers of Aphides" (p. 20). It is obvious we have to do with special pleading by one who has not had sufficient experience in food habit research to establish a proper perspective. On the whole we must abide by economic tendencies of groups, and for the sake of common fairness apply the same criteria throughout. On the face of the author's tabulations of food items the reviewer would reckon the Buff-backed as a voracious feeder, of preponderantly beneficial food habits. The note added to the title page (Recommended for publication by the Publication Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture, which is not, as a body, responsible for the opinions expressed herein), whether peculiar to this paper or not, is very well conceived.—W. L. M.

### The Ornithological Journals.

**Bird-Lore.** XXVII, No. 4. July–August, 1925.

How a Family of Hermit Thrushes Came to Camp. By Henry A. Carey. With excellent photographic studies at Pocono Lake, Pa.

Bird-Life on an Oklahoma 'Oil Lease.' By Viahnett S. Martin.

Three Young Ospreys. By Fremont C. Peck.—With photographs.

"Those House Wrens." By S. Prentiss Baldwin.

The Solution of the Problem. By Allan Brooks.

Once More, the House Wren. By Mrs. Charles F. Weigle.

A Summer of Bluebird Tragedies. By Mrs. Arthur F. Gardner.

A Bit of Evidence. By Harriet C. Battell.

The House Wren: Pro and Con. By S. C. Swanson and Sons.—The six articles just listed present varied experiences with the House Wren, much of the evidence being at variance. Mr. Baldwin and Major Brooks come to quite different conclusions. The latter, curiously enough, while he believes in "interfering with the so-called balance of nature to the fullest extent by killing off all Crows, Magpies, squirrels, chipmunks, bird-killing Hawks and Owls and snakes," and puts House Wrens in the same category, does not destroy neighboring cats, mainly because he recognizes them as the best check on the white-footed mouse, "an inveterate enemy of birds and birds' nests." This view on the cat problem is so at variance with all that has been published by state and national conservationists and the practically universal experience of individuals, that we seem to be completely "up in the air" on the whole question. It is sincerely to be hoped that in our zeal to kill off such birds and mammals as each one of us feels he has convicted of some outrage, the entire fauna will not be wiped out. Personally we still endorse the views of the late Wm. Brewster, that a tract devoted to wild life conservation should be left as nature made it with no attempt by man to "improve" it, except to offset the changes that man himself has been responsible for. In the case of the Wren, as already stated, a check on promiscuous Wren boxes will probably adjust the matter.

Dr. A. A. Allen has an article on "Instinct and Intelligence in Birds" in the Audubon Society department and the Educational Leaflet by Dr. Pearson treats of the Water Turkey with a colored plate by Major Brooks.