

EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

The discovery of a new *species* of bird in North America is of late years a well-nigh unknown event. Rather startling, then, is an announcement in the *Auk* for January, 1923 (p. 90), of the finding of a new Clapper Rail in the Colorado River bottom near Yuma. Mr. Donald R. Dickey christens this bird the Yuma Clapper Rail (*Rallus yumanensis*), new to science, and also a species new to California. Its relationships are with *Rallus levis* of the coast of southern California; but it is so very much smaller that intergradation seems unlikely, especially in view of its wholly isolated habitat.

Mr. A. W. Anthony has resigned from the post of Curator of Vertebrates on the staff of the Natural History Museum of San Diego, to go into other work. His place was filled on March 1 by Laurence M. Huey, the experienced field naturalist and collector who has been working under the direction of Donald R. Dickey for several years past. The work of the San Diego Museum of Natural History will henceforth concern itself most especially, it is announced, with education among the schools of the city. Also, a series of nature walks and lectures has been inaugurated under its auspices.

We learn from the *Ibis* that our British confreres are busy on one section of the proposed new check-list of the birds of the world. We wonder what the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature is doing in regard to our share of the work. Why should we be behind-hand, with our "Systema Avium Nearecticum"? The promised American contribution to the international series will, as we understand, supercede the A. O. U. Check-List, as standard authority for names and for concise information in regard to manner of occurrence and distribution. It must, therefore, be a well-ordered, uniformly handled, conservative product. It should not be the output of any one man, at least without the concurrence in every detail by others officially designated as representative of American opinion. It should represent a fair consensus of opinion and knowledge in America.

Some of our more active and sincere field students of birds are beginning to resent the statements made over and over again by ardent protectionists that bird life in the country at large is rapidly decreasing. As a matter of fact our bird life has greatly increased over what it was when the pioneers first came. We recently heard Allan Brooks say that in certain parts of the northwest familiar to him for many years, birds now exist in numbers five to one as

compared with their numbers not so many years previously. As a general thing, cultivation, reclamation and deforestation mean a marked increase in the aggregate number of individual birds, and immigration of bird species new to the locality. There is thus an actual increase in the number of species—though of course some specialized types disappear. In many localities new appearances outnumber extinctions. Misstatements of fact are not justified in any connection, even when arguing for perfectly justifiable and wholly desirable protection. Sentiment cannot rightly be cultivated at the expense of truth.

The Autobiography of John Macoun has been published as a memorial volume by the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club during the past year. It is a book of pleasing appearance, well written and attractively illustrated. Macoun was not an ornithologist primarily, despite the accomplishment of a large amount of bird work during his lifetime, and birds appear but incidentally in this account of his career; but there is much to attract a naturalist, whatever his specialty, in the accounts of early days in various parts of Canada. Of interest, too, is the story of the beginnings of certain great undertakings, of which the present generation is familiar only with the final accomplishment.

The Roosevelt Memorial Association, 1 Madison Ave., New York City, has sent out a request for any original letters or copies of original letters written by Theodore Roosevelt and dealing with wild life conservation and related subjects. These are to be printed in a volume that will contain also the various published essays and addresses which he wrote on the preservation of animal life.

In connection with the communication in the January *Auk* on "generic subdivision" it may be of interest to call attention to an earlier protest along the same lines as that inaugurated by Mr. Taverner. The letter reproduced below was sent from Berkeley with the signatures of local ornithologists, as here given. Copies were sent to certain eastern centers, whence they were forwarded to the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature with additional signatures.

September 16, 1920.

The American Ornithologists' Union Committee on Nomenclature and Classification, Gentlemen:

In the course of your labors upon the sev-

eral supplements to the American Ornithologists' Union's "Check-List" and upon the revised edition of the latter that it is planned to publish, you are required to pass upon many generic changes which of recent years are being proposed in increasing number. We, the undersigned, wish to protest against the general adoption of those changes resulting from the division of genera of long standing, of convenient size and of real usefulness, into several smaller groups, often into several monotypic genera. We believe the function of the genus is to *show likenesses* quite as much as to emphasize differences. We believe the limits assigned to a given genus to be largely a matter of convenience, and they are usually, therefore, a matter of opinion; we do not believe that a host of monotypic genera serves any purpose of *convenience* to the great majority of working ornithologists.

Apparently the many changes of the nature indicated, that are being urged, are the work of a few individuals. Judging from the comments of many writers, the majority of the working ornithologists of North America are opposed to the practice, and, in this belief, we adopt this means of concentrating these scattered objections and giving them more force.

In this petition, which must be of a general nature, it is not desirable to state explicit objections to any particular genus or genera lately proposed. We urge, however, that, in general, the Committee on Nomenclature and Classification use the utmost conservatism in the adoption of generic changes of the nature above indicated.

We suggest further for your consideration that in connection with the listing from time to time of proposed generic changes (which has been done together with other proposed changes), the Committee adopt some means of eliciting opinions from the working ornithologists of North America. It might be desirable for the Committee to issue at intervals in mimeograph form lists of proposed changes upon which they desire the opinions of others. The generic changes above referred to might well be influenced by such a vote.

Harry S. Swarth
Joseph Mailliard
Barton W. Evermann
J. Grinnell
H. C. Bryant
J. Eugene Law
W. K. Fisher
Leverett Mills Loomis.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

WESTERN BIRDS. By HARRIET WILLIAMS MYERS. Macmillan, New York, 1922. Cloth, 12mo, 392 pp. with 53 pp. of illustrations. \$4.00.

The author, in her Foreword, states that she is dealing with the song birds of the west coast, and that she has followed the A. O. U. Check-List. By song birds, Mrs. Myers evidently means all but water and game birds, and birds of prey. Beginning with the Roadrunner, the most common birds are considered. The wish of the author is "to have the information so plain and simple that the most unscientific of readers may enjoy and become more familiar with our feathered wild life."

That this wish is being fulfilled is evidenced by the fact that many people not otherwise interested in birds are reading this book, and saying "we all feel we want to study the birds." (Mrs. Foote, reviewing for the Highland Park Ebell Club.) Members of the California Audubon Society are pleased with the fair presentation of economic value, with the nice balance so justly maintained between the economic value and the aesthetic enjoyment suggested, and with the amount of descriptive statement.

The appearance of the book is tempting; the many original photographs, the good paper, and the large type are appreciated. Indeed, the type is almost disconcertingly large. The student, accustomed to find his identifying descriptions in fine print and italics, scarcely realizes that he is being given a scientific description until it is all over. Looking again, he often discovers family characteristics described; then one member and another are distinguished, and the student is assured that the identity of this particular bird is unmistakable. Mrs. Myers gives what Lynds Jones calls single characteristics, thus gently leading the beginner to the attainment of powers of discriminative study. The comparison of western with eastern forms is also helpful.

Mrs. Myers does not expect Cooper Club members to find much that is new in the book. For one reason, much of the material has already appeared in THE CONDOR. The writer recalls Dr. Grinnell's comment on the Rufous-crowned Sparrow material, to the effect that we need more such biographies. Serious students are commending the book, however, for its wealth of personal observations expressed in the author's happy con-