

Check-List cannot reflect an extremely heterogeneous popular usage; it would appear also that definite teaching value of the code of names as at present constituted, as well as effectiveness in shaping usage, remains to be proved. A reference set of vernacular names of *species* of birds is of value in connection with popular handbooks and bulletins; but it is not apparent what valuable use there is for made-to-order names for all of the *subspecies*, that is not fully served by the scientific names.

Washington, D. C., October 9, 1922.

## COMMENTS ON TWO RECENT NUMBERS OF BENT'S LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

By G. WILLETT

ON READING the last two numbers of Mr. Bent's splendid work (U. S. Nat. Mus. Bulls. 113 and 121), several items contained therein seem to the writer to call for a certain amount of enlargement or criticism. Therefore the following notes are submitted as of possible interest to CONDOR readers.

**Larus glaucescens.** Glaucous-winged Gull. In regard to this species the statement is made on page 70 of Bulletin 113 that no evidence was found to show that it eats the eggs of other species of birds. Previous to the summer of 1920 all information secured by the writer during several years of close observation of the species on its breeding grounds would certainly have led one to believe that it lacked the egg-stealing propensities of its more southern relative, *Larus occidentalis*. The natural food of the Glaucous-winged Gull is small fish—in southeastern Alaska the herring—and it is doubtful whether it resorts to egg stealing when this food is to be readily obtained.

During the summer of 1920, which the writer spent on Forrester Island, the herring, though present in considerable numbers throughout the summer, for some reason seldom rose to the surface of the water where the gulls could obtain them. The puffins and cormorants secured their rations without difficulty, by diving, but the gulls were forced to seek their subsistence elsewhere. In early summer they ate shell-fish, crabs, etc., to a large extent, but later, after the cormorants and murrens had laid their eggs, these constituted the most important item on the menu of the gulls. Mr. A. M. Bailey, at that time with the Biological Survey, was with the writer on several occasions when the gulls were seen busily engaged in pilfering their food from the nests of murrens and cormorants. The latter, in particular, were so persistently robbed that visits to their colonies in late summer showed a large proportion of their nests to be empty and most of the others to contain but one or two young to the nest.

**Larus argentatus argentatus.** Herring Gull. **Larus argentatus thayeri.** Thayer Gull. The occurrence of these two forms of the herring gull in southeastern Alaska has, up to the present time, not been well understood. This fact led Mr. Bent to state that breeding records for the herring gull from southeastern Alaska might refer to *thayeri*.

There are apparently but few breeding localities in this region, the only two known to the writer being Forrester Island and Muir Inlet. In the former locality the bird breeds only in small numbers and apparently is entirely absent during some summers. The summer of 1914 several pairs nested on rocks off the northern end of Forrester Island (*Auk*, xxxii, 1915, p. 300), in company with Glaucous-winged Gulls. After considerable difficulty, the writer succeeded in flushing herring gulls from two nests. The species was noted frequently during subsequent summers until 1920. During this season, a collecting permit having been secured, an attempt was made to secure specimens, but, though several immature birds were seen, not a single adult could be found on the island.

Mr. A. M. Bailey, while with the Biological Survey, found about a dozen pairs of herring gulls nesting among Glaucous-winged Gulls in Muir Inlet June 19, 1920. He informs me that specimens secured are referable to *argentatus*.

The writer is familiar with the two forms of herring gull as they occur in this region and has taken numerous specimens of each. At close range the two, in nearly all instances, may be easily differentiated in the air by one familiar with them. The bird that is sparingly found throughout the summer is *argentatus*, readily distinguished from *thayeri* by the large amount of black on its wing tips.

Both forms winter in the vicinity of Craig in considerable numbers, though *argentatus* is the most plentiful. The earliest fall record for *thayeri* is September 24 (1922) and the latest in spring, March 24 (1922). It is probable, however, that they remain considerably later in the spring. In February and March vast numbers of herring come to the vicinity of Craig to spawn. At this time gulls and many other species of birds congregate in thousands to feed on the fish and their spawn. During this period both forms of herring gulls occur commonly.

**Larus brachyrhynchus.** Short-billed Gull. Although Mr. Bent does not include southeastern Alaska in the winter range of this species, it is an abundant winter resident in the region, at least as far north as Wrangell. Adult birds begin to arrive in the vicinity of Craig about the middle of July, and by the end of the month they are common. They are very plentiful throughout the winter and until late April, and stragglers are occasionally noted through May. Immatures are occasional during the summer months. The species was common at Wrangell during the winter of 1920-21.

**Oceanodroma furcata.** Fork-tailed Petrel. The earliest nesting date Mr. Bent gives for this petrel is June 7. On Forrester Island eggs were found as early as May 13 and by May 18 were quite common.

**Sula dactylatra.** Blue-faced Booby. Though, as Mr. Bent indicates, two eggs is the usual number laid by this species, the writer, while on Laysan Island during the winter of 1912-13, noted two nests containing three eggs each; and on Lisianski Island a nest containing four eggs was found.

**Phalacrocorax auritus cincinatus.** White-crested Cormorant. Among pro-

tected breeding grounds of this cormorant Mr. Bent mentions St. Lazaria and Forrester islands. The writer spent two summers in the vicinity of St. Lazaria Island and six summers on Forrester Island without seeing any indications of its breeding on either of them. The species was not seen at all at St. Lazaria and only once, in spring, at Forrester. There is no portion of the coast line of Forrester Island and outlying islets that was not thoroughly covered and it is certain that this bird did not breed there from 1914 to 1920. Though the writer has searched carefully for breeding colonies of this bird and has questioned many others regarding them, he has been entirely unable to locate any along the southeastern Alaskan coast and doubts their existence in this locality.

The White-crested Cormorant is a rather common winter resident in the vicinity of Craig, adult birds being noted as early as September 11 (1921) and as late as May 17 (1922). Immature birds have been seen as late as June 2 (1921) and may possibly occur throughout the summer. It is the writer's belief that these birds come from lakes in the interior and not from coastal breeding colonies.

**Phalacrocorax penicillatus.** Brandt Cormorant. The specimen of this cormorant taken by the writer on Forrester Island June 2, 1917, and recorded in Condor, xx, 1918, p. 85, constitutes the only record of the species for the locality and, I believe, from Alaska. This bird was almost certainly a straggler only and it would seem insufficient evidence upon which to include Forrester Island in the breeding range of the species as is done by Mr. Bent.

*Craig, Alaska, November 5, 1922.*

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Concerning the Cassiar Junco.—I wrote a personal letter to the editor of THE CONDOR the other day which called forth the decidedly unexpected reply that I had some very good ideas which ought to go on record. The editor's remark was called forth by some comments I had made on Swarth's discovery of the breeding range of *Junco connectens*, at Telegraph Creek, B. C., as set forth in his "Birds and Mammals of the Stikine Region of Northern British Columbia and Southeastern Alaska". I took rather a personal interest in this discovery, as my home, Colorado Springs, Colorado, is the type locality of *Junco connectens*. I was living there when Messrs. Allen and Brewster collected the type specimen, of which, however, I knew nothing until years after, though I met those gentlemen there.

It so happens that much of my field work about Colorado Springs has been done in the autumn and winter months, when we have a goodly assemblage of Juncos with us: *caniceps* (the local breeding form), *mearnsi*, *aikeni*, *shufeldti*, *montanus*, *hyemalis*, and *connectens*. Of course these are not all equally abundant; some are quite rare. I may say here that I had never been quite satisfied in my own mind with the treatment accorded *connectens* by various writers. Some, if my memory serves me right, tried to explain it as a hybrid, an explanation which seems to me in many cases to be a confession of ignorance, an explanation to fall back upon if you don't know the real facts.

In my field work in this region I have yearly seen a certain number of these black-headed Juncos, with no brown on back or pink on sides. They are quite different-looking birds from *hyemalis*, which is much rarer, and they are, of course, easily distinguishable from *shufeldti* or *montanus*, the other two black-headed Juncos about here. Seeing these birds regularly, even though they were relatively rare, rather convinced me that they must belong to a distinct form and not of a hybrid nature, though