

EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

We often see in the local press reference to some person as "*the authority*" on the birds of a state or of a region. The word authority confers certain blandishments, attractive to the conferee in a way, and acceptable to the newspaper reading public. But rarely now-a-days is the word really applicable. As a matter of fact, ornithologists who are accomplished, if not in the field at large, then in some segment of it, are numerous. In a state like California, "authority" is vested in no single individual or even in a few persons. For a summation of ornithological knowledge, relative to our state, appeal would have to be made to each of a score or more. For example, we would seek information as to the nesting of the birds of California generally, first of all from a person we will call C, though his name rarely appears in print, more's the pity. In regard to the nesting of certain Sierran birds we would appeal to R; and so on, as regards oology, for many districts. As to the songs and call-notes of difficult species we would ask H. For facts and interpretations as to bird behavior we would ask of L. Regional and seasonal occurrence of species is the special knowledge of a number of persons, among them M, T and W. As to the systematic status of birds in certain groups we would enquire of S, and in certain other groups, of V. When it should come to historical and biographical matters we would most certainly appeal to P. And as to birds of past time we would seek information of M. And so on. Thus, orderly knowledge, in a general large field like ornithology, has become so extended that it can be the possession of no one person. "Authority" in ornithology is now vested in the many.

Mr. P. A. Taverner, Ornithologist for the Canadian Geological Survey, is carrying on field work in Saskatchewan, Canada. Early in the fall, when he is through there, he will proceed to the Pacific Coast, making a tour of the country from British Columbia to southern California, before returning to his headquarters in Ottawa. We understand that Taverner's "Birds of Western Canada," illustrated profusely with colored drawings by Major Brooks, is about ready to appear from the press.

Californians have invaded San Salvador. Two collectors representing Mr. Donald R. Dickey's interests are at work there upon birds and mammals, namely, Mr. Adriaan van Rossem and Mr. R. A. Stirton. Also, Dr. Loye Miller and Alden Miller are there, collecting skeletons of birds to use in comparisons with fossil material from California. Interestingly, several types of birds were present in Pleistocene times in California which are now restricted to Central and South America.

We heartily recommend that all who are interested in the conservation of wild life read carefully a little book which has recently been published in London. It is by Lewis R. W. Loyd and is entitled, "The Protection of Birds—an Indictment" (Longmans Green and Company, 1924). No matter what preconceived ideas the reader may have with respect to the proper use by mankind of bird life—the absolute prohibition of destruction under any circumstances, on the one hand, as against a certain measure of freedom on the part of collectors and sportsmen under reasonable control—he will find in Captain Loyd's book much food for reflection.

Attention of bird banders is called to the surprisingly large list, on the outside of the back cover of this issue, of birds banded in the Western Province during the period from March 1, 1924, to February 28, 1925. A total of 96 species and 9995 individual birds received bands.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WILD FOWL. ORDER ANSERES (PART). By ARTHUR CLEVELAND BENT. United States National Museum, Bulletin 130, x + 376 pp., 60 pls.; 1925 (our copy received August 4).

In this volume, the fifth of the series, the author concludes his accounts of the order Anseres, covering certain of the diving ducks, the geese and the swans. General manner of treatment is essentially the same as in the preceding parts of the work (see Condor, XXII, 1920, p. 45; xxv, 1923, pp. 25, 35), and, as before, there is a liberal allotment of well selected illustrations to supplement the text.

To all appearances Mr. Bent has been most thorough in his assembling of known facts, and his compilation of the scattered contributions of other observers is supplemented to no small degree by original matter of his own. His "Life Histories" are volumes to be eagerly anticipated and to be kept for handy reference by everyone interested in birds. The pity is that the series can not be pushed to completion within a reasonably short time.

In the nomenclature used, there are various departures from the rulings of the A. O. U. Committee, which I still regard as an unfortunate attitude (see Condor, xxv, 1925, p. 35). The problem of the true relationships of the several forms of *Branta canadensis* is mentioned, but not discussed at any length. A real contribution to this subject is found in Mr. Bent's statement of the similarity of the downy young of *Branta canadensis occidentalis* and *B. c. minima*, and their dissimilarity from the same stage in *B. c. canadensis*.

In the two volumes covering the Anseres the plates are segregated at the back of the books; in the preceding volumes they are scattered through the text, a preferable procedure, to my notion. It is always a nuisance to leave reading matter in order to search for a distant illustration.

There is a detail in the manner of publication of the "Life Histories" that arouses one's curiosity. The several volumes are each issued as separate "Bulletins" of the United States National Museum, even though two of the volumes (as those dealing with the Anseres) are indicated as "parts" and bear the same title. In the exactly similar case of Ridgway's "Birds of North and Middle America", a long series of volumes issued through the years, each appears as a separate part of "Bulletin 50". One wonders at the different treatment.—H. S. SWARTH.

TOWNSEND'S "SAND DUNES AND SALT MARSHES".*—This book is a happy combination of correct literature and good natural history. It reminds us in these respects of Bradford Torrey's "Field Days in California", therefore to be read by a fellow naturalist with mental comfort and with appreciative interest. The local setting is in the neighborhood of Ipswich,

Massachusetts; but the painstaking observations recorded and logical inferences made can most of them be verified in many another part of North America. Dr. Townsend's book, in our estimation, deserves to be placed on the rather short list of "best books" on American natural history and therefore should be read widely. We can, of course, cite here only samples of the very many points made by the author that strike us as of real scientific merit. Skipping over, then, a great deal of very attractive matter concerning the behavior of sand-dunes and of their avian and other living inhabitants, we select the following paragraphs for quotation, from the last chapter, which is entitled "Bird Genealogy".

"Scratch a bird and you will find a reptile, can be said as truly as the similar trite remark concerning civilized man and savage, with the difference that one must scratch much more deeply in the case of the bird.

"The English sparrow, although fond of bathing in mud puddles, like all street gamins, would never be mistaken for a water bird, yet in its early infancy it is a capital swimmer, as I discovered in a perfectly innocent and excusable manner. Having occasion to shut an outside blind in my city house, I found that I had torn down a huge nest of street bric-a-brac that English sparrows had built between it and the wall. Two young had fallen to the ground below and were pounced on by a dog, two others—fat, misshapen things, mostly stomach and devoid of all but the black lines of incipient feathers—remained on my hands. As I could not rebuild their nest, and as I was entirely unprepared to furnish them with properly modified food, and, moreover, as a lover of native birds and a sworn enemy of these avian rats, I was bound to destroy them, I cast about for a method which would least disturb my peace of mind, for I did not think they would much care, being so infantile and inexperienced. I therefore dropped them into a basin of tepid water, expecting the inert masses to sink, or at least that their wobbly heads would fall below the surface. But presto-change! the creatures at once became endowed with life and vigor as if upon their native heath once more, and, with a combination of rapid wing-strokes and leg action and with necks out-stretched, they scudded across the surface of the miniature pond. They could not have done it better if they had tried, and I do not imagine they tried at all, but that the

* Sand Dunes | and | Salt Marshes | by | Charles Wendell Townsend | [4 lines] | New Edition | With an Introduction by | Ralph Hoffmann | And numerous Illustrations from Photographs | [seal] | Boston | L. C. Page & Company | Publishers. || "New Edition, April, 1925": pp. 10 + (1)—311, frontispiece + 93 other half-tone illustrations on inserted plate paper, usually on both sides. \$3.50.