

# THE CONDOR A MAGAZINE OF WESTERN ORNITHOLOGY.



Volume X

November-December 1908

Number 6

## RETROSPECTIVE

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WITH the present issue the CONDOR closes its first decade, and perhaps we may be pardoned if we occupy a few moments of our readers' time in looking back or planning ahead. Ten years: a long time for some of us, yet all too short for others. Ten years have wrought their changes in all our lives and left their impress on the ornithological work of the Pacific Coast; and it is with no small feeling of pride that the CONDOR, thru and with its mother organization, the Cooper Club realizes the great strides that have been made in the promulgation of bird knowledge and protection, and the share that we have all had in the work.

When the Cooper Club was formed in June, 1893, by four earnest bird students in San Jose, little did anyone think of the significance of the movement started, or the extent and magnitude that would be reached in the space of fifteen years. Those were the days when H. R. Taylor was publishing the old *Nidologist*, and it was made the official organ of the Club. The first officers of the Club were: President, W. H. Osgood; Vice-President, H. R. Painton; Secretary, Chester Barlow; and Treasurer, F. A. Schneider. Monthly meetings were held, and papers read and later published in the "Nid", as the paper was affectionately called.

The "Nid" filled a long felt want: prior to its issuance we had no publication on the Coast of its kind, and a deep debt of gratitude is due it and its publisher for the impetus it gave to ornithology among men who had hitherto been working independently. By means of the "Nid", and the Cooper Club, we were enabled to get together, to communicate to each other our ideas and discoveries, and to systematize our work.

The Club grew slowly month by month; by the end of the year 1893 there were seventeen members and by the first anniversary of the Club there were twenty-five; and the membership kept growing till by the end of 1896 we had sixty-seven members. The systematic work of the Club up to that time had been confined to the life histories of the Vireos and Wrens of California, and the general trend of the papers on all subjects was along the lines of the recording of observations, migration and nesting dates. Notable among the papers presented were records from

Guadalupe Island and other Lower California points that at that time were little known; the nesting of the Western Evening Grosbeak was for the first time authentically described and a superb photo in colors of the nest and eggs was published as a supplement to the "Nid"; the nesting of the White-throated Swift was also described for the first time authentically. Numerous photos were published illustrating papers and articles, and in general the close of 1896 showed a very satisfactory record. But better than all the work done and records made was the undercurrent of co-operation that had set its permanent tide in movement to carry upward to success the work of ornithology in California; we couldn't see it then, but it is plain enough when we look back and muse on the old days, and when we compare them with the present.

With the May, 1897, issue, the old "Nid" suspended publication after nearly four years' life, and the Cooper Club was without an official organ for over a year; but the necessity for such being obvious, the necessary steps were taken during the fall of 1898 for the publication of a Club Bulletin, and at the annual meeting of January, 1899, the final resolutions establishing the Bulletin were passed and the initial number appeared at once. This time between the cessation of the *Nidologist* and the issuance of the Club Bulletin was really the critical period of the Cooper Club's existence, and but for the tireless efforts of certain members, among whom shine out Barlow, Emerson, Grinnell, McGregor, and Taylor, the interest of the members was in a fair way to cool. More than this, the older and gray-headed members of the Club scoffed at the idea of maintaining an official Bulletin and predicted disaster; but they were in the minority and disregarded, and time has shown them wrong.

So with the January, 1899, issue the first number of the Bulletin of the Cooper Ornithological Club was launched, and it marked a new era for the Club and for California ornithology. A new tone was manifest at once; it was as if we had all come to a realization of the fact that we were engaged in earnest work and had assumed responsibilities that we must carry to a successful issue; we had started something in the face of opposition that our pride spurred us to finish. Besides, we were growing older; and the papers published showed at once a more serious tone and an absence of a flippancy that had no place in a scientific journal. The description of new species began, and to Richard C. McGregor belongs the honor of describing the first new race published in the new Bulletin; four new birds were described during the first year of the Bulletin and many valuable records of rare and little known species were given to the world.

Chester Barlow—responsible for the formation of the Cooper Club nearly six years before and strongest advocate of the new Bulletin, main-stay and hardest worker of us all—shouldered the brunt of the work and assumed the editorship of the new journal; H. R. Taylor and Howard Robertson were his assistants and Don Cohen and A. I. McCormick handled the business end. Gradually the quality of the journal bettered; half-tones began to be used in profusion and the size of the issues increased almost monthly; things went merrily as a wedding bell till November 6, 1902; and then, a bolt out of a clear sky, came the news of Barlow's death. I need not dilate on the extent of our loss; to know Barlow was to love him and we all knew him. Personally his place can never be filled in our hearts; but as far as the CONDOR was concerned, Walter Fisher stepped into the editor's chair and held it for three years and his work speaks for him stronger than can I. On his voluntary retirement at the end of 1905, Mr. Joseph Grinnell took the reins and is the present incumbent.

One has but to run over the files of the Bulletin of the Cooper Ornithological

Club, called the CONDOR from 1900 on, to note the almost monthly improvement in tone, typography, size and general excellence. Local lists soon became prominent and their value cannot be overdrawn. The practice of listing species by their scientific names, giving the vernacular name the minor place, soon became common and marked a radical step for the better. In the issue of November, 1900, a typographical scheme was adopted of printing the scientific name of the species in heavy type and the vernacular name in light small capitals that can hardly be improved upon, and it is hoped that this method will be made permanent in the future. Reference to pages 136-138 of that issue will show that no subsequent typographical scheme has been quite so successful in impressing upon the eye at first glance the name of a species sought; and it may not be irrelevant here to once more urge upon writers to allow no article to enter the pages of the CONDOR in which the scientific name of the species is not given. True that a text of a popular article, cumbered with scientific names, may be made bombastic and clumsy in the extreme, but it must be remembered that our work is scientific first and popular second; and if a species is mentioned in such a manner that it constitutes a record or *may* constitute one, the giving of the scientific name is a debt the author owes to ornithology. This is a subject that has been discussed from many points of view in the CONDOR, and the delightful Sierran gem of J. M. Welch has been used as an illustration of a type of article whose poetic charm would have been entirely destroyed by the introduction of a single Latin name (Vol. I, pp. 108-111). True; yet the Editor thought advisable to append a foot-note giving the locality written about, and had the author appended a foot-note giving not only the locality and date of his notes but the Latin names of the species referred to as well, the poesy of the writing would have been impaired not one whit, while the *record* would have stood for all time as of some value to ornithology.

This point cannot be more strikingly shown than by an inspection of the September issue of the CONDOR of the present year (Vol. X, No. 5). Of ten articles printed in this issue that deal with records of species, no less than three—nearly one-third—are entirely valueless as records simply because the species are recorded by the vernacular name alone. These are not articles that can be classed as "prose poems" in any sense whatever; they are *records*—records of value and interest; records of life history phases, records of breeding ranges of species; yet they will never get beyond the pages of the CONDOR, but, to quote Robert Ridgway in a letter of some years ago (March, 1900), "must remain buried where they now are". We are working in ornithology for the love of it—not for money; our only reward is the satisfaction of work well done, and the name we may make for ourselves; but no one can hope to see his records quoted or passed on, to the credit of his name, unless he makes those records complete and in the manner approved of by the scientific world.

In May, 1902, the incomparable photographs by Finley and Bohlman commenced to appear and marked another epoch in advancement. Field workers began to realize the immense value of good photographs, and where these had been hitherto largely confined to the photographing of nests and eggs, a new impetus was given to the photographing of live birds in their native haunts that was evidenced by the increased number of very excellent half-tones of this nature that made their appearance in the CONDOR during 1903 and thereafter. Particular mention must be made of the really remarkable series of photographs made by Walter K. Fisher on Laysan Island.

The high grade of half-tones that formed the illustrations in the CONDOR at this time rendered necessary the best grade of paper, and with increased excellence

in character of writings and typographically, the journal soon became not only an abiding place of valuable scientific record but a thing of beauty and a joy forever. From this time to the present the general tone of the CONDOR has been steadily improving and the members of the Cooper Club have just reason to feel proud of their work.

During the last ten years, the ornithological articles in the CONDOR have, with the special publications of the Cooper Club, constituted practically all that has been published on the Pacific Coast; in this space of time there has been less than a dozen other articles on ornithology printed here, with the exception of the publications of the Fish and Game Commission.

One thing that has always hampered the work of active ornithologists on the Pacific Coast has been the lack of access to any large collection of birds to work with. Workers have had only their own private collections, supplemented by material borrowed from fellow members and Eastern museums. There is on foot, however, a project to establish at a central point a large collection of birds; the plan will undoubtedly be described in due course, and all I need to say on the matter is to point out to Club members the enormous advantage that will accrue to all if this can be done. All the improvement and good work we have done in the Club has been due to co-operation; if we co-operate by combining collections the same will hold true.

Before we turn our backs to the past and face the future we must mention our absent members—just three or four of them: Barlow, Dr. Cooper, Walter Bryant, Slevin, Miss Mollie Bryan—they all had the interests of the Club and the CONDOR at heart and ever present in their minds. They strove always for the betterment of the work and the advancement of knowledge and their loss was keenly felt by all; their genial spirits are with us always and our memories of them should carry us over many a dark spot.

And now, what are we going to make of the CONDOR in the ten years to come? Where is there room for improvement? To answer these questions requires some thought, and frankly I confess that even after hard thinking the result is unsatisfactory. To improve typographically will be natural and commensurate with the march of progress in printing; improvement in caliber of writings will depend upon the work of the Club members and rests with them; perhaps an increase in the size of the journal can be looked for, but that is a financial matter that will call for a committee on finance. Of course we would like to see a CONDOR three times the size of the usual one; and a volume of 600 pages instead of 200 would be just three times as good; perhaps we will have it before the second decade is completed. But whatever form the improvements may take, let us not forget that it is up to each and every member of the Club to do his best to help out; if we all do that the future is assured.

And now, all thanks to those who have worked to bring us to this successful ending of our first ten years; we all know who you are, and we thank you; all thanks are due to the little workers as well as the big, and we only hope that you will work as hard in the future as in the past. If you need any encouragement, just read over your old files; remember the obstacles met and surmounted in the past; note the successive steps always up and on, in the improvement of the journal and the work of the Club, and then let's all pull together for an even better record in the next ten years.

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