

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Sunlight and Shadow.—Since we put away the gun and took to the field-glass I wonder if many a doubtful bird on our local lists, admitted solely upon field-glass observation, could not be traced to the effect of sunlight or shadows. While doing a little collecting recently in the winter woods of southeastern Arkansas this was brought home to me as never before.

The man with the field-glass finds the sunshine one of his greatest drawbacks to identification. It is a good thing to have light on a subject but a very unsatisfactory condition to have a glare of brilliant sunlight on a bird we are endeavoring to identify. And should it be necessary for us to look directly toward the sun, we may find the identification of the species well nigh impossible. What a gorgeous plumage a little sunshine can impart to some dull feathered and commonplace bird! The bird-man afield often finds it necessary to work under conditions that are far from ideal. It is not always possible to keep one's back to the sun and it is generally at the least expected and unprepared-for moment that the prize of the day appears. A living bird is an active creature and rarely is it so accommodating as to sit still long enough for us to make out every detail of its plumage. Possibly ninety-five times out of a hundred our bird moves on before we have clearly seen that one *sure* identification mark. If we are fortunate we may be able to follow it and observe it under more favorable conditions, but the chances are that we have seen the last of it for that day and we have just seen enough to set us guessing. It may be that we caught but a fleeting glimpse of it, or we may have had it under observation for a few seconds, but because of some projecting twig we have failed to see that much desired field mark. No doubt we can name its family and perhaps we are almost certain about its species. We saw enough to be all but *positive* and it takes but a freak of light or shadow to supply that one half hidden spot.

One trouble is that we are too apt to look for the rare and unusual in the bird we meet. We should curb our enthusiasm and imagination and treat every bird we see as the common and to-be-expected species for our locality until we have *proven* it to be otherwise, and when the identity lies in some minor detail, the proof should always be the bird in the hand.

In the cause of accurate observation it might be a good thing if every field-glass student could use a gun at least a few times in his or her life. A gun makes one sceptical and thereby careful. When you identify a bird as this or that with the glasses and then shoot it and find it to be something different, it brings home to you as nothing else can, how very easy it is to be mistaken. I believe that most collectors have had such an experience.

The field-glass observer is often hurt because someone doubts his accuracy in identifying some unusual bird, but no one realizes better than the man who has collected, what an easy thing it is to misidentify a bird, and when the identification rests on some minor point, it is little wonder that he questions it. I believe my own field-glass lists would be larger had I never collected. Many is the bird I leave off my list whose identity I am all but *positive* about.

Down in Arkansas one day I saw a Hooded Warbler; I identified it with the field-glass, but my gun transformed it into a Black-throated Green Warbler, and no one could have been more surprised than I. The sunlight or the shadows had played me a trick.—CHRESWELL J. HUNT, *Chicago, June 2, 1920.*

How Fast Can a Roadrunner Run?—The Roadrunner has gained the reputation of being swift of foot, but is its reputation based on actual swiftness, or merely on the fact that the bird gets from place to place by the conspicuous use of its legs? In his article on "Habits and Food of the Roadrunner in California" (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., vol. 17, 1916, p. 27) H. C. Bryant quotes from Heermann that the Roadrunner "may . . . be overtaken when followed on horseback over the vast open plains" and that Heermann "once saw one captured by a couple of dogs." If these statements are accepted, as they will be by most people, not for what they literally say, but for what they imply in regard to the speed of the Roadrunner, they are calculated, I fear, to give one a slightly