

RECENT LITERATURE

Ecological geography.¹—There have been many efforts to classify the ecologic divisions of the North American continent in a way that would satisfy all the various biological fields, although it is doubtful if such a result is attainable. All forms of life do not conform to identical standards although all are interwoven in varying degrees of relationship. Whatever boundaries are put on the divisions, therefore, will always fail to delimit the ranges of many of the plants or animals that live in them and even the divisions, themselves, can not always be precisely bounded. The best that can be done is to examine as much of the evidence as possible and balance the factors equably.

This Dr. Dice has done in the present volume which he presents, not as a final classification but as an outline to bring the study up to date and stimulate future work. His arrangement is a fairly complex one, far different from the early designs of Merriam and others which have been so greatly criticized in recent years but which had the virtue of simplicity. With Dr. Dice's twenty-nine 'provinces' of equal rank, something of this simplicity has been lost. Perhaps it had to go with the increased knowledge of the times and perhaps some of it could be retained by grouping various of the 'provinces' together into larger divisions for generalized usage.

Be that as it may, even the biotic 'provinces' are divisible into 'biotic districts' and these into vertical 'life belts' made up of their own 'ecologic associations.' Some of these are discussed briefly in the present text. The 'provinces,' always continuous (except on marine islands) and thereby different from 'biomes,' are described in some detail—their geography, topography, geology, climate, flora, and fauna, at least in their salient features. Admittedly the flora has provided the principal basis for the deductions. Some of the 'provinces' will be found very similar to earlier divisions proposed under other names; some with familiar names, it will be noted, have considerably altered boundaries; most of them have been suggested at one time or another by previous writers, but some present new concepts. Previous authorities are cited in each case. Whatever the status in this respect, Dr. Dice has outlined the evidence on which he bases his acceptance of the 'province' as entitled to recognition. He has thus developed an interesting and careful classification and it now remains to be seen how well forthcoming knowledge of the distribution of different forms of life will be found to fit into the pattern here presented.—J. T. ZIMMER.

A study of the English Robin.²—During a period of four years, Mr. Lack carried out a series of observations and experiments on the behavior of the British Robin in a limited area in South Devon. Several formal reports have appeared in different scientific journals giving certain results of these studies and in the little volume at hand the entire investigation is summarized.

At the beginning of the study, all the Robins in the vicinity were marked with colored leg-bands for individual identification of the birds concerned. Many interesting facts were discovered and a generalized behavior pattern has been outlined, although Mr. Lack has been careful not to generalize until the same activity was observed at least six times. Individual idiosyncracies thus appear in their

¹ Dice, Lee R. 'The Biotic Provinces of North America.' Royal 8vo, viii + 78, 1 map (fold.), 1943. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. Price, \$1.75.

² Lack, David. 'The Life of the Robin.' 16mo, 1-200, 6 pls., 2 figs., 1943. H. F. & G. Witherby, Ltd., London. Price, 7s, 6d.

proper light. Territory was given its share of attention. Lack disputes the 'optimum spacing' theory and concludes that it is not the food value of the territory that determines its extent but rather that the size of the breeding population as a whole in a given area has considerable effect in determining the space claimed by each breeding male. The areas are not constant for individual birds from year to year.

Stuffed Robins were used to study the birds' reactions to intruders. It was found that a tuft of red breast feathers alone would induce attack whereas a complete specimen with the red breast camouflaged by brown color might be ignored. One of the most interesting observations concerns a female that had been attacking a mounted specimen for forty minutes and that, when the mount was removed, continued to attack the empty air at the place where the mount had been stationed.

Fighting is believed to be a compound behavior incompletely divisible into three parts—flying-in-pursuit, threat display, and actual striking, each with its own signal or releaser. These are, respectively, the sight of a small bird flying away, the sight of red breast feathers, and an object with the shape of a Robin. A stuffed specimen thus did not always induce all three parts of the reaction since it presented only part of the releasers.

Interesting calculations were made on the longevity and life-expectancy of the species based on individuals found dead. With ten or eleven years the usual maximum life-span, the life-expectancy at any age after the young bird has reached the date of August 1, is just over thirteen months. Seventy-seven per cent of the young die during their first year but only seventy-two per cent of those that live until August 1 die before the next August; sixty-two per cent of the adults die from one August to the next.

These are but samples of the details that Mr. Lack gives in his interesting account. There are discussions of song, pairing, fighting, care of nests and young, migration (indulged in only by females and not all of these), food and feeding, recognition, and tameness, and a digression on 'instinct.' Throughout, there are comparisons with the behavior of other species so that the treatment is rather more complete with respect to birds in general than the title indicates. The book, thus, gives not only a fine account of the life of a common species, less well known than might have been believed, but something also about birds in general.—
J. T. ZIMMER.

Nature on a Welsh island.—In 1927, the author purchased an abandoned island, some 250 acres in extent, lying off the coast of Pembrokeshire, to which he moved and where he lived until 1940. This little book describes his life on the island, his work to make the place self-supporting, and nature as he found it there. Being keenly interested in natural history, he was able to make good use of his time to study the animals and plants of the island at close range. Thirty-four species of birds were found breeding, at one time or another, on the island and 114 others were regular or casual visitors. Puffins and shearwaters nested in old rabbit burrows, gulls and razorbills on the cliffs, and other species in suitable places and in varying abundance. Of many of these, Mr. Lockley has something to say concerning their arrival, behavior, song, and other characteristics. The other animal life of the island and the waters surrounding it, the flowers, the seasons, and human visitors, as well as his visits to other islets (such as Grassholm

¹Lockley, R. M. 'Dream Island Days. A Record of the Simple Life.' Pp. 1-144, 8 pls., 26 figs., map (end pap.), 1943. H. F. & G. Witherby, London. Price, 10s, 6d.

with its Gannet colony) are entertainingly discussed and there are appended lists of the birds and plants of his own homestead.

The book is made up in part of two earlier works, 'Dream Island' and 'Island Days,' with some revisions and additions. Illustrations are from sketches by Mrs. Lockley and photographs. Readers who missed the earlier volumes will find the present account pleasantly interesting.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Lapland Longspur nesting.¹—The Lapland Longspur is the most abundant breeding passerine bird on the eastern Timan tundra of northern Russia, where it was studied, principally near the lower Velt River in 68° north latitude. Its nesting cycle was followed from the arrival of the first little group of ten or fifteen males when there were spacious thawed areas in the generally snow- and ice-bound landscape on May 8, until young of the year and adults had assumed first winter plumage prior to southward migration.

The mass arrival of males began May 12, and up to the 17th, thousands of feeding birds were present on the bottom land of the river mouth. Later they decreased in number, presumably due to transients passing on. They fed about piles of thawing rubble, which had been drifted at the edge of the water by autumn winds. The first females were seen on May 13, and their mass arrival was on the 21st. They scattered out more singly than the males from which they kept separate for the most part. From May 25 to 29, the weather became markedly warmer, the snow cover disappeared almost completely, and the birds broke up into pairs and dispersed over the tundra. Their dispersal was accomplished by violent fighting between the males, which eventually resulted in very definite territories being established by each pair, with an average diameter of about 100 meters (presumably greater in areas where the species nests less plentifully). This territory was strictly maintained until the young left the nest; food also was gathered within its limits. Other intruding birds than Longspurs were driven from it, especially the Red-throated Pipit with similar nesting habits, and which established similar territories, averaging on brushier ground. With young in the nest it was found that the human observer was not tolerated anywhere within a bird's territory, but no attention paid to him outside its periphery. In the bottomlands the food of the Longspurs consisted mainly of seeds, with a few insects, mostly pupae; when they dispersed on the tundra it changed abruptly, almost entirely to insects.

May 30 marked the beginning of nest construction, and mass building took place in the early part of June. The bowls of the nests were inclined to the east, south, or southeast, doubtless correlated with the rarity of southeast winds at this season. All nests had a lining of small, white ptarmigan feathers. June 4 marked the beginning of egg laying, which became general June 6 to 8. Brooding occupied only ten days (a longer period has been reported elsewhere). Only the female sat on the eggs, but the male remained on guard nearby. Brooding ceased when the majority of the young had hatched; one or two others might have hatched later from the warmth of their nestmates, and there was usually at least one egg in each nest which did not hatch. The parents shared feeding of the young. The first young bird was noted out of the egg June 20; the young remained in the nest eight to ten days; the first were out of the nest in the last days of June, and there was a mass appearance of such young in the beginning of July. Young

¹ Mikheev, A. V. 'Contributions to the Biology of the Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus* L.)' [in Russian]. Publ. Acad. Sci. U. S. S. R., Zool. Jour. Moscow, 18 (5): 924-938, 1939.

matured and left all the nests under observation; but at this stage, when only able to fly weakly, they were much preyed upon by jaegers and other predacious birds, and were soon removed off the tundra to thickets of willow along river banks or in low places, where they had more protection.

The speed and uniformity of the Longspur's nesting cycle, here observed, is interesting as probably correlated with a short season in a high northern latitude. Its very definite, seemingly uncomplicated territorialism appears to be highly efficient.—J. T. NICHOLS.

The Wild Turkey.¹—Beginning with a general review of the history of the Wild Turkey and its status in America, Virginia in particular, and the methods of hunting it, the authors pass to a detailed study of the bird and its life history—its general characteristics at different ages, breeding activities, feeding and other behavior, flight, and longevity. The remainder of the volume discusses the propagation and management of the bird in captivity and its encouragement in the wild, with recommendations for legislation and public policy. Full use has been made of available published information to which are added the results of the authors' investigations and observations, making a comprehensive report on this, the finest of American upland game birds. Although pointed especially at conditions in Virginia, much information is presented from other regions and the book should prove useful and informative in all parts of the range of the species. It is copiously illustrated with photographs, maps and drawings, and two colored plates by Fred Everett.—J. T. ZIMMER.

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