

RECENT LITERATURE

Beecher on vegetation and birds' nests.¹—This is a valuable study of the nest site as a key to population densities, based on the birds nesting on a 482-acre upland marsh area in northern Illinois. The local plant communities are described in detail, their succession illustrated, and their physical characteristics analyzed for their substrate value in nest construction. Beecher is the first to measure carefully the minute vegetational blocks in a large avian community and to furnish statistical confirmation of Leopold's law of dispersion. He finds that population density increases directly with the number of feet of edge per unit area of the plant society. It is also shown to be correlated positively with increasing floristic complexity of the environment in terms of communities per one-quarter of an acre. The author points out that the life form of plants has limitations as an index of population density; he finds the sod-forming of *Poa*, the hummock-forming of *Calamagrostis*, and the stout stalks of *Typha* of great importance. Data are presented on the vertical and seasonal distribution of the nests of fifteen species. Beecher concludes that the simultaneous nesting of marsh birds is conditioned by the development of the vegetation: laying may be retarded in spite of the physiological maturity of the gonads. Statistics on the nesting of seventy-two species in seventeen vegetational types are given. These afford a valuable quantitative clue to the relationship of nest pattern to the vegetational substratum.

Beecher's discussion of his results displays sound ecological thinking. The die-hard school of ornithologists may choke over the tribute paid to the Greeks, but the few terms of the bio-ecologists are happily defined in the opening chapter. (Sample: "Eccesis. Invasion."): The present report is almost too much a model of condensation. The edge effect is demonstrated for a number of species but the actual use made of it is seldom clear. To give the density of ten Robin nests in 7.08 acres of thicket would seem to the reviewer to tell only part of the story. The character of the adjoining fields should affect the density, depending on the degree of ecological services (feeding, bathing, etc.) which they offer.

This study represents several seasons of preliminary field work and is based on week-end observations in 1937, when some 1200 nests were located. About sixty-four of these were rails! The volume is a monument to amateur ornithology and a credit to the Chicago scientists who encouraged and aided the author. The book is attractively bound and printed but without an index. Its publishers can well be proud of this sound contribution to bird ecology.—J. J. HICKEY.

Behle on Western Horned Larks.²—The far western subspecies of Horned Larks are found to have various degrees of differentiation and stability, some wide-ranging and locally variable, others restricted and relatively more homogeneous. Each has a differentiation center where the most typical individuals occur, while away from this area the population is progressively less typical until it may gradually blend into the adjacent subspecies. Lesser trends may occur within the limits of a single subspecies. Mr. Behle found large intermediate populations for whose origin he prefers the hypothesis of intermediate geographical differentiation rather

¹ Beecher, William J. 'Nesting Birds and the Vegetation Substrate.' Chicago Ornithological Society, Chicago, 8vo, iii + 69 pp., 1 aerial photo, 10 text figures. 1942. Price \$1.00 (at the Book Shop of the Field Museum, Chicago, Ill.).

² Behle, William H. 'Distribution and Variation of the Horned Larks (*Otocoris alpestris*) of Western North America.' Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., 46 (3): 205-316, figs. 1-13, May 20, 1942. \$1.25.

than that of hybridization, although he admits the probable existence of the latter process in certain cases and concludes that definite proofs of one or the other are lacking. He also considers the color of the soil to have been, and to be still, of considerable importance in the development of the various color differences since there is marked similarity in the dorsal coloration of the different subspecies and that of the soil on which they reside. The same condition may account for resemblances of distantly living forms to each other since the soil colors of their respective habitats are similar. Intensity of plumage color and humidity of climate also show correlation in general.

Separate origin of the two more recently described forms, *lamprochroma* and *utahensis*, in the dried up beds of two Pleistocene lakes is discussed to account for the existence of these two subspecies so near to each other. Much of the subspecific differentiation in the group is thought to have occurred since the Pleistocene. Isolation is conceded to have been an aid, but only an aid, in the speciation process, most effective when marked differences in environments exist or when environmental changes occurred simultaneously with the isolation.

The paper is well illustrated with distributional maps, and diagrams showing the individual, sexual and geographical variations of various measurements in the forms discussed. Molts and plumages and the ecological relationships of the Horned Larks are discussed and each form recognized by the author is treated in some detail.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Bent's 'Life Histories.'¹—This generous volume, the nineteenth of the series, begins the passerine birds and covers the four families listed in the title. As in previous numbers, Mr. Bent has culled information from a wide variety of sources, published and unpublished, to which he has added his own critical notes and observations. As before, much data and a few entire chapters have been supplied by various contributors to whom the author makes acknowledgement, but even with this assistance the amount and variety of material brought together is surprising. It is safe to say that no ornithologist, except the author of the volume, can read this work without learning many things new to him about the birds treated herein. Mr. Bent is to be congratulated on the passage of another milestone in his long task.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Birds around New York City.²—We have here a discussion in A. O. U. Check-List order of each species of bird known (or supposed in a few carefully considered cases) to have occurred in a New York City region (including Long Island and northern New Jersey). This is the area very thoroughly covered by keen and enthusiastic field students of birds, for whom the Linnaean Society of New York is a contact center. The region thus defined is treated as a whole.

A picture of each bird's distribution over the region is presented, its normal seasonal fluctuations in abundance, dates of arrival and departure if it is migratory, with abnormally early and late dates cited as such. If it breeds locally there is a statement of egg dates and number of broods. In estimating abundance, actual numbers which may be or have been observed in a day are given, and it is likely that this tangible data will be an even more interesting record in later years than at the time of writing.

¹ Bent, Arthur Cleveland. 'Life Histories of North American Flycatchers, Larks, Swallows, and their Allies.' U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 179, pp. xi, 555, pls. 1-70, 1942. \$1.00.

² Cruickshank, Allan D. 'Birds Around New York City, where and when to find them.' The American Museum of Natural History Handbook Series, No. 13, xvii + 489 pp., 55 pls., 1 map (end sheets), 1942. \$1.75.

The author's years of very active field observation in diverse parts of our region enable him to generalize from his own, and evaluate a mass of data from the records of the Linnaean Society and elsewhere which he has examined. In most cases a very satisfactory picture of the occurrence of the bird in question is presented. The correlation between fall migration and actual frost or freezing temperatures is probably overemphasized. These seem to be only one factor involved in a complicated pattern, and it is very questionable if carefully compiled statistics would bear out such correlations too well. A greater or more extended familiarity with certain included areas suggests some minor modifications of statement, and reminds us that the book is another stepping-stone, something to test and build on. The treatment of species whose movements are abnormal or complicated is less satisfactory than of others. A slight tendency is apparent to regiment them into a mould where they do not quite belong.

One can find statements which, if not erroneous, are somewhat misleading, such as that the Scarlet Tanager is noticeably scarce to unknown as a breeder even in ideal woodlands on the south shore of Long Island. Perhaps it is a reaction against the sanctity of the collected specimen, in a mostly field-glass observer, that leads the reviewer to call attention to Burggraf's cited winter specimen of the Migrant Shrike, which he examined hoping to substantiate the winter record, but found to be a rather small bird in the characteristic brownish, barred plumage of the winter immature Northern Shrike, as reported to the Linnaean Society at the time.

In the introductory chapters which precede treatment under species, in one on various habitats called 'ecological blocks,' dominant and sub-dominant birds are listed for each,—summer, spring and fall, and winter. This seems to the reviewer principally interesting in method, a method which might bring out significant facts in a better delimited field, but means little as here applied over so varied an area to a heterogeneous and poorly analyzed avifauna.

Under 'Seasonal Variation' the local birds are divided into groups by seasons with excellent judgement. Those called "casual or accidental," however, though they are rarely identified near New York, differ widely from one another in local status.

'The Ornithological Year,' the rise and fall of local bird life followed month by month, is an exceedingly clear, true, and well-written picture.

The attempt to establish the normal gives a valuable background for analysis of occurrence, and migration dates, but no attempt is made at real analysis of such data, that which might bear on the subject being frequently set aside as of no consequence. The word casual is used so freely that it is robbed of a specific meaning. Perhaps we have reached a point where no single volume will suffice for full discussion of the local avifauna.

Having examined 'Birds Around New York City,' perhaps too critically, it remains to say that it is an exceedingly attractive volume, full of previously unpublished information, to which we will all have frequent occasion to refer. It reflects not only the author's field experience and knowledge of local birds but something of his dynamic personality, and can be read with pleasure from cover to cover. The numerous photographs of birds in nature with which it is illustrated are chosen for their beauty. The reviewer's favorite is the Hooded Merganser drake, but each reader must suit himself.—J. T. NICHOLS.

Birds of southeastern Georgia.¹—This little work presents an annotated list of the birds of these two extensive areas of swamps, based principally on the author's own observations over a period of years but including also notes by a variety of other observers. Dates of occurrence of the rarer forms, local distribution, behavior, and such matters are given attention in varying degree. Local vernacular names of many of the species are added. An 'Okefinokee Shooting Record' for the years between 1926 and 1935, inclusive, shows the fluctuating abundance of the various species of ducks, the snipe, and the woodcock. A glossary of local topographical terms is appended and detailed sketch-maps show the configuration of the terrain. The list should form a useful basis for future work in the area.—J. T. ZIMMER.

An ancient bestiary.²—Although of primary importance to the bibliophile, medieval 'bestiaries' are historically interesting to zoologists as showing early stages in the development of the illustrated natural history and also demonstrating the antiquity of certain of the myths about animals, some of which still persist. The ancient and unique volume discussed in the present treatise occupies an important place in the family tree of this class of books and also throws new light on an old technique of quantity production of text and illustrations. It appears to have been prepared as a model for a proposed 'edition' of which no final copies are now known to exist. Several interesting conjectures with reference to this work are discussed.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Structure and function in scansorial birds.³—A woodpecker, a woodhewer, a nuthatch, a creeper, and a wren were critically examined to determine what structural modifications are held in common that are lacking in other birds without such habits. Such modifications were found only in the legs and feet except that when the methods of feeding and climbing are similar in detail in some of the birds studied, further similarities are noticeable in these particular cases. Thus the species that use the tail for support, like the woodpeckers, woodhewers, and creepers, but not the nuthatch and wren, have several features of tail-structure in common. The creeper and woodhewer which use their bills in similar manner have comparable modifications of the bill. All of them have adaptations for clinging to the sides of the trees—structural modifications to increase the leverage of particular muscles, devices to give more effective control of the claws, lengthened foreclaws, etc. These are largely primary adaptations formed by the modification of existing structures. Some preadaptations are noted but were found to be not easily recognizable; the short leg and zygodactyle foot of the woodpecker are considered as probable preadaptations since they occur in various non-climbing piceoideans. Incidental adaptations were not recognized as such in the study. The comparable structures were found to be homologous in every case and the adaptations are therefore classed as parallel rather than convergent. The study is an important contribution to the knowledge of the correlation of form and function.—J. T. ZIMMER.

¹ Hebard, Frederick V. 'Winter Birds of the Okefinokee and Coleraine. A Preliminary Check-List of the Winter Birds of the Interior of Southeastern Georgia.' Georgia Society of Naturalists, Bulletin No. 3: 84, X, 3 maps, December, 1941.

² Ives, Samuel A., and Lehmann-Haupt, Hellmut. 'An English 13th Century Bestiary. A new discovery in the technique of medieval illumination.' Pp. 1-45, figs. (plate) 1-5, 1942; H. P. Kraus, New York. \$1.85.

³ Richardson, Frank. 'Adaptive Modifications for Tree-trunk Foraging in Birds.' Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., 46 (4): 317-368, pls. 23-24; 16 text-figs., May 26, 1942. 75 cents.

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