

## FLICKER INVESTIGATION.

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I take pleasure in announcing through the BULLETIN to the sixty ornithologists who have assisted me in the preparation of the Flicker Report, and to others who may be interested, that a definite time has been decided upon for its completion and publication. It will contain notes on the Scientific and Vernacular Synonyms, Geographical Distribution, Relative Abundance, Plumage, Hybridism, Albinism, Vernal Migration, Flight, Roosting, Song, Mating, Location, Position, Excavation, Composition and Dimension of Nest, Deposition, Measurements, Color and Shape of Eggs, Number of Eggs in Set, Season's Quota, Dates for Complete Sets, Incubation, Young in and out of Nest, Moulting, Food, Autumnal Migration, Destructive Agencies and Conclusions. It will be ready for the printer sometime in December of the present year. In the meantime I need migration notes for '95-'99, measurements of eggs with complete data, notes on incubation, young, and moulting.

I would be pleased to hear from and correspond with all who are willing to help me in this or anything else relating to the Flicker. Do not delay but write before it passes out of your mind.

FRANK L. BURNS, *Berwyn, Pa.*

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## PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT OF WORK FOR THE COMMITTEE ON VARIATION.

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Now that winter is here and field work demands little attention, some time can be very profitably spent in getting acquainted with the material in our collections, which is generally apt to lie idle.

We have our specimens labelled and classified, but what does it all mean? Why have birds been grouped as they are and why is it that we are able to classify birds in such orderly fashion? The earlier ornithologists recognized in the resemblances and differences in the birds they found a natural arrangement in groups, but this work was simply to start out and make pigeon holes for the different forms; and most of us in our systematic work are simply finding these pigeon holes for our specimens.

With the development of the great theory of evolution the secrets back of all these conditions began to come forth. Species were now seen to have come from common ancestors and it was realized that they

had not always existed as we see them now. We realize now that Thrushes and Grebes belong to one great family and that their great differences are due to their early differentiations, whereas the various species of Warblers, for example, are only twigs of one branch of the bird limb. Recent work in classification has been guided more or less by this light, and yet it must be admitted that comparatively little attention has been given to a bird's family and ancestral relationships. In other words, phylogenetic study of birds, as of other animals, is still a little explored field; and few subjects offer more opportunity than this for the thoughtful and resourceful student.

Some work along this line that I am doing in Harvard University has suggested to my mind the organization of a committee of members of the Chapter, who have opportunity and inclination for such work, to take up a careful study of the various races of North American Song Sparrows, from a phylogenetic standpoint. It is very desirable that we have the co-operation of as many ornithologists as possible and that the various life areas be represented as far as possible. First of all, as many skins as are accessible should be gathered together, and the following measurements made with great care with a pair of dividers.

Bill.—Length from nostril to tip. Depth at base where feathers begin.  
Left wing.—Length of greatest chord.

Tail.—Length from knob or papilla or "bishop's row" to tip of tail.

It is desirable that all measurements be according to the metric system and that those of the bill should be accurate to tenths of millimeters.

Careful measurement of eggs are also desirable. After the work of measuring has been completed, a study of the color patches may be begun, and the following general principles should be borne in mind: \*

I.—That young birds and females, in so far as they differ from adult males, are more primitive in coloring.

II.—That the color spread over the greater portion of male birds is the more generalized and the detailed markings the more specialized.

III.—Variations are found to occur more frequently in extremities.

Count the number of primaries and tail feathers; observing also any progression or correspondence in markings. If any variations are found, they should be noted. Notice whether females or young males of one race differ as much from those of another as the adult males.

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\*Evolution of the Colors of North American Land Birds | by | Charles A. Keeler. | San Francisco: | California Academy of Sciences. | January, 1893. | 361 pp. 19 plates. Very rich in suggestions.

Study the physical geography of the regions inhabited by the different races of Song Sparrows. Note differences in climate, due to temperature and humidity, also variations in altitude; and try to correlate them with the variations found in Song Sparrows.

It will be interesting to compare Song Sparrows with other species of Sparrows to see which are most closely allied and what characters are common. It is a good plan to attempt the construction of a Sparrow "tree." This may be largely a matter of guess work, but the attempt will help in obtaining a clearer conception of phylogenetic relationships.

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## THE WORK FOR 1899.

This year, as heretofore, our work is naturally divided into two sorts: The more general study of the superficial features of bird life, often resulting in a glimpse into the inner life and thus throwing more or less light upon the many problems before us; and the more specialized work asked for by our committees. The general work requires less time and effort, and is often more entertaining to most of us. It certainly occupies a large place in present day bird study, and must always do so among those to whom it is merely a recreation or change from other activities and duties. It has its legitimate place and is certain to do great good.

The co-operation asked for by the committees on special investigations is work of the sort that must, from its nature, advance our knowledge of the birds materially if entered into with anything like heartiness by even a few. This is what we are organized for. It is for this purpose that our Chapter has continued these ten years to agitate the question of co-operative study among ornithologists everywhere. It is not too much to say that if every member would devote even what little time he may have at his disposal to the study of the Flicker, during the next six months, and make a report of that study to Mr. Burns in August, more would be known about that species than has ever been written. So it is with any subject upon which information has been asked. It seems difficult for us to understand that in this, as in everything else, it is the *little* things that count. The value of such reports lies in the range of comparison that is made possible by the work of individuals. It is not so much new things that are wanted as it is old things carefully studied and restated. Here a slight change and there a slight change made