

Communications

A Protest Against the Indiscriminate Use of Poison by Orchardists.

EDITOR THE CONDOR.—The proposed new bird law which was considered at the last meeting of The Cooper Ornithological Club, met with the hearty approval of its members, and the discussion which followed illustrated the importance of concentrated action in such matters. In this case, among other methods of destroying birds, that of poisoning, which prevails so extensively in Southern California, was mentioned by the writer. At once enough facts were presented by the members to establish beyond question that this practice, which destroys the beneficial as well as the obnoxious birds, should be suppressed.

Since the meeting I have taken the trouble to write to friends and acquaintances in different parts of Southern California in regard to poisoning of birds in their locality. The evidence from this source shows that most of the animosity is against the linnets or house finch. In outlying districts where little fruit is raised, he remains with it from the start, and no doubt is a pest to that particular orchard. Powder and shot cost money and require constant vigilance in its use, so the orchardist resorts to cups of poisoned water and broken fruit dosed with arsenic or strychnine, placed in neighboring trees. The linnets might, and do, rain down in clouds, without protest; but it happens that about the time of the ripening of the first fruits our beautiful Louisiana Tanager passes through Southern California on its northern migration, some years in immense numbers.

He carries his appetite with him and is sure to meet one of the many death-traps set for the linnets and is destroyed by the thousands, although he tarries but a few days and does no more damage than he is entitled to do. I have myself seen *156 birds dead under one tree*, of which 130 were tanagers, all the result of one morning's work. The fact was agitated in the local papers, but there being no law protecting the bird, it had no effect.

A letter received today from Miss Mollie Bryan, of Orange, who is much interested in bird protection, gives a graphic account of the methods and actual results of bird poisoning. I quote from it as follows: "I have taken a little time to enquire about the birds poisoned here. I know of but one orchardist in Orange who has poisoned to protect loquats and I cannot obtain accurate numbers with regard to the mischief he has done. Three years ago he killed principally tanagers, some orioles, the rest linnets, the numbers running up into the hundreds. I remember hearing at the time that three hundred had been killed before the

season was over. The next year the linnets were the most numerous of the killed. A friend has just told me she was visiting at this place, saw the fruit poisoned with arsenic, tied in the ornamental trees 'and the poor little dead linnets literally rained down. I gathered my dress-skirt full of the dead birds and brought them home.' But the orchardist said that the tanagers were very scarce that year; he had not killed one the day my friend was there. And this year he says there has been but few about his place, though I could tell him they were plentiful at my home.

"The second year his numbers ran to 'about a thousand,' but mostly linnets. My informants are reliable, but they have forgotten the exact numbers, but all are sure that my statement of three hundred is not exaggerated in the least. The idea of linnets eating apricot fruit-buds seems to be exploded, and poisoning for that has stopped in this section, though two years ago it was universally done in San Bernardino Co., and the ranchers were very proud of the work of destruction they were doing. That was done by putting cups of poisoned water in the trees. The most wholesale slaughter I have ever known of was out near Victor or Hesperia. I did know the rancher's name; he had last year the only bearing orchard in the community in which he lived, and killed *one thousand tanagers* in one spring. That was not in my locality, but it seems so horrible I cannot refrain from telling it."

I have no doubt from the letters I have received that this slaughter of the innocents goes on from year to year with more or less persistence according to local conditions. We may not be able to stop the shooting of marauding birds and perhaps it is not best to try to, for the farmer will usually shoot at the ones that pester him the most, but the Club should make a strong fight for a clause in the proposed law prohibiting the use of poisons which kill indiscriminately.

FRANK S. DAGGETT.

Pasadena, Cal., Oct. 10, 1900.

Are Blackbirds Injurious or Beneficial?

EDITOR THE CONDOR:

A note in connection with the recent bulletin of the Department of Agriculture on "The Food of Bobolinks, Blackbirds and Grackles" may prove interesting. Brewer's Blackbird is shown by it to have eaten 60 per cent. of grain, mostly oats. As few oats are cultivated in California, they must have been mostly wild oats, one of the wheat-grower's greatest pests in most parts of the state. Brewer's Blackbird probes for wheat kernels of young grain and often destroys the wheat plant, but it is not as bad in this respect as the Western Meadowlark. However, both species eat many grasshoppers in a year and I cannot say that the