other ducks drop in from time to time. Of rarer species I have seen one Black Tern (*Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis*), a young bird in first year plumage, the Wilson Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*) and Northern Phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*), and one Least Sandpiper (*Pisobia minutilla*). The Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) is often seen about the edge of the reservoir. The Killdeer (*Oxyechus vociferus*) is common in the ploughed fields. I have seen both the Anthony Green Heron (*Butorides virescens anthonyi*) and the Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax naevius*) hereabouts.—R. A. BRAMKAMP, *Banning, California, December 21, 1921.*

EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

Many years ago one of our foremost ornithologists claimed a certain species of bird as "his own", because, while it had been named by another man, he, himself, was first able to give a satisfactory description of the species. We can smile at the "claim", perhaps; today we disallow it. Of the valid credit he acquired by information given out regarding this species and many others, there is no question. The incident seems amusing now, in the general acceptance of uniform nomenclatural rules, but the lesson conveyed may still be read. To claim "credit" or "priority" will not secure it; it comes unsought if it is deserved. It is a matter of congratulation that ornithology today is practically free from bickering and jealousy between individuals, and that as a rule a spirit of mutual helpfulness prevails.

An immensely useful feature of our contemporary magazine *Bird-Lore* is the School Department which is conducted under the auspices of the National Association of Audubon Societies. Dr. Arthur A. Allen of Cornell University is editor of this department. As is to be expected under Dr. Allen's editorship, the material presented is well chosen, rigidly authentic, and couched in sober language. The educational function of the Audubon Societies, thus performed, is an exceedingly worthy one.

In *The Ibis* for April, 1922, Mr. J. H. Gurney writes "on the sense of smell possessed by birds", an article that is well worth reading. Details of observations made far and wide, on various species of birds, by many different people, are brought together, as well as arguments, for and against, in the disputed question of whether or not the sense of smell is used by birds in their search for food, or for other ends. While it is well for any ornithologist to have a grasp of what has been done in this field, still an elaborate resume of opinions and controversies (perhaps the major part of the literature on this subject) together with such obviously inadequate, frequently accidental, "experiments" as compose most of the recorded observations, should be no more than a preliminary to studies of a more conclusive nature.

Here, again, is a field for those who, disliking to kill birds, still wish to make some substantial contribution to ornithology. To carry on the discussion on the basis of the disputed observations so far placed on record, is to put ornithologists in the same class as certain clerical disputants of the Middle Ages, whose serious activities are now an untailing subject of humor, discussing heatedly, for example, the number of legs possessed by a fly, without descending to the vulgar expedient of counting them. To carry on a series of experiments here in California, and experiments that should be conclusive, would seem to be a simple matter for anyone with a little time to devote to the subject. The Turkey Vulture, an obvious subject for such experimentation, is abundant throughout most of California. It would take but little ingenuity to devise and carry out a series of observations upon the habits of this species, based perhaps upon baits, concealed and otherwise, the results of which would explain at least the method by which this bird discovers its food. Furthermore, such experiments could be conducted without offending even the most rabid bird protectionist or anti-animal-experimentalist—without the need even of such official permits as are called for in the banding of birds.

The ornithologists of Washington, D. C., met at the home of Mr. B. H. Swales, 2921 Albemarle St., Chevy Chase, D. C., on March 14, 1922, and organized an ornithological club to be known as the Baird Club, in honor of Prof. Spencer F. Baird. Dr. A. K. Fisher was elected President, Mr. Robert Ridgway, Honorary President, Mr. Ned Hollister, Vice President, and Mr. B. H. Swales, Secretary. The membership of the club is restricted to those primarily interested in birds. Meetings will be held monthly at the members' homes, for more or less informal social intercourse.

The Cooper Prize in Ornithology ($50.00), offered at the University of California for the best essay on any topic concerned with birds, has been won by Mr. Robert C. Miller. His thesis, "A Study of the Flight of Sea Gulls", was unanimously chosen by the

committee of award from among the several essays offered. It will be printed in an early issue of The Condor.

We hear that Mr. E. R. Kalmbach of the U. S. Biological Survey has been working on the problem of controlling blackbirds in the Imperial Valley. These birds have responded very favorably to the irrigation and cultivation of that territory; their numbers are now so great that damage to certain crops is reported to be heavy.

After five years of active field work in the state of Washington for the U. S. Biological Survey, Mr. George G. Cantwell, of Puyallup, has resigned, as of date January 1, 1922. During a good deal of this time Mr. Cantwell has served as assistant to Dr. Walter P. Taylor in the latter's vertebrate survey of the state.

COMMUNICATION

PROBLEMS CONCERNING DESERT BIRD-LIFE

Editor THE CONDOR:

I have had opportunities in the last few years of studying the ornithology, and the fauna generally, of some of the deserts of the Old World. I have come to the conclusion that the desert birds are particularly worthy of study from an ecological point of view because they live in an environment which has been unspoilt by man and because their reactions to their peculiar environment are, in some cases at any rate, very easily observed. I have also come to the conclusion that the accepted interpretation of some of the most obvious features of desert life requires revision. May I appeal to your readers to send me any facts, or any ideas, which bear on such problems as the following, so that I may compare our Old World fauna with yours. Eventually I hope to publish a summary of my results.

1. The surface of the desert soil heats up to a very high temperature in the daytime and cools very rapidly at night. Do birds which nest on the ground in American deserts commence incubation as soon as the first egg is laid? Have you any birds which lay right out in the open without the shelter of a bush, as is done by Coursers, Stone Curlew and Sand Grouse with us? Some of these birds lay in May, or even in June and July, at the very height of summer, and it is difficult to see how the eggs avoid being cooked if incubation is not continuous from the date the first egg is laid.

2. I should be grateful for information as to the water supply of the chicks of desert birds. Our Sand Grouse fly a very great distance to water, once a day, and the males saturate the breast feathers with water and bring it back to the chicks, who drink from the breast. We know nothing about the water supply of other desert chicks; but one presumes that their requirements are high, because only by evaporation can they keep their bodies cool.

3. The prevalent color of desert birds is of course roughly that of their environment; this is true also of their chicks. I am inclined to think that it is not true of the eggs. The egg of such a bird as the Stone Curlew, or Courser, is of the familiar type characteristic of the ground nester, but it is not specialized in the direction of being paler or less blotchy. It is in fact a typical ground breeder's egg, not a typical desert breeder's egg. What do American oologists say?

4. We regard the sandy color of desert birds as protective, and so it is, under certain circumstances. With us, many desert birds are running about feeding in early morning and late evening; the sun is low and they cast long black shadows and are quite conspicuous. In these cases the protection must at any rate be very incomplete. Then, again, our Eagle Owl is a powerful bird, nocturnal, and found over a large part of western Asia and Europe and North Africa. Many subspecies are described, and the desert ones are all pale and more or less sandy in color. Of what possible value is this to the bird? Does the theory of protective coloration fit the facts as regards birds in North American deserts? Have you any species of birds in America which produce red forms on red desert, gray on gray desert, pale on sandy desert, etc?

I have trespassed too far on your space already. If any American ornithologist is good enough to write to me, to discuss these problems or furnish me with facts, I shall be extremely grateful. Would my correspondents remember that I am quite ignorant of American birds, and furnish scientific names, and state even the obvious facts which *you* all know?

I remain, Sir, yours,

P. A. BUXTON,

Government Laboratory, Jerusalem, Palestine, February 27, 1922.

MINUTES OF COOPER CLUB MEETINGS

NORTHERN DIVISION

FEBRUARY.—The regular meeting of the Northern Division of the Cooper Ornitholog-