

NOTES AND NEWS

At the eightieth meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in Salt Lake City in August of this year the following officers were elected or continued in service: President, Austin L. Rand; First Vice-President, Roger Tory Peterson; Second Vice-President, Robert W. Storer; Secretary, Lawrence H. Walkinshaw; Treasurer, Robert J. Newman; Editor, Robert M. Mengel. New Councilors elected were John W. Aldrich, Thomas R. Howell, and Charles G. Sibley.

The Brewster Award was made to Albert Wolfson.

New Fellows elected were William J. Beecher, Philip S. Humphrey, Robert J. Newman, and Robert K. Selander.

Niko Tinbergen was elected an Honorary Fellow. Corresponding Fellows named were Friedrich Goethe, A. J. Ivanof, Maria Koepcke, and John M. Winterbottom.

Persons added to the class of Elective Members were Walter Bock, Crawford Greenewalt, Lawrence Kilham, George W. Salt, Paul Slud, and Richard Zusi.

Important to all working ornithologists is the appearance in August of 1962 of volume XV of the Check-list of Birds of the World, edited by Mayr and Greenway—the continuation of Peters' work. This volume includes the weaverbirds, starlings, Old-world orioles, drongos, wood-swallows, Australian butcherbirds, bowerbirds, birds of paradise, crows and jays, and several smaller families.

PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

HANDBOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS. VOLUME 1. LOONS THROUGH FLAMINGOS. Edited by Ralph S. Palmer. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, vii + 567 pp., 6 color plates, many black and white illustrations, 1962; \$15.00.

The appearance of a volume as eagerly awaited by American ornithologists as the first volume of the Handbook of North American Birds should be an event which a reviewer could report with a great deal of pleasure. Unfortunately, this is not the case. After such a great outlay of time, effort, and money, one can only regret that the final product is, in general, so unsatisfactory.

The area covered by the volume coincides with that of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list, except that the Mexican peninsula of Baja California is omitted. Included are Green-

land, Canada, the United States except Hawaii, and various islands including the Bermudas.

The introduction discusses the method of treatment of a number of kinds of information, including such topics as higher categories, plumages and molts, color specification, measurements, voice, distribution, and the like. These topics are discussed in considerable detail, perhaps, in some instances, in too much detail, but at least there is little chance that the reader will misunderstand the manner in which these subjects are treated in the species accounts. A chromatic hexagon by J. Villalobos is included which makes for some degree of standardization in text references to color. One of the worst features of the book is the use of the nomenclature of molts and plumages devised by Humphrey and Parkes (Auk, 1959). A perusal of recent issues of the three leading American ornithological journals reveals that very few American ornithologists have adopted this system. As a result, nearly all readers will have to refer repeatedly to page 3, on which the old, familiar classification of molts and plumages is equated with the "new" classification, if they are to understand the material on molts and plumages in the species accounts.

The species accounts present the following information compiled by 26 contributors: a brief characterization of the species; description (including descriptions of each plumage, measurements, and geographical variation within the species); subspecies; field identification; voice; habitat; distribution (a brief statement of range and a distribution map); migration; banding status; reproduction (including reproductive behavior); habits; and food. Although the array of subjects covered is impressive, the species accounts are too often treated as receptacles into which a vast number of facts is thrown without regard to relative importance or possible duplication.

The characterization of each species preceding the general account should have been omitted as it adds little and too often duplicates material in other sections. For example, consider the account of the Great Shearwater, which starts as follows: "Great Shearwater—*Puffinus gravis* (O'Reilly). Greater Shearwater of A. O. U. list; Hagdon of fishermen on Grand Banks of Nfld.; Petrel of Tristan da Cunha. Large, heavily built, dark-billed, long-winged, short-tailed, brown and white shearwater with clearly defined dark cap, also dark back and tail; a pale collar, whitish band

across rump, and white underparts (including most of wing lining) with darkish patch in center of belly." In the section on field identification, we read that this species is "A big, solid, heavily built shearwater In closer view: dark cap sharply defined from pure white throat; white of underparts extends up sides of neck nearly meeting on nape, thus forming almost complete collar. Bill dark. Whitish band near base of tail visible at considerable distance; Belly patch of dirty-appearing feathers sometimes conspicuous Undersurface of wing white, margined with dark brownish." The duplication of descriptive material is evident and is typical of such duplication in most of the species accounts. And since most ornithologists will rarely come into contact with the fisherfolk of the Grand Banks of Nfld. or the rather isolated inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha, the fact that the former refer to this species as the Hagdon, and the latter as the Petrel, will not serve any particularly useful purpose. Indeed, considering the ready availability of the excellent Peterson field guides, one wonders whether it would not have been better to omit the section on field identification as well as the prefatory material. It is doubtful that any ornithologist would care to use such a large and expensive book as this as a field guide, especially in the marine environment.

The distribution of each species has been handled in fairly satisfactory fashion. The text descriptions of range are not sufficiently detailed to give a precise statement of range and the maps, although they convey a good idea of the range of each species, including breeding and nonbreeding ranges, cannot be used to work out a truly detailed distribution. Thus, any worker who needs to have precise information on distribution will have to consult other sources. For most purposes, however, the information is adequately presented in the maps. However, when one considers that the range maps account for 63 pages, or 11 per cent, of the total of 567 pages, and that these maps were undoubtedly expensive to print, it seems inexcusable that maps have been presented for such species as the Black-browed Albatross (1 record for our area), the White-capped Albatross (1 record), the Yellow-nosed Albatross (4 records), the Cape Pigeon (2 records), the Great Gray Shearwater (1 record), the Little Shearwater (2 records), the Mottled Petrel (6 records), the Trindade Petrel (1 record), and a number of others.

Too frequently, unimportant trivia have been included in the species accounts. Some examples

are: Red-throated Loon, page 60, "On Southampton I., head and neck feathering often used to clean binocular lenses (T. Manning), sometimes used in wall carpet industry of sw. Greenland"; Common Loon, page 33, "One is known to have alighted among duck decoys in N. Bruns. in Oct. (S. Gorham)"; Arctic Loon, page 41, "Banks I. Eskimos do not use it much for food but feed it to dogs (E. Höhn); on arctic slope of Alaska it is considered a delicacy by the Eskimos . . . ; cartridge and tool bags are made from the neckskin (Dixon 1916). In nw. MacKenzie the head, neck, and sides are a much-prized head ornament"; Wilson's Petrel, page 250, "Among seafaring men, however, there is a superstition that killing this bird brings bad luck"; Black-crowned Night Heron, page 483, "In Japan this species occupies a unique place in history and folklore as the only bird ever raised to the Japanese peerage. Austin Jr. and Kuroda (1953) reported that the bird is unpopular with fish culturalists and, as a result, 'no longer enjoys the immunity of its rank.'" In the account of the Northern Fulmar, a 12-line paragraph (p. 151) is devoted to a discussion of ornithosis in this species. The whole subject, if worth mentioning at all, could have been covered in a single line. Although not trivial, a detailed, page and one-half discussion on relationships within the *Puffinus puffinus* complex by W. R. P. Bourne could well have been made the subject of a separate paper which could have been cited in the present work. The Handbook does not seem the appropriate medium for discussions of this sort.

The sections on banding status could have been omitted, as most do not add any useful information. It does not help the reader to know how many birds have been recovered of the total banded if the sites of recovery are not given, information obviously beyond the scope of this book. The small amount of useful information given for a few species could have been included under migration or some other pertinent heading.

In view of the fashion in which space has been wasted on unimportant details, it is aggravating that the contributors' material is initialled, so that one is forever turning to the list of contributors and their initials given at the beginning of the book to see who "WWHG" or "MWW" might be. It would have been far more satisfactory to have had each contribution signed. Since there are 26 contributors, it will take a while for most readers to memorize the full set of initials.

The illustrations consist of four color plates by Robert M. Mengel, two by Roger Tory Peterson,

and a number of black and white sketches by Mengel, some illustrating various plumages or displays, others merely decorative vignettes. The plates by Peterson are of the usual high quality, although the illustration of heads and legs of some herons in and out of the breeding season is quite overcrowded. Nonetheless, this plate is quite useful. The plates by Mengel seem to this reviewer to be poorly executed and neither good art nor good illustration. The choice of species to be portrayed is particularly bad, although this may be the editor's fault rather than the artist's. Why costly color illustrations are wasted on such species as the Scarlet Ibis and the Eurasian Gray Heron is inexplicable. The plate illustrating Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans is characterized by a most peculiar perspective which lends itself to a number of interesting interpretations. Considering the great number of illustrations of North American birds that has already appeared, and the ready availability of the Peterson field guides, one may wonder why all the color plates were not omitted, at a considerable reduction in the cost of the book. Incidentally, there is a very bad error in the legend for the plate facing page 454. The lower row is supposed to show, in succession, a Glossy Ibis at the onset of the breeding season, a juvenile of the same species, and a White-faced Glossy Ibis. Actually the birds shown are, in order, a White-faced Glossy Ibis, a Glossy Ibis, and a juvenal Glossy Ibis. The plate of cormorant heads facing page 184 is the best executed and most useful of Mengel's plates. The black and white sketches are fairly well done. The full page sketches showing displays are in addition to the detailed text descriptions of same.

Either the sketches could have been omitted, or the textual descriptions could have been greatly curtailed.

The concise and condensed bibliography of 11 pages is a valuable contribution and will undoubtedly be of great use to those interested in the groups covered in this volume.

Comparison with the British Handbook will be inevitable. The concise, scholarly, well-edited accounts in the British Handbook make one wonder why the North American Handbook has departed so far from such a fine and readily available working model.

To this reviewer, the worst feature of this volume is its disregard of the reader and his pocket-book. There has been no really effective effort made to winnow out unimportant text material, and the book has been padded with unnecessary, and in some cases poorly done, illustrative material. The result has been an unnecessary increase in size and cost and a decrease in usability; the purchaser thus bears the brunt of the editor's sins of omission and commission. By default, this book will be a standard reference for years to come. Those whose special interests are in the groups of birds included may wish to purchase this volume. Others may elect to consult it in their local libraries.

Finally, since this is the first of at least six volumes, it would seem most advisable to send out a questionnaire to a number of leading ornithologists in this country and abroad, asking for suggestions for future volumes. The present method of treatment could stand a great deal of improvement, and now would be the time to start.—
JOHN DAVIS.