starting at the coast at San Francisco and extending 800 miles out to sea in the direction of Hawaii, is a brilliant white band paralleling the coast. It is a belt of clouds, like a white quilt, with scarcely a hole through it. The base of the clouds is sometimes not a thousand feet above the sea; its upper surface is only a matter of a few hundred feet higher; but this stratum of air is a solid blanket of cloud. Above it is brilliant sunshine; below it is cold. The clouds apparently lie over the California Current.

The position of this current varies somewhat with the seasons. The extent of the cloud canopy (according to a report from Pan-American Airlines) varies considerably with the seasons. But during part of the year, at least, an aviator or bird could fly a course parallel with the coast and nearly a thousand miles out to sea, by following the seaward margin of the solid cloud. Beyond the 800-mile point, or thereabouts, the cloud topography is different. It consists of scattered low cumulus clouds. The base of these cumulus clouds seems often to be at about a thousand feet; their tops may be a thousand or sometimes two thousand feet higher. They occupy only a minor fraction of the total area.

The West Wind Drift or Current circles eastward past the Aleutians, and then under the name of the California Current flows southward down the coast to the edge of the tropics, where it turns westward directly toward the Hawaiian Islands, to become the North Equatorial Current in the latitude of Mexico. If the cloud canopy follows it, a bird has only to follow the cloud to find itself within sight of these islands. Among the small cumulus clouds in this area are a few towering giant ones where the trade winds striking the Pali [cliffs], and steep slopes of the islands, go shooting upward. No better beacon would be asked, in the morning sun, for a bird approaching from the east. The volcanoes of the southeastern islands are almost 14,000 feet high, and if the air were clear enough they would be visible to a bird flying at an equal height nearly 300 miles away.

It is not the purpose of this note to suggest that the plover does fly at a great height, or that it does follow the cloud or other, perhaps more subtle, differences in cloud topography or ocean features; this may, or may not, be the case. My purpose is to utter a word of warning against the assumption that the ocean is featureless, merely because it is so shown on a map.—F. W. PRESTON, *Butler, Pennsylvania.*

Aquatic snails eaten by woodcock.—An American woodcock (*Philohela minor*) was accidentally killed in a muskrat trap set along the edge of Breakneck Creek, Rootstown Township, northeastern Ohio, on November 29, 1947. It is uncommon for this species to be in the locality at that date, since most of the woodcock leave this region in October. On request, the viscera were given to the writer by the trapper, William Winnefeld, and his uncle Bernhard Raithel. The woodcock is reported to feed almost entirely on earthworms and grubs. Three species of aquatic snails made up the bulk of the contents of the digestive tract of this specimen. The crop was filled with eight *Physa gyrina* and two *Gyraulus parvus*. In the gizzard were one *P. gyrina*, ten *G. parvus* and one *Paludestrina nickliniana*. Fragments of a weevil were also present. The bird was probably killed while engaged in hunting snails along the shallow waters of the creek.—RALPH W. DEXTER, *Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.*

***Hoploxypterus cayanus* in Colombia.**—On February 14, 1948, while Mrs. Grinnell and I were travelling in a small motor boat on the upper Meta River, in the Llano country, a few miles below Puerto Lopez, in the Department of Meta, east of the Andes, we saw two unfamiliar, medium-sized plovers, feeding along the edge of a

sand bar. We landed on the bar, observed them with 8 x 30 field glasses, and took moving-pictures of them, using a 6 inch telephoto lens. As Chapman's "Distribution of Bird-life in Colombia" failed to list this species we were unable to identify it at the time, nor did we collect it, but after having later checked the specimens of the Charadriidae in the American Museum, New York, the unique posterior crown pattern of a white circle, bordered with black, and containing an inner grayish patch (features distinguishable in our movies), together with its black chest band, were sufficient characteristics to place it as the Cayenne plover. Peter's "Birds of the World" gives its distribution as "Southern Venezuela (Orinoco Valley) and the Guianas south through eastern Ecuador, eastern Peru and eastern Bolivia to Paraguay and southern Brazil," but does not include Colombia. I find no other reference to it in the literature of the last twenty years.—LAWRENCE I. GRINNELL, *Ithaca, New York.*

A preening phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*).—On October 5, 1947, along the coast of the Yselmeer, the former Zuiderzee, near Schellinkhout, some five kilometres west of Hoorn, Holland, I noticed a northern phalarope swimming in the quiet water close to the base of the dike.

As is the case in all phalaropes, the bird was exceptionally tame and allowed me to approach up to a distance of less than one meter. I studied it for more than an hour.

It was swimming with rapid alternations of its legs, which were clearly seen in the limpid water, and pecking away in the copper-colored coating of algae that covered the basal boulders of the dike. Sometimes it pecked at some organism in the water. Most pecks seemed to be successful, as only very seldom did I see the phalarope peck again on the same spot.

After some minutes' pecking, it started stretching its wings. To do this stretching it always stood on a stone in the shallow water. The wings were stretched alternately at first—the left wing two or three times and after that the right wing.

When stretching, the upper-arm of one wing was put nearly in a 90-degree angle to the longitudinal axis of the body, and the hand-part of that wing was laid in a horizontal plane across the back, rump, or tail. The wing remained in this stretched position for one or two minutes.

A black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*) chanced to come that way and soared over it in search of food. The phalarope at once flashed into a crouched and immobile attitude on the water—retracted, thick-set neck, head very closely pressed to the water's surface, and bill partly dipped into the water. It kept this "frozen" attitude for some minutes, or until the gull had disappeared.

I approached to less than two feet. When I moved, it looked at me and swam away, its "flight-distance" from me being about one meter. It then started washing and preening. During its washing it remained floating on the water. The bill was continually and rapidly dipped into the water, and after each dip it was pressed against and between the breast- and throat-feathers. First, the left side of the neck, breast, and body were attended. Especially when it was preening its tail feathers, I could see how each feather was "combed" separately by shoving it between the mandibles from base to tip with a vigorous effort, ending in a real jerk. The rectrices on the left side of its body were combed to the middle of the tail. In this way also the remiges, coverts, and flank-feathers were dealt with, and after that the right side of the body underwent a similar treatment.

Now the phalarope stopped washing and cleaned its bill by lowering it to the right and by stretching its right leg over the folded wing. It then wiped its bill with its