

A Criticism of Certain "New" Subspecies.—In the Murrelet for September, 1933 (vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 78-79), there is an article by R. A. Cumming entitled "Descriptions of a proposed new race of song sparrow and of a hermit thrush" that calls for adverse comment, as embodying some of the most objectionable of current practices in ornithological taxonomy. A song sparrow is named from the Queen Charlotte Islands, a hermit thrush from the vicinity of Vancouver. The "descriptions" are severely brief, and deceptively authoritative in their technicalities. Yet these birds are named, not from remote, unexplored parts of the world, but from a region that is well known ornithologically; and they belong to species that have been carefully studied by others.

As meeting criticism of such publication, it has frequently been pointed out that anyone has the right to name anything he pleases. The existence of human "rights" of any sort is a debatable question, but it may be conceded here, at least in the sense that such action cannot be stopped. However, conscientious people exercising assumed rights should recognize accompanying responsibilities. The obligations in the case at issue include familiarity with, and recognition of, previous work by others (whether agreed with or opposed), and the labor of ascertaining and explaining the meanings that may be attached to observed variations. There have been all too many "descriptions" that append a barely diagnosed name to a bird or mammal, leaving it to others to work out the underlying principles and conditions that alone give any point whatever to the study.

When Major Brooks and myself prepared our "Distributional list of the birds of British Columbia" we aimed at more than a perfunctory compilation of records. Group after group of birds received as thorough revisionary study as was practicable, and the song sparrows were given careful attention. We assembled a large series in which the Queen Charlotte Islands bird had ample representation, and we found no grounds therein for a separate name for the song sparrow of that region. The study of this particular group was published as a separate paper (Condor, 25, 1923, pp. 214-223, map), a paper that, obviously, Mr. Cumming has not seen.

The western hermit thrushes have recently been subject matter for careful and detailed study by Thomas T. McCabe and Elinor B. McCabe, as appeared in the Condor (34, 1932, pp. 26-40), again a paper that, clearly, Mr. Cumming had not studied. Not one word of explanation is given for the naming of a subspecies of hermit thrush from Vancouver, when the type locality of *nanus* is Fort Vancouver, Washington, such a relatively short distance away and also in the humid coast belt.

The wording of the "ranges" ascribed to both song sparrow and hermit thrush is sufficient evidence of the scanty material the writer had at his disposal. My impression of Mr. Cumming's mental procedure is about as follows: That he acquired certain song sparrows and certain hermit thrushes that appeared to him to be different from certain other song sparrows and hermit thrushes in his possession, and that the ones that were unfamiliar to him were regarded as necessarily "new." The upshot of the matter is that he has added two more synonyms to an already over-stuffed literature.

As previously implied, any person's "right" to name subspecies is limited only by his ability to find a medium for publication. It seems to me, therefore, that a sensible policy to pursue, by editor, society, or whomever controls a given journal, at least as pertains to a region as well known ornithologically as North America, might lie in the discouragement of the publication of subspecific descriptions except when they appear as by-products of studies that incidentally disclose the actual need of new terms.—H. S. SWARTH, *California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, November 1, 1933.*

NOTES AND NEWS

Shortly following the appearance of this issue of the *Condor*, members of the Cooper Ornithological Club will convene in San Diego for the Ninth Annual Meeting. Attention is called to the precise dates of the meeting, which will be March 30 to April 1, hence not beginning on March 29 as

stated in an earlier notice. Sessions for the presentation of papers will be held on Friday the 30th, and on Saturday the 31st. The Board of Governors will meet on Sunday, April 1. Evening entertainment will be announced on the opening day. The San Diego Museum will consti-