

RECENT LITERATURE

Check-list of West Indian birds.¹—The present edition of this useful list follows the general format of the first edition, published in 1940 (but somehow escaping citation in *The Auk* at the time), with slightly smaller type but improved distinction between bibliographic references and general text.

The list, however, is completely revised, bringing the author's views on the classification of West Indian birds up to date. Many of the citations are, of course, unchanged but others are entirely rewritten. Some synonymy is added where required but some synonyms, based on West Indian birds and cited in the first edition are omitted when the subordinate status of the names has been established in recent general catalogues. Dates of arrival and departure of North American migrants are supplied for the first time and form a useful addition to the data. Since the author justifiably adheres to the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature and not the A. O. U. Code, some differences in names will be apparent to the North American reader, and in the absence of common names from the list, a little confusion may result that can hardly be avoided under the circumstances.

The footnotes throughout the volume present the author's comments on the relationships and derivation of different West Indian birds which his long familiarity with the avifauna of the region permits him to discuss with especial authority. The check-list is one which all students of the area will find of the highest importance. —J. T. ZIMMER.

Ducks on a prairie marsh.²—Although the Canvasback is the focal point of the present volume, the study as a whole covers a much wider field, involving all ten species of ducks that make their summer home in the Delta Marsh at the southern end of Lake Manitoba, Canada, with lesser mention of various transient waterfowl and some other birds of the region.

All phases of the summer life of these birds in the area were studied at first hand and a mass of data accumulated which is here systematized. The spring flights, the period of courtship, the nesting season, the rearing of young, the post-breeding activities, and the autumn shooting season are taken up successively. The author's discussion of territories in these waterfowl is illuminating. He finds that the territory does not necessarily include the nesting site, although this is somewhere near, and that various females may converge from widely separated territories and nest near to each other in a relatively small area. The territory, itself, has four requirements—water, food, proximity to a nesting site, and a 'loafing spot' which, for various species, but not all of them, must be in a dry situation. The female chooses the territory but, when it is selected, the male takes the initiative in defending it. Sometimes the same territory is used for a period of years by the same species, not certainly by the same individuals. In the author's opinion, the territory is primarily defended to secure the isolation of the mated pair from sexually active birds of the same species during the copulation period.

Two distinct periods of display by the males were recognized, each with its characteristic pattern—one a courtship display and the other a nuptial one. The study

¹ BOND, JAMES. 'Check-list of Birds of the West Indies.' [Second edition.] 8vo, pp. XIII + 182, 1 map (fold.), 1945. The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

² HOCHBAUM, H. ALBERT. 'The Canvasback on a Prairie Marsh.' 8vo, pp. XII + 201, frontisp. (col.), 13 pls., figs. 1-9, 30 unnum. figs., 1944. The American Wildlife Institute, Washington, D. C., Price \$3.00 (in U. S.).

of recognition of the mate or of other individuals of the same species provided some surprising figures on the distance at which it appears to be effective.

Drakes deserted the females and territories as soon as the clutch was complete or no more than a week or ten days later. A second nesting, after the drake's departure, is doubtful. The drake's molt into eclipse plumage may begin early in the nuptial period, before it leaves the territory. The first males to molt are the earliest-mated birds, while the last are the latest-mated or the unmated birds. It is suspected that the full eclipse plumage is acquired only by young birds in their first few seasons; some individuals seven and eight years old lost their flight-feathers but not the body plumage. The Ruddy Duck was found to differ from the other resident species in that it passes the flightless period in worn nuptial plumage and, when again able to fly, molts into a dull winter plumage that is worn until late winter or early spring, when a new breeding plumage is acquired.

In the matter of sex ratios, it was found that, in general, males outnumbered the females, although a shooting-bag count during four seasons showed more females than males to have been killed except in the Mallard and Redhead. Differentials are tabulated, including the proportions of young and old birds.

These are only a few of the interesting details discussed in the book. The general purpose of the studies on which the volume is based was to uncover information that would be useful in wildlife management, to which a special chapter is devoted, but the report should interest a much wider circle of readers. It may be recommended as a valuable contribution to our knowledge of American birds.—J. T. ZIMMER.

A Field Guide for birds of the Southwest Pacific.¹—A preface by Dr. R. C. Murphy states that this book was written because of a flood of letters asking for information on the birds of this vast but little-known area. The world war has made it a subject of general interest and curiosity to a large public instead of a few technical experts. It should be known to all readers that Dr. Mayr is the world's authority on the region and that he has been studying for years the great collections amassed by the Whitney South Sea Expedition for the American Museum of Natural History. While not, strictly speaking, a report on a long-range research project, the volume will have interest and value for technical ornithologists; it contains much unpublished information; the author's opinions on systematic problems are original and interesting. No other ornithologist today could have compiled such complete and up-to-date lists of the birds known from the various island archipelagoes, with nothing available except the technical reports on small collections scattered in many scientific journals. Our author has made an original contribution to ornithology as well as written a field guide.

However this may be, the main object of the book may be inferred from its title. It is intended primarily for the field student, not for the museum curator. It is to help him identify and name the birds he encounters, and to ascertain what kinds of birds can be expected on a given island.' The various birds are described and discussed on the basis of identification marks or field characters. The book must be judged on the degree of success attained in the objects professed.

The method adopted and the arrangement of the great body of facts is admirable. Since 803 forms are treated, in ten different archipelagoes, the author had a choice between a systematic or a geographic treatment. He has devised an ingenious and happy compromise. In a General Section, as Part I, he has chapters on the seabirds,

¹ MAYR, ERNST. 'Birds of the Southwest Pacific. A Field Guide to the Birds of the Area between Samoa, New Caledonia, and Micronesia.' 8vo, pp. xix-316, pls. I-III (in color), figs. 1-16, map on inside front cover, 1945. Macmillan Co., New York, Price \$3.50.

shorebirds, the land and freshwater birds. The last is particularly important, as it attempts to introduce for the first time to the ignorant reader many unfamiliar Oriental and Australian families of birds. Characteristic or widely ranging genera and species are given by way of illustration; three excellent colored plates by Jaques and 16 text figures by Alex. Seidel depict a total of 55. The only criticism I have here is that there might have been more liberal references to the plates in the text. Americans, for instance, are mostly unfamiliar with the Old World flycatchers; it appears that *Rhipidura* and *Monarcha* are two characteristic genera, both of which are illustrated in color. The reader of page 92 would refer immediately to Plate 3, figs. 26-28, had there been a cross reference, to see what these birds look like. The fact that in certain cases the species figured is different from the one mentioned in the text makes no difference in gaining a mental picture of the genus.

Part II is geographic. For reasons of faunal affinity the ten archipelagoes are combined into seven; hence seven chapters give the land and freshwater birds of each area. The descriptions of each species are confined to those characters diagnostic in the field. If any species has already been described in Part I, a cross reference renders repetition unnecessary. The first two chapters on the widely ranging sea and shore birds must be consulted for records for the various islands; this avoids redescribing the Golden Plover seven times, and saves much space. Each chapter opens with a geographic and faunal analysis. There is a special summary geographical review for the Solomon Islands, and a special section on Rennell Island, which should have been listed in the table of contents. In all cases where several to many species of one family or order occur in one area, there are helpful color keys.

The final test of any field guide is whether it is found useful and workable by field students. The reviewer is also bound to remember that a field guide is not an encyclopedia, and he should be chary of complaining of omissions or too great brevity. This particular reviewer is in a happy but paradoxical situation in that he knows something to considerable about the sea and shore birds, little to nothing about the land birds. It seems to me that a remarkable family like that of the Kagu might rate a text figure or at least a few lines of description about some of its many characters besides color. I certainly want to know what the shape and size of the bill are in an uncertain family like that of *Lamprolia*. My field experience with the rails of three continents convinces me that the size and shape of the bill are a most important aid to identification in the field; I can hardly believe that they are of no consequence in the seven rails of Micronesia. The only fault I have to find with Dr. Mayr's method is his too great reliance on artificial or color characters, and his apparent idea either that generic and structural characters are not usable, and helpful in observing living birds, or that the amateur field student is "scared off" by a book that does use them. In a "popular" guide it is not necessary to suppress these details.

This suspicion reaches conviction when examining the keys to the terns and shore birds. While miracles of ingenuity, they are unnecessarily artificial. In the Shorebirds, closely related genera and species are widely separated, and two birds in different families are bracketed together and separated by color characters, of trivial importance and no more striking than the family characters. The tyro can recognize a Stilt, a Plover, a Curlew, a Godwit, a Sandpiper, or a Snipe as such long before he can hope to discriminate most of the species, and the key should have been constructed on this basis. The key to various species of *Sterna* is even more unfortunate, as the important colors of the bill, which vary seasonably and between adults and immature, are not correctly stated in certain cases.

There are two final features of the book which are all too rare and beyond praise.

The author is more than willing to make it clear that he does not possess final or complete knowledge. Some of his opinions or statements are tentative; they *may* be correct. Some of the field characters may not work; he hopes that readers will point out others that he didn't know about. Throughout the book there are useful hints to observers; opportunities for them to add to knowledge are constantly offered; possible or probable range extensions are indicated; we are told if the life history or nesting habits are unknown. Is a certain bird extinct or not? These hints will be just as valuable to the ornithologist as to the amateur observer.

Dr. Mayr's book is perhaps the most difficult undertaking ever attempted in this field of ornithological activity. Most regional field guides have not been written until the birds were far better known systematically and geographically, with far more experience and knowledge of them in life. Let the reader remember that most of my unfavorable comments are controversial, in that they are matters of opinion. The author's struggle with his many difficulties must be described as a brilliant success. My admiration and congratulations are gladly proffered. Let us hope that Dr. Mayr's efforts will be rewarded not only by the esteem of his colleagues and the thanks of those able to use the book in the field, but also by the successful sale it so richly deserves.—LUDLOW GRISCOM.

The birds of Ceylon.¹—A generation ago Ceylon was considered one of the best known parts of the Indian Empire. Collectors, therefore, concentrated on other regions until it was recently found that the knowledge of the birds of Ceylon was falling far behind that of these other sections. To fill this gap the British and the Colombo museums jointly conducted an Avifaunal Survey of the island. It was particularly fortunate that Hugh Whistler, who knew Indian birds better than any of his contemporaries, was able to complete the report on this collection, shortly before his untimely death. By including also the birds not obtained by the Survey, Whistler has prepared a complete list of the known birds of Ceylon. Of the 384 listed forms, only 239 nest on the island; 22 species and 77 subspecies are endemic. Six species have two endemic subspecies on Ceylon. All but one of the remaining 162 forms are identical with the South Indian races.

The Ceylon races differ from those of South India for the most part either in their smaller size or in their darker plumage. In three races, *Kittacincla m. leggei*, *Turdus s. kinnisi*, and *Hemipus p. leggei*, the females have practically attained male plumage. Some Ceylon races are remarkable in the suppression of the seasonal plumages, found normally in the species—for example, in certain warblers (*Franklinia*, *Prinia*), the Kentish Plover, and the Stilt (*Himantopus*). A number of the endemic species seem to be the result of double invasions. Most of the new races discovered by the Survey had been described previously by Whistler. Only five are included in this report: *Cinnyris lotenia hindustanicus* (India) (p. 199), *Piprisoma agile zeylonicum* (p. 201), *Brachypternus benghalensis jaffnensis* (p. 206), *Merops orientalis ceylonicus* (p. 223), and *Himantopus himantopus ceylonensis* (p. 277).

There are many valuable discussions on the taxonomic status of the Ceylon populations of various species, but the impression is given that lack of adequate material has, in many cases, prevented the reaching of final conclusions. Stuart Baker's archaic and frequently completely absurd generic nomenclature is unfortunately followed throughout. Owing to the long delay between completion and publication, the recent work of Deignan, Delacour, Amadon, and other workers has not been incorporated. These are only minor blemishes in a most useful report, a lasting

¹ WHISTLER, HUGH. 'The Avifaunal Survey of Ceylon conducted jointly by the British and Colombo Museums.' *Spolia Zeylanica*, 23: 119-321. 8 pls. August 25, 1944. Price Rs. 6.

monument to the memory of Hugh Whistler, as fine a gentleman and sound an ornithologist as I have ever had the fortune to meet.—E. MAYR.

West Sumatran birds.¹—This paper, based mainly on Dr. W. L. Abbott's splendid collections in the United States National Museum, has interesting chapters on the geography and the ornithological history of the islands in question and ends with a summary and conclusions. It is clear and concise and interesting from the point of view of distribution and speciation. An excellent map accompanies the text.

The West Sumatran Islands form a chain 600 miles in length fringing the Indian Ocean coast of Sumatra. Comparatively low, no island reaching an altitude of 2000 feet, they are for the most part covered with forest and scrub. Except for Nias, none is heavily populated. The larger islands lie on an average about 60 miles off the coast.

The bird population, as might be expected, has been received mostly from Sumatra (84 per cent) via the Banyak and Butu islands which lie closest inshore, and from there funnelled out north and south to the other islands.

The avifauna comprises 280 species and subspecies (including migrants). For many years these islands have been a paradise for the 'splitter' and some 220 species and subspecies have been described from them. The fact that Ripley in his careful analysis can recognize no less than 114 (111 endemic) of them attests to the high proportion of endemism found in the region. Differentiation takes the form of larger size in 58 per cent of the cases. A barbet (*Cyanops australis*) is said to be found only on Nias, but a distinct form is known from the Batu Islands which raises the number of endemic forms to 112.

Ripley has very successfully cleared the confusion into which the status of the avifauna had fallen. Although papers on the various islands have appeared since 1863, this is the first to be written on the entire chain as a whole.—R. M. DE SCHAUENSEE.

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¹ Ripley, S. Dillon. 'The Bird Fauna of the West Sumatra Islands.' Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 94 (no. 8): 307-430, pls. 1-2, figs. 1 (map, fold.)-5, October, 1944.

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