

THE CONDOR

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of Western Ornithology

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EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

There is a growing custom among museum and private collectors concerning which a word of caution may be in order. We refer to that of securing the services of missionaries, traders, prospectors, and others not well versed in ornithology to gather eggs of rare northern birds, these eggs to be preserved and distributed as scientific specimens. It is extremely difficult in many cases to insure accurate identity of the various geese, ducks, waders and gulls even by the trained field naturalist. Although a few bird skins may have been saved, the discrimination of species on the ground where scores of individuals representing many species nest in close proximity to one another, is a difficult matter. The tendency to *gather in* a big showing is liable to overcome the best of intentions with regard to accuracy. The grave danger scientifically comes of course when data accompanying such eggs is published. We have no doubt but that there are many bad records in our literature traceable to some such source. This danger should be vigorously guarded against, even if by so doing a museum collection does not grow so rapidly.

Mr. J. H. Riley and Mr. N. Hollister, both of the staff of the United States National Museum, spent a portion of the past summer collecting in western Alberta and eastern British Columbia. Specimens, practically topotypes, of Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, White-tailed Ptarmigan and Franklin Grouse, were obtained.

Part V of Ridgway's "Birds of North and Middle America" is reported almost ready for distribution, Mr. Ridgway being now occupied upon Part VI. His color book is to be expected shortly as all the color work has been done and only the text remains to be printed.

Mr. G. Willett's "Birds of Southern California" is nearly ready for the printer. It is to be published by the Cooper Ornithological Club as Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 7, and distributed free to all members. Its cost will be defrayed by private subscription. Mr. Willett's contribution will consist of an exhaustive compilation of all that is known to date in regard to the manner of occurrence of the birds of that part of southern California lying west of the desert divide. We look forward with great interest to the appearance of this carefully executed work.

There will shortly appear from the University of California Press two notable papers chiefly of an ornithological nature. These are: Mr. H. S. Swarth's report upon the Alexander Expedition to Vancouver Island in 1910, and the concluding part of Mr. W. P. Taylor's report upon the field work of the Alexander Expedition to Nevada in 1909.

Mr. W. Leon Dawson spent a goodly portion of the field season just closed in out-door work contributory to his projected "Birds of California." The Farallone Islands and the Mount Whitney region shared in this year's attention, each locality contributing to Mr. Dawson's stock of first-hand ornithology. The editor of THE CONDOR has been privileged to examine some of the photos obtained, and he enthusiastically asserts that they include some of the most successful bird photographs he has ever seen.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED.

BIRDS AND MAMMALS OF THE 1909 ALEXANDER ALASKA EXPEDITION BY HARRY S. SWARTH. [=Univ. Calif. Publ., Zool., VII, pp. 9-172, pls. 1-6; Jan. 12, 1911].

In continuation of its well-planned and well-executed campaign in Alaska, the University

of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology presents this liberal measure of results for a single season's work. The author, with one assistant, Mr. A. E. Hasselborg, spent the six months from April to October in visiting sixteen islands and six mainland localities in southeastern Alaska, reaching practically all important points not covered by the previous expedition of 1907. Somewhat more than 1000 specimens of birds and mammals were collected and a great amount of trustworthy information obtained. The list of birds totals 137 forms of which the 31 not attested by specimens are mostly included upon the careful observation and competent authority of the author himself. The extended critical and ecological notes bristle with facts new, interesting, and pertinent to particular problems. The notes on spring migration are especially welcome as very few observations have been made in this region earlier than May and June. In spite of the evident active field work done, one notes with no surprise that but little is recorded of nesting habits and the more intimate features of the bird life. Such matters must be left to local observers, for the itinerant collector in virgin fields can never spare the time for them. The critical notes are rather too numerous for specific mention, but it may be said that they carry a spirit of fairness and in a number of cases matters are presented in a new light or with additional and highly pertinent material tending to elucidate the status of various species and subspecies. Among the forms touched upon in this manner are *Macrorhamphus griseus scolopaceus*, *Buteo b. alascensis*, *Picoides a. fumipectus*, *Dryobates v. harrisi*, *D. p. glacialis*, *Passerculus s. savanna*, *Junco oregonus*, *Hirundo e. palmeri* and *Dendroica c. hooveri*. No new forms were discovered, and in view of the large collections and their careful study, this seems to indicate that possibilities in this direction are well nigh exhausted in a long productive region.

A very interesting section of the report, devoted to "Distributional Considerations," is all too short, although the modest statements of facts and conditions which it includes are perhaps better without ingenious elaboration of the theories to which they might lend themselves. In finding no faunal relationship between Prince of Wales Island and the Queen Charlotte group, the author is at variance with former writers who had the advantage of the possession of extensive material from both localities.

Doubtless he is right as to the reference of specimens, but we venture the belief that the Queen Charlotte forms are approached more closely by specimens from Prince of Wales Island and nearby islets than from elsewhere.

Arrangement, typography, and proofreading are above reproach, but the fastidious might ask for a more dignified abbreviation than Grin. for Grinnell, especially as we do not find on the same page, corresponding abridgments to Les., Lin., Nut., and Pal.—W. H. OSGOOD.

THE WARD-MCILHENNY WILDFOWL REFUGE. By CHARLES WILLIS WARD [=Forest and Stream, vol. LXXVII, no. 5, July, 1911, pp. 167-170, 5 ills.]

It is hard to overestimate the practical value of such game protection as is here described. To set aside large tracts of suitable land (there are 13,000 acres in this refuge) on which absolutely no shooting is allowed, will most assuredly protect the game thereon, while, as the writer says, "laws limiting their killing, prohibitions of the sale of game, societies for the protection of game, all seem inadequate to prevent the steady destruction of wild life". Of game laws, supposedly protective, but too often juggled with and adjusted to benefit various coteries of shooters, rather than the game, we have a superabundance, frequently so complicated and contradictory in different parts of the same state that it is hard for the conscientious sportsman to obey, and frequently easy for the unscrupulous to evade them. After years of experimentation along the same general lines we are forced to admit that our present system of game preservation is a failure, and that unless some radical changes are made, many of our game birds and mammals, and many non-game birds as well, are certain to disappear. Some have already gone. The "game refuge" idea holds out a gleam of hope. It looks practical and reasonable, and, linked with sensible restrictive laws covering the country at large, should do much to arrest the deplorable decrease of animal life. It is an undertaking that should be carried out by the various state governments, but the states are slow to move in such matters, and any private individuals stepping in meanwhile and doing as Messrs. McIlhenny and Ward have done deserve the fullest measure of praise and credit for their work. They seem to be going ahead in an eminently practical and unsentimental way. Sportsmen themselves, and fond of shooting, they are attacking the problem from the standpoint not that it is wrong to kill for sport but that it is eminently foolish and unsportsmanlike to utterly destroy so valuable an asset as the game of a country, and leave nothing for the morrow. We wish them the fullest measure of success. Their efforts should be given the widest publicity, and the results studied carefully. Would that other wealthy men could be found to attempt the same thing elsewhere; such refuges are badly needed in our own state, and could prob-