

NOTES AND NEWS

The Board of Governors of the Cooper Ornithological Society has requested the editors of *The Condor* to extract and print newsworthy items from the reports of monthly divisional meetings and to discontinue publishing minutes, as such, of the divisional groups. This plan will be instituted in the next issue.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

THE BIRDS OF ALASKA. By Ira N. Gabrielson and Frederick C. Lincoln. Color illustrations by Olaus J. Murie and Edwin R. Kalmbach, topography of a bird by Bob Hines and gazetteer by Myra A. Putnam. The Stackpole Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and the Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D.C., xiv + 922 pp., 13 color pls., one fig., one map. 1959; \$15.00.

The publication of this volume brings to a close an ambitious project that has spanned the last seventeen years. During this period the work proceeded only as time was available from the many official duties of both writers with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and, more recently in the case of Dr. Gabrielson, with the Wildlife Management Institute. The rather extensive field experience of the senior author in Alaska, and the competence in the taxonomy of North American birds on the part of both authors, well qualified these men for this undertaking. Additionally, their intensive scrutiny of the scattered literature on birds of this area has resulted in a 55-page bibliography. The result is a much-needed and useful book.

Quite understandably, the greater part of the book, and its major contribution, is comprised of accounts of the 321 species and 414 subspecies the authors recognize as Alaskan birds. The wealth of information found here is arranged, in general, under the following headings: (1) scientific and vernacular names; (2) native names; (3) description; (4) general range; (5) range in Alaska; and (6) haunts and habits.

The nomenclature follows for the most part that of the Fifth Edition of the A.O.U. Check-list, although vernacular names are supplied for subspecies. Where only one race of a species is present in Alaska no vernacular name for the species is given. This will surely lead to some confusion, especially among less experienced students, and certainly makes use of the book more difficult. Notable departures from check-list nomenclature, other than in spelling, are few, of

which the following are examples: the designation of the Green-winged Teal as a subspecies, *carolinensis*, of *Anas crecca*; inclusion of the Ruddy Turnstones, confusingly referred to as European Turnstone, in the race *morinella*, not *interpres*; and the placing of the Bank Swallows in the race *maximiliani* (consistently misspelled with two l's) rather than *riparia*. Particularly puzzling is the referral of the Alaskan Gray Jays to the race *arcus*. This name was proposed for jays inhabiting the Rainbow Mountains of coastal British Columbia when it was revealed that the former name *pacificus* should be applied, through priority, to the birds in western Alaska. The races *kadiaka*, for the Rosy Finches of Kodiak Island, and *crassus*, for the Savannah Sparrows in southeastern Alaska, are recognized. The Lincoln Sparrows of Alaska, Yukon Territory, and the Mackenzie Valley are considered to be the race *allicola*, not *lincolnii*. Some of these changes seem very tentative and should be verified by further work.

The native names may prove useful for field workers, but some confusion will result from the fact they are variously allocated to dialect, locality, or both, or merely "Eskimo." The Innu dialect is incorrectly indicated as being spoken at Hooper Bay in western Alaska; actually it is spoken north of Norton Sound. The variation in native names, even between nearby localities, plus the difficulty of pronunciation, makes one wonder whether these are of real value to ornithologists.

The descriptions are taken from such sources as Bent's life histories, Chapman's handbook of eastern birds, Bailey's handbook of western birds, and numerous others. Included is length (casually given in inches), and a discussion of the plumages of downy young, immatures, and adults. These descriptions are often laboriously detailed and far exceed information necessary or pertinent for identification. Much space is devoted to unnecessarily detailed accounts of species known only as accidentals or casuals in the state. Notes on nest and eggs are also included in this section.

The statements on general range have been condensed from the Fifth Edition of the A.O.U. Check-list, while those on range in Alaska have been derived from such sources as the files of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the unpublished records of a host of observers, and the literature. Each record is cited to the original source or, when unpublished, to the observer. This extremely valuable and well documented compilation, the most outstanding single feature of the book,

brings together for the first time many previously unavailable records.

The notes of the senior author, Bent's life histories, and other sources, have been extensively utilized in drawing up the miscellany of natural history information under the title "Haunts and Habits." Important details on song, relative abundance, nesting, food, territorial behavior, and flight are presented. Others, such as accounts of nest and eggs, and remarks on plumage, are needless repetitions of material found under "Description." Many of these accounts are written in a tiresome anthropomorphic fashion unlikely to appeal to the professional ornithologist, or to the general reader, and certainly they are not in keeping with the scientific nature of the book.

In the opinion of this reviewer the species accounts suffer most when they deal with those polytypic species represented by several races in Alaska. In some instances both general range and range in Alaska are discussed under the race in question. For others, only general range is mentioned here, and the range in Alaska is given as a unit for the group of races being considered. In the latter instance each race may be introduced in any one of six or seven ways, making necessary a search to pinpoint the form being discussed. Finally, the headings "General Range" and "Range in Alaska" may both be replaced by simply "Range" when this is only in Alaska. This was done for the Winter Wrens, in part for the Song Sparrows, but not at all for the Fox Sparrows.

The book is poorly illustrated. The absence of range maps, particularly weakening the treatment of geographically variable species, will be noted by many as a grievous omission. There are no photographs, and only one small map for use with the gazetteer. The 13 color plates, scattered indiscriminately through the text, are, in general, of poor quality.

The introductory chapters cover a variety of subjects, such as history, migration, ecological zones, and introductions. The 29-page section on history, easily one of the better chapters in the book, carefully traces the activities and contributions of nearly all the ornithologists who have worked in Alaska during the periods of Russian and American exploration and the recent period beginning about 1900. Included as "Some Interesting Aspects of Alaskan Ornithology" are topics such as numbers of species and subspecies present, an interesting comparison of numbers of land and water birds, regular migrants not known to breed in Alaska, casual or accidental species, summer and

winter residents, and remarks on such strikingly variable species as Winter Wrens, and Fox and Song sparrows. Many readers will take issue with loose statements such as the one expressing the view that all the breeding birds are boreal species. While the avifauna is distinctly boreal, it does not follow that all the species and subspecies of which it is comprised are also boreal. *Acanthis flammea holboellii* is regarded as the single land bird known only as a migrant in Alaska, although this race is currently regarded by the A.O.U. Committee on Nomenclature as breeding across the northern part of the state, and no real evidence to the contrary is presented. The remarks attributing intraspecific variation in Winter Wrens and Savannah, Fox, and Song sparrows to fortuitous combinations, environmental factors, and isolation due to absence of suitable habitat seem to be a rather oversimplified attempt to explain complicated phenomena. The chief discussion on migration, primarily concerned with defining routes, is of necessity quite speculative, and points up the need for detailed studies involving banding, collecting at critical stations, and coordinated observation.

The discussion of major ecological units in Alaska, together with brief statements on those species of birds characteristic of these units, is developed around the life-zone and faunal district concepts of Merriam and Nelson, respectively. Merriam's system includes all of Alaska in the Arctic-Alpine (tundra and montane), Hudsonian (interior spruce-birch forest), and Canadian (coastal forest) life-zones. These coincide with the faunal districts, although Nelson also places emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Aleutian area from the standpoint of both vegetation and avifauna. Other major systems of ecological classification, as well as climate or climatic gradients, are not discussed, and no attempt is made at an ecological or faunal analysis. The inclusion of a map indicating the distribution of the major vegetation types would have greatly enhanced this section.

The lists of vernacular names used in the introductory chapters do not always agree with those used in the species accounts. Names for species and subspecies (for example, Lapland Longspur, p. 45, and Alaska Longspur, p. 48) are used interchangeably. Some names such as Lapland Longspur, Olive-backed Thrush, Lutescent Warbler, and others never appear again in the book.

The closing sections include a hypothetical list

of birds reported from Alaska but not represented by specimens. It is indicated that only four species were included in the state list on the basis of sight records alone. A helpful gazetteer is provided.

The book is refreshingly free of typographical errors, and only one of the few noticed, the misspelling of "grosbeaks" (p. 744) is conspicuous.

This is the first comprehensive report dealing with the birds of all of Alaska, and as such aids in filling a gap in our knowledge of the ornithology of a vast section of North America. The book also serves to bring into focus the relationship between Alaska's avifauna and the avifaunas of the circumpolar tundra and coniferous forest biomes and the boreal avifauna of this continent, although this is not discussed in detail or particularly emphasized. Ornithologists generally, and those with an interest in boreal regions particularly, will welcome this new and valuable reference book. It will long remain the definitive work on Alaskan birds.—FRANCIS S. L. WILLIAMSON.

COOPER SOCIETY MEETINGS

SOUTHERN DIVISION

NOVEMBER.—The monthly meeting of the Southern Division was held on November 25, 1958, at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The following names were proposed for membership: Liscum Diven, Rt. 1, Box 1063, Scottsdale, Ariz., Mrs. W. C. Knoblauch, Rt. 3, Box 271, Tiffin, Ohio, Kathleen R. Peck, 5215 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, Calif., and John M. Stokely, 45 Marinita Ave., San Rafael, Calif., by C. V. Duff; James B. McCandless, M.D., P. O. Box 1079, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, by Don R. Eckelberry; Waldo S. Cook, Rt. 1, Box 183-A, Ukiah, Calif., and Mary Reynolds Schroeder, 9720 Regent St., Los Angeles 34, Calif., by Thomas R. Howell; Douglas Oglesby, P. O. Box 4, Atascadero, Calif., and Tom Reeder, 1108 Taylor St., Topeka, Kans., by Jack C. von Bloeker, Jr.

The meeting then adjourned for members to attend a lecture by Dr. W. H. Thorpe, Dept. Zoology, Cambridge University, and President, British Ornithologists' Union. Dr. Thorpe's lecture, "Imprinting and Other Forms of Learning," was given under the auspices of the Lida Scott Brown Foundation.—DOROTHY E. GRONER, *Secretary*.

JANUARY.—The monthly meeting of the Southern Division was held on January 28, 1959, at the Los Angeles County Museum.

The following names were proposed for membership: Lawrence Edward Francis, 120 S. Lassen

St., Susanville, Calif., by Seth B. Benson; Jan Roger van Oosten, 2167 E. Crescent Dr., Altadena, Calif., by Mrs. John Q. Burch; Carl S. Dentzel, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles 42, Calif., Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson, 222 DeVoe Ave., Spotswood, N. J., William James Graber III, M.D., Parkland Memorial Hospital, 5201 Harry Hines Blvd., Dallas 35, Tex., Margaret Louise Hill, 4200 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin 5, Tex., Edmond A. Schlesselman, 4580 N. Palm Ave., Fresno 4, Calif., Amy B. Tolman, Aiokpanchi, Route 1, Picayune, Miss., Edward R. Valentine, 609 S. Grand Ave., Room 1201, Los Angeles 17, Calif., Lincoln C. Van de Griendt, 2530-A Piedmont Ave., Berkeley 4, Calif., Miss Mary Alice Wiley, Broadbent, Ore., James L. Woodson, 28 Whitmond Ave., West Hartford, Conn., and Dien Zuh-ming, No. 1, Lane 6, Yung Kang St., Taipei, Taiwan (Formosa), China, by C. V. Duff; Walter William Ferguson, 216-15 132nd Road, Springfield Gardens 13, L. I., N.Y., and James Fenwick Lansdowne, 1978 Forrester St., Victoria, British Columbia, by Don R. Eckelberry; Clarence Donald Cone, Jr., 29 Reynolds Drive, Hampton, Va., by Ed N. Harrison; Henning Aptrup Jensen, Jernbane Alle 993, Vanlose, Denmark, William Homan Thorpe, Jesus College, Cambridge, England, and Mrs. Wm. Hibbs Wallace, Drummond, Mont., by Thomas R. Howell; Jon Charles Barlow, Dept. Zoology, Univ. Kansas, Lawrence, Kans., by Richard F. Johnston; Alwin Gissing, P. O. Briscoe, British Columbia, by Frank A. Pitelka; Arthur G. Morley, Jr., 712 Cedar St., San Diego 1, Calif., by James R. Sams; Thorkeld R. Knudsen, 1974 Santee St., Los Angeles 11, Calif., by W. J. Sheffler; Jim Brandt, 109 11th St, Sparks, Nev., Anthony B. Burgess, 3880 Blenheim St., Vancouver 8, British Columbia, Otis D. Hyde, 12745 Gravelly Lake Dr., Tacoma 99, Wash., John L. Kaspar, Zoology Dept., Univ. Wisconsin, Birge Hall, Madison 6, Wis., Kenneth Lane, 1349 Clermont St., Denver 20, Colo., K. McKee, 2603 Maple Crescent, Rossland, British Columbia, Frederick P. Poole, 17 North Girard St., Woodbury, N. J., and Dennie G. Rainey, Dept. Biology, Long Beach State College, 6101 E. Seventh St., Long Beach 4, Calif., by Jack C. von Bloeker, Jr.

The following slate of officers for 1959 was elected: Dorothy E. Groner, president; M. Dale Arvey, first vice-president; Wilbur W. Mayhew, second vice-president; and Don Bleitz, secretary.

William H. Moore, M.D., of Bakersfield, showed his colored motion picture, "Bridger's Wilderness."—DOROTHY E. GRONER, *Secretary*.