

A Letter from Dr. Coues to Dr. Cooper.

THE following letter, contributed by Mr. Emerson, is of interest just now, in connection with the life of Dr. Cooper. We have here a glimpse into the past, showing us at once the friendship existing between Dr. Cooper and Dr. Coues, and the esteem in which Cassin was held by his fellow workers.

Fort Macon, North Carolina.

February 21, 1869.

MY DEAR COOPER:

I have not heard from you for so long, that I don't recollect which one of us owes the other a letter; but that's no great matter after all! I have received the two copies of your paper so kindly sent, and read them with unusual interest and profit. You quote me, I notice, very extensively. I have not the papers by me or I should like to make a few notes that struck me on first perusal. I consider the paper a highly interesting and very valuable one. That one now printing in the "Naturalist" will also be of great practical service. Please let me have a copy of all that you write. I understand that your large work will be out before long. I think I have seen it announced, in print, in some publisher's prospectus, but can not recall definitely. I look for it with eager interest. I have sent you, I think, all the papers that I have published since my "Prodrome," directing them for want of more definite address to care of the S. F. Nat. Hist. Soc. Have you received them? A short one, "List of Birds Collected in Arizona by Dr. Ed. Palmer," bears directly upon your work. He got on the Gila desert 3 species not previously attributed to the Territory; and several kinds of eggs not before known to the ornithologists. My large work still remains in MSS; but is about ready for the press. I have about 2500 pages of MSS. Yours and mine together will, I think, about use up the subject. Yours has the great desideratum of mine—illustrations. I

know these will be GREAT; have seen the proofs of a great many of them, and they are first rate. Best things out since Cassin's and the Pac. R. R. Reports!! I deeply regret that my book can boast of nothing of the sort; but I have no means of procuring any such desirable embellishments.

After my long stay at Columbia, over 2½ years, I am at length moved. Fort Macon is on one of the long islands off the coast of North Carolina just opposite Beaufort. I did comparatively little at Columbia in the bird line, my position being a very onerous one as regarding official duties. I only managed to collect data for a Synopsis of the Birds of the State (a copy of which I sent you). Although the birds are of course well known in the general run, I thought that a new carefully prepared list might find an acceptable place in our chronicles. I have as much time here at my disposal as you seem to have at drum barracks, and I hope to put it to good account in the line of ornithological studies. I have never before lived on the South Atlantic seaboard.

Of course you heard the sad, sad news that John Cassin's labors are ended. The loss to Science none of us can measure; nor can those privileged to call him friend adequately express the depth of that bereavement. And many as are our American ornithologists—high as some stand in American ornithology—there is none left in all our land who can lift up the mantle that has fallen from his shoulders. His good work is accomplished, and he has gone to reap the rich reward of a life nobly spent in the survey of Nature's beauties, in drinking from the perennial fountain of Nature's truths. Since Audubon passed away from the scene of his usefulness, death has struck no such cruel blow to our beloved science. As Dr. Brewer has said to me, "which one of our younger ornithologists will

undertake to stand, after thirty-five years of training, where Cassin stood at his death?" The all-worthy time-honored quartette has been rudely broken. Now only a triangle, Lawrence, Brewer and Baird, remains of the last generation of American ornithologists. Who shall lead opinion when they too are gathered to their fathers? A higher trust than we perhaps appreciate, is laid upon the few of us of this later day who pay devotion to the beautiful study of ornithology. It is no less than the keeping bright and untarnished,

and transmitting to our successors, the name and fame of the science that has absorbed such minds as those of Wilson, Nuttall, Audubon, Bonaparte and Cassin. May we prove worthy servitors, guarding with jealous care our trust, watchful that the vestal fires shall ever burn at the shrine where we worship with a clear and steady flame.

Ever yours, faithfully,

ELLIOTT COUES.

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### Some Observations on the Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

BY C. BARLOW.

THOSE who go afield after the first glories of spring have vanished, when the foxtail along the roadside and the short grass on the hills have taken on an uninviting appearance, have doubtless noticed that most of the birds have settled along the water courses, and that save for an occasional kingbird, lark sparrow and the like the parched hills appear deserted.

Yet my subject deals with a small, rather steep hillside, where from May to September the heat dances dizzily over the thin sage growth and where life to most of us would be intolerable. Here a small colony of rufous-crowned sparrows (*Aimophila ruficeps*) have contentedly established themselves, and they lead an altogether busy life searching along the old stone wall which separates the pasture from the road. Considerable travel passes along the road but it seems in nowise to disturb them and they are really a sociable colony.

How long the birds have frequented this sparsely-covered hill I do not know, but they were there to my knowledge to 1896 and perhaps have been there for decades. This particular hill possesses a decidedly scraggly growth of sage, and why it was chosen in preference to some heavily covered hill which might afford secure protection, is

best known to the birds themselves. Perhaps the stone wall mentioned and the adjacent road afford a generous food supply. It should be mentioned also that a small country schoolhouse lies just across the road, so, withal, this particular band of *Aimophila* cannot be termed as exclusive as we should expect individuals of this genus to be.

The population of this colony can only be speculated upon. A small series including a number of juveniles was collected here by Mr. Grinnell and myself in September, 1901. To be exact some eighteen specimens were taken within an area of two or three acres, and some interesting plumages were represented. Whether there had been an influx of birds from the surrounding hills or not I do not know, but on the same day other seemingly inviting sage hills seemed not to harbor a single sparrow. Thus I am inclined to believe that they are not uniformly distributed over this range of hills, even in the most inviting and suitable territory.

#### PUBLISHED DATA.

We are indebted to Mr. William Brewster for the first published account of the nidification of the rufous-crowned sparrow. In the *Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club* (II, p. 37, 1877) under the caption 'Two Undescribed