

EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

In the Secretary's report of the 1930 Cooper Club annual meeting, he omitted to mention the exhibits of ornithological materials which were displayed in the Los Angeles Museum especially for Club members and visitors to see. These included a series of line and colored illustrations by John L. Ridgway, a series of special mounts of feathers by tracts, as used in molt studies, by J. Eugene Law, a large series of eggs of the California Murre exhibiting color variations, by George Willett, and a series of fossil bird bones from Conkling Cavern, New Mexico, illustrating the paper given by Mrs. Hildegarde Howard Wylde.—T.I.S.

The third 10-year index to the *CONDOR* is now in the hands of the printer. The manuscript for this, over 400 pages of it, has been prepared with painstaking care by George Willett, a contribution of service on his part which all serious workers in our field will gratefully acknowledge. We can point with some pride to the large store of creditable ornithology which has been given permanent record in the last ten volumes of our magazine. But a further duty is to make the detailed information contained in these volumes easily accessible to the serious student of the future. The performance of this duty will now soon be completed.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

REALITIES OF BIRD LIFE. By EDMUND SELOUS. With an Introduction by Julian S. Huxley, M. A. London, Constable and Co. Limited, 1927. Demy-octavo (140 x 220 mm.), XVI + 342 pp.

It is so long since such a book has appeared that we of the present generation must cast about for adequate critical criteria. The book is intimate and dramatic. We feel the nipping and the eager air of the north before dawn, on the cliffs above some gray Hebridean flow, or on the windy flats of the Dutch coast. We watch, insatiably, equipped only with glasses and the genius to neglect nothing, to take nothing for granted, to comfortably pigeon-hole nothing in the easy repository of another man's doctrine.

There is no smell of powder, no hint of bird-skins, museum trays, or taxonomies,—nay, not even of scales, stop-watches, clinical thermometers, colored

bands, or long-focus cameras. Yet the mass of solid material is so great as to inspire as finished a technician as Julian Huxley, who writes the introduction, both to quick enthusiasm and careful criticism.

The volume has unity rather as a study of the mind of a brilliant ornithologist than as an attack upon any given problem. Scattered, diary-like records of the behavior of birds, most frequently of the breeding behavior of the birds of the shore and the sea, are not planned for the convenience of the slit-eyed specialist. Having thrown the usual defensive sop to Cerberus in the form of disclaimers of "literary" intent ("for 'you cannot serve God and mammon,' or say here 'gammon'"), Selous proceeds to cram his three hundred pages almost as tightly with ironic wit, philosophic and aesthetic by-play, and an overload of polyglot literary echoes, as with solid ornithology.

To have obviously gone so far, both in field and study, yet to write a volume which does not contain one stale pseudo-scientific "tag" is a mighty assertion of individuality. To have so exposed one's thoughts yet to remain a man without a doctrine indicates not so much the sceptic as the hardened cynic. If the British School, as shown by men like Howard, Nicholson, Selous and Huxley, are leading the world in the re-discovery of field ornithology, they are not doing so as a conscious unit. Selous, for instance, has no love for "territorialism". "The fact is, a bird cannot possibly be nowhere, and so is forced into having a territory." ". . . It might fly into a certain wood, field, island, etc., with a distinct idea of appropriating it, *first* [i. e., before localized sex and food associations were formed], which, for my part, I doubt if it ever does."

Perhaps if one aspect of bird life has stronger fascination for Selous it is what he has once called "psychology in transition",—the transitory confusion of behavior which passes from its origin into a complexity of new adaptations and collateral values, as the singing exhibitions of the oyster-catchers, which seem, from a functional, sexual, origin, to have become an end in themselves.

If the volume deals largely with instinct, it is hardly mechanized, and never freed from a haunting suggestion of something higher. A pervading ironic sense of a sort of reversed anthropomorphism