

THE CONDOR

An Illustrated Magazine
of Western Ornithology

Published Bi-Monthly by the Cooper Ornithological Club of California.

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Pasadena, California: Published Nov. 20, 1906

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One Dollar per Year in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and U. S. Colonies, payable in advance.

Twenty Cents the single copy.

One Dollar and a Quarter per Year in all other countries in the International Postal Union.

Claims for missing or imperfect numbers should be made within thirty days of date of issue.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Business Manager.

Manuscripts and Exchanges should be sent to the Editor.

Advertising Rates on application.

EDITORIALS

BETTER VERNACULAR NAMES In view of the fact that there is in preparation a new A. O. U. Checklist of North American Birds, and that this will undoubtedly be the generally accepted authority in matters of nomenclature for the next decade or more, a discussion of certain features is more appropriately in order in advance than later. The A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature announces itself as open to suggestions and recommendations from anyone anywhere, and these will be given due consideration before final action is taken.

We have not been alone in our advocacy of better *common* or vernacular names for our birds than many of those in use in the old List; and this is the subject we wish to bring up here.

Common names should be chosen from the standpoint of popular convenience as well as more or less of technical propriety. The usefulness of the A. O. U. Checklist would in our minds be decidedly augmented by the following modifications and innovations.

Drop possessives; for instance, Audubon Warbler instead of "Audubon's" Warbler. The merits of this usage have already been discussed, and to our minds thoroly demonstrated by its increasing employment.

Use a nominative form of geographical name instead of an adjectival; for example, Texas Nighthawk instead of "Texan" Nighthawk, California Woodpecker instead of "Californian" Woodpecker. The old List is inconsistent in this respect.

Insert some qualifying term before the name

of each bird which has two or more representative races; for example, we have in the old List, "Bluebird," Western Bluebird, Azure Bluebird, etc. But all are *bluebirds*, and the eastern species should be called, say, Eastern Bluebird. So also there should be an Eastern Wood Pewee instead of "Wood Pewee" alone, and so on with a great number of cases.

Change "Partridge" to Quail wherever the former name is used in the old List. We, here in California, never hear of Valley "Partridges"! They are always Valley *Quail*; and the same with the other species.

For similar reasons the term "House Finch" should be replaced by the much more preferable *Linnet*; the "House Finch" of the old List would become Common Linnet; the San Clemente "House Finch" would be known as the San Clemente Linnet, etc. We can see no excuse whatever for retaining "House Finch"; 99 persons out of every 100 who are familiar with Linnets never heard of "House Finches"!

For similar reasons the "American Coot" is far better known as the Mudhen; the latter name should be adopted.

"Leucosticte" should become Rosy Finch, just as it used to be called in earlier literature, this for the sake of the amateur (possibly others) who doesn't know Greek!

"St." or "Saint" Lucas should be replaced by San Lucas wherever this geographic name is used; for instance, San Lucas Cardinal. Both "St. Lucas" and "Saint Lucas" are hybrid names and incorrect.

Besides the above, for varying reasons we think an improvement would be accomplished by making the following substitutions: Mountain Partridge of the old List should be changed to Painted Quail; Plumed Partridge to Mountain Quail; California Vulture to California Condor; Burrowing Owl to Ground Owl; Arkansas Kingbird to Western Kingbird; Santa Cruz Jay to Santa Cruz Island Jay; Large-billed Sparrow to Large-billed Marsh Sparrow; Gambel's Sparrow to Nuttall Sparrow; Thurber's Junco to Sierra Junco; Forbush's Sparrow to Northwestern Lincoln Sparrow; Louisiana Tanager to Western Tanager; Grinnell's Water-Thrush to Alaska Waterthrush; Macgillivray's Warbler to Tolmie Warbler; Bush-Tit to Pacific Bushtit; Chestnut-backed Chickadee to Chestnut-sided Chickadee; California Chickadee to Marin Chickadee; Barlow's Chickadee to Santa Cruz Chickadee.

Besides the above specified cases there are a good many more which warrant reconsideration. We would urge the desirability of employing the very best vernacular names that can be selected. This selection is not an easy task, and the responsibility devolves upon the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature. At best we can't expect them to please everyone. Yet we hanker after names that we can use in our school work and popular literature without the necessity of explaining why we have to use them *wrongly*!

If anyone has serious objections to the above proposed changes, or if he has further suggestions to make, now is the time to speak; and THE CONDOR is a good medium for the

expression of opinion. We invite relevant discussion.—J. G.

IS EGG-COLLECTING 1906, pages 95 to 98, appears an JUSTIFIABLE? article, entitled "The Amount of Science in Oology", which deserves careful attention from every egg-collector and oologist. The writer, Professor Thomas H. Montgomery of the University of Texas, arraigns oology as a science in a very convincing manner. He handles his subject admirably and we heartily agree with him in a good deal of what he says, tho we as heartily dissent from his repeated implication that the bulk of egg-collecting is useless and should be stopped.

A reply by Mr. Robert P. Sharples, as printed in the September-October issue of *Bird-Lore*, pages 169-170, altho it contains some excellent points, still leaves Professor Montgomery with the best of the argument. Several more points have occurred to us, however, which we hereby submit in defense of the collector and student of bird's eggs and nests.

Even in his contention as to the quantity of science in oology Professor Montgomery is not quite fair. He admits that there is a little, but dwells on the technicality that the term excludes everything but what relates solely to the colors, shapes, sizes and numbers of eggs. This is mi-leading, for we all now-a-days use the term oology as including everything pertaining to the eggs, nests, nesting places, and nesting habits of our birds.

Then Professor Montgomery proceeds to belittle the value of whatever facts we can accumulate in this field, partly on the grounds that the field is relatively small, and partly because the published results of the study of oology are in the nature of a bare record of numbers, sizes, descriptions of nest structure, etc.; he says this is not science, but merely a possible preparation. For science begins only when laws are established.

What a juggler of words! He seems to have forgotten for the moment that the vast bulk of the work of embryologists, morphologists, and systematists is a "mere cataloging" of the structures of animals and plants. The work of His in embryology is referred to in comparison with the published descriptions and figures of egg-shells and nests; but we must declare that the distinction appears to us only one of subject matter: both are records of structure.

In belittling the importance of the accumulation of hoards of facts, Professor Montgomery makes a grave error. The majority of present-day scientists (tho perhaps we use the term wrongly!), many of them of eminence, content themselves with a simple accumulation of facts; they have constant reason to deplore the premature deduction of laws (tho that is where science begins, according to our learned informant!). The cataloging of a vast array of facts is often necessary to the safe establishment of even a single law in nature. As to the different laws determined, who is as yet in a position to judge anything of their relative values?

We will admit that the field of oology ap-

pears to be *small* as compared to the field of say, embryology. But it seems hardly needful to say that this in no way militates against the value of each fact recorded in the smaller field. The only difference resulting is in the relative sizes of the two masses of facts. Some of us can accomplish more, by nature of our capacity for work, in a small field than we can in a large one: we can gain a more adequate comprehension of the smaller subject. Should we, whose ability happens to be limited, be debarred from any participation in the contribution to science, simply because we cannot enter the largest field? The field of oology, in its broader sense, will be found extensive enough to occupy the average investigator for some time. And in spite of Professor Montgomery's over-emphasis of the barrenness of oology, it without any violence to meaning involves the accumulation of data on habits, life history and general ecology, as well as on the mere egg-shell.

After all, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that the quantity of science in oology is the only deciding point as to whether or not egg-collecting is justifiable. We do not maintain that all collectors pursue the subject with the sole purpose of obtaining knowledge. But we do say that the majority, more or less incidentally perhaps, do obtain a considerable amount of information which becomes sooner or later available to Science.

Besides the scientific aspect of collecting, no matter what its valuation, there is the educational feature so prominent in the development of many individuals. Many an advanced investigator along more important and practical lines received his early training in accuracy and method thru securing and arranging his collection of eggs. We can name at least a dozen eminent men of science who have declared to us that they got their first interest in things of Nature thru collecting birds' eggs. We wonder if Professor Montgomery himself did not get his start in this way, too!

The boy may find far worse play-time employment than in hunting the fields for a new bird, especially when he puts in his spare time at home studying his finds. Which is of most worth, a few bird skins and eggs, or A MAN? The educational value of egg-collecting is to our minds preeminent.

Then there is the recreative phase which is not to be disparaged; and the pleasure to be derived from this pursuit. We must confess that we have gotten more complete satisfaction, in other words *happiness*, out of one vacation trip into the mountains after rare birds and eggs than out of our two years of University work in embryology! The tired business man who takes a week's vacation in the spring, finds in oology a most restful pursuit. The mind-worn school-teacher, and we know several such, forgets all his troubles in a June jaunt into avian haunts. Both take in a few specimens, and about these cluster woody memories which serve to refresh an evening hour now and then during the long work-a-day season. There is an esthetic tinge which only one who has "been there" can appreciate.