

REVIEWS

Distributional Check-list of the Birds of Mexico.—Part 2. A. H. Miller, H. Friedmann, L. Griscom and R. T. Moore. 1957. Pac. Coast Avi., no. 33. 436 pp., 7 col. pls. Cooper Ornith. Soc., Berkeley, Calif. Price: paper \$6; cloth \$7. (Parts 1 and 2 bound together in cloth, \$9.) Treating Trogonidae through Fringillidae, Part 2 completes the first detailed check-list of Mexican birds, Part 1 of which appeared in 1950. To the three original author-compilers Alden H. Miller was added as editor-in-chief. Though the format of the two parts is the same, one recognizes improving touches in points of detail. Everyone interested in Middle American birds will find this work of value. The distribution of each listed species is given as a whole, including the range outside of Mexico, then the general range of each Mexican subspecies, followed by the names of the Mexican states from which specimens are known. Of major usefulness is putting on record data from the great Moore collection of 55,000 Mexican specimens. Also indicated are the institutions where other significant, or previously unreported, specimens are lodged. Subspecies considered but rejected are mentioned in footnotes—a most commendable practice. These footnotes often contain illuminating comments on taxonomic points, sometimes serving to modify the text treatment.

Responsibility for the accounts of particular families was placed on different members of the compiling group, whose names are indicated. The taxonomic treatment usually conforms with that of the A.O.U. Check-list (1957)—not surprising, as Miller and Friedmann were members of the A.O.U. Check-list Committee. There are, however, a number of divergences in taxonomy and nomenclature (both scientific and vernacular). For example, *Myiarchus tyrannulus* is considered not to include the Central American *M. brachyurus*. This treatment makes somewhat misleading the range given for the species *M. tyrannulus* ("southern Texas through Mexico and Central America to South America"), for if *brachyurus* is specifically distinct, then as a breeder *M. tyrannulus* is absent from Central America south of Guatemala. Indeed one may then wonder whether the other northern forms belong with *M. tyrannulus*, a South American bird. On the purely nomenclatural side, generic names ending in *-rynchus* and *-rhamphus* are treated as masculine, thus following traditional usage and anticipating the recent ruling of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. The compilers considered unnecessary and confusing, and therefore declined to follow, the A.O.U. Check-list decisions replacing *Contopus richardsonii* by *C. sordidulus* and transferring the name *Empidonax wrightii* to *E. griseus*. Is not the failure to accept the A.O.U. rulings (involving only the names of three North American species) likely to produce even more confusion?

The Mexican Check-list supplies an English and a Spanish name for each species. Though doubtless regarded as a minor aspect of this useful work, common names, because of their importance in popular ornithology, warrant discussion, for indifference has often characterized their selection in otherwise meticulously prepared distributional works (e.g., Hellmayr's "Catalogue of Birds of the Americas"). There is certainly no obligation to supply vernaculars in such works, but if authors elect to do so, should they not be judged by the same critical standards as apply to other aspects of their undertaking?

In regard to English names the Mexican Check-list announced a sound basic policy—to provide names applicable to each species as a whole, rather than to any particular Mexican subspecies. Names of neotropical species are not yet

standardized by long usage; they cannot be drawn perfunctorily from the great monographs of Hellmayr or Ridgway, for these authors followed the older practice of giving to each *subspecies* a different English name, which often contained no suggestion of conspecific relationship. Selection of English names for the many *polytypic species* having wide neotropical distribution should involve consideration both of usage in previous literature and of the species characteristics throughout the range. For Mexico this task had already been undertaken in Blake's widely-used "Birds of Mexico" (1953)—so far the only identification guide to the avifauna. While opinion may differ on some of Blake's selections, this reviewer knows (from having participated in their selection) the effort devoted to seeing that the names should not be misleading for the species as a whole. In the interest of uniform usage many other authors dealing with Middle American birds have adopted the same names. The compilers of the Mexican Check-list of course had the right to adopt their own nomenclature, but to the extent that they disregarded the desideratum of uniform usage some good reason should have been apparent. Most of the names adopted in Part 2 do agree with Blake's selections, but many of the divergences (except where conforming with the new names of the A.O.U. Check-list) seem haphazard. Why, for example, was Ridgway's name for *Centurus hypopolius*, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, emended into the less correct 'Gray-bellied'? All ornithologists now agree that *Ramphocaenus rufiventris* is not an antwren (Formicariidae). Yet the misleading Long-billed 'Antwren' is here perpetuated, though most recent authors since Sutton have used Long-billed Gnatwren. *Aechmolophus mexicanus*, called Pileated Flycatcher by Blake, Edwards and others, is here endowed with the new name 'Crested Wood Pewee', though its nesting habits suggest no close relationship with *Contopus*. The names applied to some tanagers are so infelicitous that one wonders whether more was done in many cases than to extend to the species whatever designation Hellmayr happened to use for the nominate subspecies. *Spindalis zena*, a polytypic species, is called 'Black-backed' *Spindalis* (a name applied by Hellmayr only to one Bahaman subspecies, the nominate race); a glance at specimens would have revealed that most races, including the Mexican, have the back mainly olive—not black. *Tanagra lauta* is here called "Thick-billed" *Euphonia*, perfunctorily following an unfortunate oversight in Hellmayr's book, which a few pages later used that identical name for another sympatric bird, *T. lanirostris crassirostris*, to which the name belongs by prior and universal usage since Ridgway (1902). In the case of *T. musica* Hellmayr's name for the nominate race, Haitian *Euphonia*, was obviously too restrictive for a wide-ranging species, but instead of adopting Ridgway's appropriate Blue-hooded *Euphonia* (used by all other writers on Middle American birds), the Mexican Check-list translates the technical name into 'Musical' *Euphonia*, although the vocalizations of this species are notably insignificant and unmusical.

Spanish names presented a really difficult problem, for most Mexican birds had neither Spanish book names nor widely used vernaculars. Here my criticism is that little guidance seems to have been given to the Mexican zoologist burdened with the formidable, and apparently unfamiliar, task of inventing hundreds of new species names. Why was he not instructed to follow the usual—simple, and educationally and mnemonically helpful—system of adopting the same *group* name for members of a genus or allied genera (except where the species had a real popular name)? Instead, we have an unsystematic and confusing application of the same *group* names to members of different families, while closely allied species

of the same genus are given different (yet invented) group names. A few examples will suffice. In the parulid genus *Vermivora* some species (such as the Tennessee Warbler) are called 'Verdín'; while others (such as the Orange-crowned Warbler) have the generic name translated into 'Gusanero'—a name which is also applied here to several tanagers. In the tanager genus *Piranga* some are given the name 'Piranga', others 'Aguacatero', and others 'Cardenal'—a group name likewise used for the grosbeaks, *Rhodothraupis*, *Richmondena* and *Pyrrhuloxia*. The designation 'Verderón', the Old World Spanish name for the Greenfinch (*Chloris*), is here extended both to the greenlets *Hylophilus* in Vireonidae and to various *Oporornis* in Parulidae. Perhaps the pressure to finish the long-delayed Part 2, a task made difficult by illness of two of the original three co-authors, precluded the needed critical editing of this phase of the work.

The matter of vernacular nomenclature has been elaborated in the hope that future authors will give it greater consideration. There is no intention to minimize our obligation to the authors of the Mexican Check-list for a truly monumental work, which should long provide a sound basis for distributional and taxonomic studies in an area of increasing interest to both amateur and professional ornithologists.—E. EISENMANN.

The Ring-necked Duck in the Northeast.—Howard L. Mendall. 1958. University of Maine Bull., 60 (16): 1-317. 40 fig., 24 tab. \$2.50. This well written, monographic work on the Ring-necked Duck is outstanding in two ways. It reports one of the most thorough and extensive studies of any species of North American waterfowl, and it records first-hand observations of the spectacular range expansion of this species. Its coverage is broad and basic, containing sections on habitat, distribution, migration, the reproductive cycle, post-breeding activities, and management. Each chapter has a brief but clear summary but much of the value of the book lies in observational details which cannot be included in summaries.

Because of the recent spread of the species, the section on distribution is particularly thorough. Expansion of the breeding range has been dominantly eastward and the bird is now well established in the northeastern states and eastern Canada. Much of the former habitat in the Midwest has been lost but isolated breeding populations occur sporadically. Despite Mendall's thorough survey of distribution data from state biologists, one record of a temporary breeding population was missed. Paul L. Errington (oral communication) found indications of nesting in north-central Iowa in the late 40s and early 50s and four nests were found on muskrat lodges during 1953. Drought apparently damaged this habitat and there are no more recent records for the species.

The chapters on nesting and the brood season constitute the greatest contribution of the book. Descriptions of display are accurate and vivid but are not analytical. A section on territoriality is detailed and emphasizes the point that spacing occurs without conspicuous aggressive action. Data from 471 nests are presented clearly and in a form usable by other waterfowl students. Island nest sites are clearly preferred but there is almost no use of emergent vegetation as in other diving ducks. Two interesting factors influencing the time of nesting were age of the female and habitat conditions; both need further study but these conclusions are supported by similar observations in other groups of birds. For the first time in diving ducks, factual and circumstantial evidence is presented which indicates that at least 50 per cent of the females reneest if their initial nest

is destroyed. Observed nesting success was a relatively high 68 per cent. Habitat improvement and delay of the shooting season from September until October have proved effective management measures for protecting and increasing local breeding populations.

Much specific information, of less general interest but relevant to the text, is presented in appendixes. Thus under one cover is the major present knowledge of this species. Despite the comprehensive scope of the work, Mendall makes every effort to point out where data are weak or lacking and poses sufficient problems to keep waterfowl investigators busy for many years.—M. WELLER.

A Distributional List of Chinese Birds.—Tso-Hsin Cheng. A publication of the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica, Haitien, Peking (53), China. 1955. Pt. 1. Non-Passeriformes, pp. i-iii + 1-329; 86 distributional maps. 1958. Pt. 2. Passeriformes, pp. i-vi + 1-591; 441 distributional maps. This first official check-list of Chinese birds includes all forms recorded within the boundaries of China, including Tibet and Taiwan. The region covered is huge, rich, and very varied. 486 species are treated in Part 1 and 613 in Part 2; with subspecies the total reaches nearly 2000. The text is in Chinese as far as the ranges are concerned, and, while this reduces its usefulness for the western reader, the work is designed primarily for Chinese students "in the hope that it may serve as a working basis for further investigations in Chinese ornithology." This quotation is from the only two brief pages in English, one in each part.

Despite the language difficulty, this list is extremely useful. Though the ranges are stated in Chinese, apparently in very brief terms, the numerous distributional maps are readily understandable. This list is superior in some respects to the current check-lists from many countries, for in addition to the more than 500 maps, references and complete synonymies are given for all birds described from China. Detailed bibliographies are included. For instance, nearly 700 titles are listed in Part 2, and virtually all are modern papers; only about 30 were published before 1920, and some published as late as January, 1958 are included. All references in the synonymies and bibliographies are cited in the original languages and alphabet. Finally, vernacular names are given in Part 2 for each species in Chinese, English, and Russian (in Part 1 only in Chinese), and there are indexes of scientific, English and Russian names. Lest these remarks concerning bibliographical matters give the impression that this work is only a compilation, let me add that Dr. Cheng has, to my knowledge, studied the collections in Berlin, Leningrad, and Moscow, and spent three years in the United States, chiefly at the American Museum of Natural History. The nomenclature and taxonomy is modern. The systematic sequence follows the general lines of Wetmore's classification. Dr. Cheng and the Academia Sinica deserve congratulations.—CHARLES VAURIE.

A Hand-list of the Japanese Birds.—Ornithological Society of Japan, Yamashina Institute for Ornithology and Zoology, 49 Nanpeidai-machi, Shibuya-Ku, Tokyo, Japan. March, 1958, pp. 1-264 + 10. Price 500 yens. This is the "Fourth and Revised Edition" of the Japanese official check-list, the "area [covered being] restricted to the present Japanese domain." This statement reflects a curtailment of the area covered by previous editions. The Kuriles, Sakhalin, Korea, some islands in the Sea of Japan, the Ryu Kyus, Formosa, the Borodinos, Bonins, Volcanos, Marianas, Palaus, Carolines, Marshalls, and Wake have been excluded. This has halved the number of species and subspecies, from 1087 in the third

edition to 552 in the present one. The drastically reduced scope of the present edition is somewhat compensated by two novelties: a statement of the world distribution of the species, and a very valuable indication of the biological status of the form concerned. The List Committee states that they prefer not to change the systematic sequence adopted in the third edition (1942), which followed Hartert.—CHARLES VAURIE.

Aves del Sahara Español.—José A. Valverde. 1957. Instituto de Estudios Africanos, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid. pp. 1-488 + 12; figs. 0 and 1-120; pls. 1-51. Price, 300 pesetas. This is a remarkable study of the ecology of the Spanish Sahara desert. The author, who knows his region intimately, starts by discussing its regions and the biotopes they offer. The climate is very severe and ecological conditions seldom remain stable. A list of the species follows with much detail on behavior, habitat, food, reproductive cycle, local movements and migration. The distribution of each species is given in detail and is often plotted on maps. These and the other line drawings by the author, which consist of schemas of the habitat, sketches of animals, or of some aspects of their behavior, such as nuptial flight, are excellent. The photographic plates are no less interesting, but, unfortunately, did not reproduce well on the paper used. It is difficult to overpraise this study, which will be of fundamental importance in the study of desert faunas. A gazetteer, bibliography, a list of Moorish names, and even some local legends, are supplied in several appendices. Incidentally, the title is misleading as the study is not restricted to birds, but includes mammals, reptiles and frogs. (In Spanish.)—CHARLES VAURIE.

[Ecology of the Colonial Sea Birds of the Barents Sea.]—L. O. Belopolski. 1957. 460 pp.; 16 pls.; 135 text figs. Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., Moscow, U.S.S.R. Price 22 roubles. (Procurable Am-Rus Literary and Music Agency, 24 W. 45 St., New York 36, N. Y.) This well-illustrated book discusses the ecology in northern Russia of eighteen, mostly Holarctic birds: Fulmar, Great Cormorant, Shag, Common Eider, Parasitic Jaeger, Kittiwake, Ivory Gull, Mew Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Glaucous Gull, Arctic Tern, Common Puffin, Dovekie, Black Guillemot, Thick-billed Murre, Common Murre, and Razorbill. Unfortunately, the scientific names are mentioned only in the preliminary pages on distribution and in the index. Arrival dates, nesting behavior, development of young, food, interspecific competition, are among the subjects treated, with many tables, graphs, diagrams, and photographs. Those working on Arctic and Sub-Arctic birds will find the book useful. (In Russian, no foreign language summaries.)—CHARLES VAURIE.

The Birds.—Oskar Heinroth and Katharina Heinroth. 1958. 179 pp., 89 figs. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Ambassador Books Ltd., Toronto, Canada. Price, \$5.00. This is a translation of Oskar Heinroth's classic work, "Aus dem Leben der Vögel," as revised by his widow. It is a lucid, short, popular account of bird biology, from the viewpoint of behavior and structural adaptation, with wide appeal. Written in an extremely simple style, the twenty-two chapters are full of fascinating and significant details, which the novice bird student can enjoy and from which the experienced ornithologist can draw profit.

The modernity of the present revision is indicated on both the first and last pages; the former refers to the hibernation of the Poorwill and torpidity in swifts and hummingbirds, and the last to the recent experiments indicating nocturnal

bird orientation by means of constellations. There are a great many nuggets of information that will be new to most ornithologists. A few examples follow: Although it is now generally accepted that full grown feathers do not change color by the deposition of new pigment, the authors say that the Cattle Egret may be an exception, for the buff nuptial color appears after the white feathers are full grown, a brownish sediment forming, perhaps through the action of light. Though penguins' wings have become flippers, they sleep with the bill hooked behind the wing, like most flying birds. Wild birds rarely lay eggs unless the female has been stimulated by at least the presence of a male, but in captivity pigeons and parrots will sometimes produce infertile eggs when they have been fondled by a human keeper. The Heinroths emphasize the enormous diversity of bird behavior and try to avoid broad generalizations. The danger is apparent when they venture to say that "all pigeons" lay white eggs. Actually, the Ruddy Quail-Dove lays brownish eggs.

This little book does not purport to cover all aspects of avian biology; distribution, ecology and population dynamics are hardly mentioned. The Heinroths draw on their great and intimate experience with living birds. The German title is thus more suggestive of the subject matter. The illustrations in this edition are exceptionally effective, and the translation by Michael Cullen is idiomatic and easy reading.—E. EISENMANN.

Das Jahr mit den Spechten.—Heinz Sielmann. 1958. Verlag Ullstein. West Berlin, Germany. 152 pp., 61 photos., 4 in color. Sielmann's book, like his well known motion picture of woodpeckers, combines his skill as a photographer with an understanding of animal behavior, fostered by contact with Konrad Lorenz. "Das Jahr mit den Spechten" is an unusual study. For example, on finding the hole of a pair of Black Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus martius*) in a beech tree, Sielmann and associates chiseled five inches or more of wood from the rear of the nest cavity and inserted a pane of glass. His pictures, taken within one or two feet, show the parent woodpecker entering the hole, moving down head first, nudging the knob of a young one's bill to make it feed, then nudging it at the other end to obtain a fecal sack. The parent bird has head and tail pointing vertically upward when brooding within the narrow cavity. Some of the observations represent original contributions. In a nest relief ceremony, the bird on the eggs starts tapping on the inside wall as soon as it hears the call of its mate. This tapping is also a ceremony prominent in the excavation of the nest hole. Sielmann's book has good, but less complete nesting studies of the Great Spotted (*Dendrocopos major*) and Green (*Picus viridis*) Woodpeckers. Hand-raised individuals gave opportunities for close-up observations. The way the various woodpeckers use their remarkable tongues, locate grubs deep within hidden tunnels in logs, and break open nuts by use of an anvil are among the many aspects of the biology of these birds which the author has both photographed and described. His book is written for the general reader, but should be of interest to any student of bird behavior, and particularly to those with special interest in woodpeckers. The European woodpeckers described have much in common with American species of the same or of related genera.—LAWRENCE KILHAM.