

RECENT LITERATURE

Birds of northern Siam.¹—Siam, the core of the Indo-Chinese countries, was until quite recently strangely neglected by ornithologists. About 1912 a period of active exploration and collecting began due to the efforts of N. Gyldenstolpe, E. Eisenhofer, H. M. Smith, R. M. de Schauensee, J. A. Griswold, Jr., Herbert G. Deignan, and others. In the present report, Deignan summarizes the results of these collections on the basis of a personal examination of most of the material including the types in European museums. His report is by far the most thorough and reliable study that has ever been made on the birds of any of the south-eastern Asiatic countries. The most recent findings are incorporated throughout not only on geographical variation but also on generic classification. The author lists in the introduction the itineraries of the principal collectors and discusses the zoogeographic subdivisions. I would have liked a more detailed treatment of the very interesting faunal differences between the various rather isolated mountain ranges. Perhaps Deignan felt that the time for such an analysis has not yet come, considering the incompleteness of our knowledge of their faunas. No statistics are given of the number of breeding species, migrant visitors, and endemic forms.

In the descriptions of the individual species much detailed information is given on the ranges, the habitats, behavior and voice, breeding season, plumages and color of the soft parts of North Siamese birds.

I am not sure that I agree with Deignan's treatment of the *Sitta europaea-castanea* and the *Criniger tephrogenys-ochraceus* relationships. The facts are that in either case the members of the pair are geographical representatives but nowhere intergrade in spite of the absence of geographical barriers. Wherever they approach each other geographically they show strikingly different ecological preferences. Deignan solves this puzzle by uniting the *Sitta* forms under the name *europaea*, and the *Criniger* forms under the name *ochraceus*. Personally, I would be inclined to consider the striking ecological divergence of these sympatric forms as an indication that they have reached the level of specific difference. Such a solution would be entirely in line with Lack's discussion of the ecological status of closely related species (*Ibis*, 1944). Admittedly, however, one cannot be dogmatic in the treatment of such obvious borderline cases. In view of their interest, it would have been valuable if the author had given distribution maps of these species.—E. MAYR.

An introduction to Argentine ornithology.²—This publication presents an introduction to the study of birds for the use of students in Argentina and has, therefore, particular application to Argentine forms. It begins with a general account of avian characteristics as a foundation. This section embraces also a discussion of the classification of birds with a list of the Argentine fossil species and a second list of the whole Argentine avifauna down to families. There are also important lists of migratory species divided into three groups—those that visit Argentina from the Northern Hemisphere, those that leave the country to winter in more northern parts of South America, and those that winter in northern Argentina but withdraw to more southern areas to nest. These lists are interestingly annotated.

¹ DEIGNAN, H. G. 'The Birds of Northern Thailand.' 572 pp., 9 pl., 4 maps, bibliog., 1945. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Price, \$1.25.

² PEREYRA, JOSÉ A. 'Nuestras Aves.' Large 8vo, pp. 1-338 + 1, figs. 1-102 + 4 figs. Rep. Argentina, Minist. Obras Publicas, Prov. B. Aires, Comision Central Honor. Parques Provinc. y Protect. Fauna Flora Aborig., La Plata, 1943.

The second portion of the work contains general descriptive accounts of each family. The third section discusses geographical distribution and divides Argentina into six zones as shown on an accompanying map. The subspecies of birds found in each zone are then recorded with scientific and vernacular names. An account of the utility of birds, a historical summary of Argentine ornithology, and notes on bird study and taxidermy close this section.

Following this major portion of the work there is a history of bird protection in the country with a recapitulation of the laws in force on this subject, and the names of individuals in various organizations particularly interested in it. Proposals for amendment of the laws are given by Luciano H. Valette and Carlos A. Marelli.

Indexes to the vernacular names, to anatomical terms, to families, subfamilies and genera, and to species and subspecies mentioned in the text furnish a useful means of reference.

The illustrations are from photographs and drawings. Some of the latter are very good, but others, it must be observed, are rather sketchy.

The publication should find a very welcome place in the hands of Argentine students who have here a work in their own language that will help them to pursue the study of the birds of their country.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Birds of the world.¹—In this latest volume of his important check-list, Peters takes up the families of hummingbirds, colies, trogons, kingfishers, todies, motmots, bee-eaters, cuckoo-rollers, rollers and ground-rollers, hoopoes, wood hoopoes, and hornbills.

More than half of the book, as might be expected, is concerned with the hummingbirds. With these, Peters has returned to a better and more conservative treatment than was accorded them by Simon in his 'Histoire Naturelle des Trochilidae' (1921). The general sequence of genera follows that of Simon but the inordinate number of genera recognized or created by that author is reduced from 189 to 123, and the number of species from 488 to 327, but the number of subspecies is increased, as seems justifiable, from 657 to 688. Thirteen supposed forms are considered as hybrids and three as artefacts. Simon's confusing and often misleading 'groups' and 'sections' are omitted while his often erroneous nomenclature caused by his curious nomenclatural standards is corrected in line with the International Code.

Probably still further revisions of genera and species should be made, as Peters admits, but such revisions must await a thorough monographic study, not suitable in a check-list. A tendency to base generic distinctions on the ornamental plumes of the males undoubtedly has led to some false conclusions in the past and Peters suggests the need for a study of the females to rectify some of these earlier errors.

There is similar conservatism in the other families treated in the volume. The kingfishers have their genera reduced in number in nearly the same proportion as the hummingbirds, and the hornbills somewhat more. The trogons have lost one genus from Sharpe's 'Hand-List' (*Pyrotrogon*) but various other genera recognized by some authors in the interim are again relegated to synonymy. The bee-eaters, alone, are provided with more genera than those given them by Sharpe—seven in place of Sharpe's five or in place of Parrot's (1911) six. As in Sharpe's volume 17 of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' (1892), the cuckoo-rollers (*Leptosomus*) are placed in the same suborder as the rollers and ground-

¹ PETERS, JAMES LEE. 'Check-list of Birds of the World.' Volume V. 8vo, pp. XI + 306, August 20, 1945. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Price, \$5.00.

rollers but in a separate family from the ground-rollers which are considered as of subfamily rank in the same family with the rollers—an arrangement altered by Sharpe in the 'Hand-List.'

The linear arrangement of genera will not satisfy all taxonomists, but the difficulties inherent in any linear disposition must always give rise to differences of opinion. For example, the reviewer is not sure that the Quetzal is the most primitive trogon or that the Giant Hummer should not be placed farther down the scale than it stands at present, but these and other similar questions are not easily settled. In any case, there is no question that this latest volume of the series contains much thought-provoking material and is a valuable contribution for the taxonomist.

Five new names are provided for discovered synonyms—*Polytmus guainumbi doctus*, *Trogon elegans lubricus*, *Alcedo cristatus robertsi*, *Halcyon australasia odites*, and *Bycanistes brevis omissus*.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Venezuelan bird collections in review.¹—This important publication gives the fundamental bases of the present-day knowledge of Venezuelan ornithology. The various collections known to have been made in Venezuela, and their respective collectors, are briefly reviewed with lists of the localities visited, the new species described from each collection (with both the original nomenclature and the modern equivalent), and the authors who have published on the material (with references to an extended bibliography that follows). Portraits are given of many of the collectors mentioned. The maps and accompanying explanatory lists give the names and positions of all the localities where birds have been collected, including, however, in the case of the author's own collections, only those mentioned in his published accounts.

The whole report is excellently planned and executed and makes a very useful reference work giving rise to the wish that other countries were equally thoroughly documented.—J. T. ZIMMER.

Swann's Birds of Prey.²—The present long-awaited number contains the final pages and plates of volume 2 of this monograph, with introductory matter and index, thus completing the work begun by the author in 1924. The last preceding part (XIV) was issued in 1936. As with all parts issued since Mr. Swann's death in 1926, the present one has been under Dr. Wetmore's able editorship in which he has preserved Swann's views on the systematic position of the treated species in contradistinction to his own sometimes divergent opinions, adding only such imperative matter as has developed in recent years.

The tardiness in the appearance of this concluding part has been due to delay caused by the war, the destruction of all the type during the air attacks on London in 1940, and the subsequent loss at sea of some of the newly set proofs.

The text concludes the discussion of the kestrels (*Cerchneis* pt., with the addition of *Dissodectes*) and closes with the ospreys (*Pandion*). American readers will find the American Sparrow Hawks in this portion and, of course, the American Osprey.

Dr. Wetmore has done an excellent service in bringing to a successful conclusion this comprehensive monograph so unfortunately interrupted by the death of its enthusiastic author.—J. T. ZIMMER.

¹ PHELPS, WILLIAM H. Resumen de las colecciones ornitologicas hechas en Venezuela. Bol. Soc. Venez. Cienc. Nat., no. 61: 325-444 + 1, 36 figs. (31 portrs., 5 maps), July, 1945.

² SWANN, H. KIRKE [AND WETMORE, ALEXANDER]. 'A Monograph of the Birds of Prey.' Parts XV to XVI. 4to, pp. i-xx, 449-538, pls. [17, (col.), 20, 24, 26], April 30, 1945. Wheldon and Wesley, Ltd., London.

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