

## NOTES AND NEWS

Plans for the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Club are taking shape under the guidance of a local committee consisting of Sumner C. Brooks, Joe T. Marshall, Jr., Alden H. Miller, Robert T. Orr, Frank A. Pitelka and Charles G. Sibley. The meetings are scheduled for May 17, 18, and 19, in Berkeley. A call for papers soon will be mailed to club members.

Clinton G. Abbott, Director of the San Diego Museum, died on March 5, 1946. This is a serious loss to the Cooper Club as also to the naturalists of the San Diego area.

The Tucson Bird Club welcomes visitors to attend its meetings in the Tucson area. A field trip is scheduled for the first Sunday of each month, notice of which appears in the local paper on Saturday. An evening meeting is held on the third Thursday of each month in room 306 of the Agriculture Building.

Increased costs of printing of *The Condor* lead the editors to urge authors to avoid making changes in the wording of their papers while in proof stage. Necessary corrections arising from faulty type-setting or editing of course are in order. We dislike instituting a system of charges for author's corrections and ask for the cooperation of contributors so that we may avoid this.

## PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

"A Distributional Survey of the Birds of Sonora, Mexico," by A. J. van Rossem (*Occas. Papers Mus. Zool., Louisiana State Univ. No. 21, October 25, 1945, 379 pp., 26 maps, 1 colored*) marks a most important step forward in the ornithological study of Mexico. Sonora becomes the first state of that country, apart from the peninsula of Baja California, for which there is a comprehensive digest of taxonomic and distributional data. With an area roughly two-thirds that of California and an avifauna nearly as complex and large (532 species and subspecies), Sonora is still relatively little worked by ornithologists. Van Rossem recognizes this condition of affairs and makes no unwarranted claims of completeness for his work. Indeed he explains that some curtailment of an earlier program for exploration and report has resulted in less full treatment of taxonomy and life history than had been desired. These circumstances mean that there will long remain questions regarding the classification of Sonoran birds, and in fact one can at once recognize in van Rossem's report some decidedly dubious situations and controver-

sial issues. Taxonomists have a way of differing on details of better known avifaunas anyway. But in recognizing these issues let there be no mistake about the great value of van Rossem's work and of its good quality, involving an accuracy of analysis of as high order as available data would seem to permit.

Five avifaunal areas are recognized in Sonora, only four of which are of significant extent and involve the mainland. These four are the Sonoran, Sinaloan, Apachian, and Durangan. There are no formulas on which delineators of faunal areas agree which fix the relative weight to be given to climatic zones, vegetation belts, differences in faunal composition, and numbers of local differentiates in defining faunal units. One worker stresses one factor more than another, and perhaps not to uniform degree in his own system, and consequently results correspond poorly. Herein lies much of the weakness of the nebulous "concept" of the faunal area which makes the units often arbitrary and of questionable scientific value. Sometimes we may even suspect them of being mere phantoms. Van Rossem is aware of this weakness and yet at this juncture cannot do anything to correct it. He is careful to call his units avifaunal areas, pointing out that they are based on bird distribution primarily. They indicate with some fidelity only the general spatial pattern of this group of organisms. They have a descriptive usefulness, although this would be enhanced by a more extended exposition of the data used in identifying and bounding them. Differentiation districts within several of the avifaunal areas are briefly mentioned.

Space will permit mention of only a few random examples of the taxonomic problems that arise. One may agree with the author's handling of the Canyon Wrens, in which great individual variability is recognized, and in the acceptance of a western race of the Myrtle Warbler. The contributions to knowledge of geographic variation in two species of orioles, *Icterus cucullatus* and *Icterus bullockii*, a new race of which is described from California, appear worthwhile. On the other hand, there is a strange insistence on the specific distinctness of *Limnodromus scolopaceus* and *Limnodromus griseus*, a separation for which there is poor evidence despite much that has been written on the subject. Also dubious is the maintenance of *Amazilia florenceae*, a unique hummingbird which Peters (*Birds World*, 5, 1945:72) probably correctly regards as a hybrid. Van Rossem on taxonomic matters tends to be a positivist. Consequently, in this work he has had to reverse himself on a number of stands