

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN MARSH BIRDS. ORDERS ODONTOGLOSSAE, HERODIONES AND PALUDICOLAE. By Arthur Cleveland Bent. Bull. 125, U. S. Nat. Mus. Pp. i-xii + 1-490. Pls. 98 in black. Washington, 1926. Price, \$1.25.

This volume is the sixth of the "life history" series under Mr. Bent's authorship. The present volume is arranged on the same general plan as its predecessors, and may be regarded as a compendium of our knowledge of the habits of the species treated. The previous volumes of the series have been reviewed in the *WILSON BULLETIN*, and little more can be said on the merits of the work; little needs to be said beyond expressing our satisfaction and gratitude.

We take it that it is the duty of the reviewer to point out criticisms, if there are any, rather than to indulge in obsequious and formal flattery. We will, therefore, not hesitate to point out what we consider to be the one weak feature of the work, namely the discussion of distributions. We do not underrate the difficulty of treating this subject within the space which is probably allotted. On the other hand we do not know of any topic connected with the bird's life history upon which complete information is more needed and more sought, at the present time, than its distribution.

The general distribution of North American species must now be fairly well known, though the information has not been collected for publication in any one place. The A. O. U. Check-list was never adequate in its treatment of ranges, and cannot be expected to be as full as may be desired. The treatment of distribution in Ridgway's "Birds of North and Middle America" is no more satisfactory than in the work under review; in fact they both follow the same plan of treatment, and one is about as complete, or incomplete, as the other. We necessarily look to the Government for a complete and adequate analysis of ranges with a published report thereon. Perhaps, in a measure, our expectation is increased by the fact that such a great number of persons have, for many years, made their annual migration reports to the Biological Survey. And through this co-operation the Government has been enabled to gather what is often spoken of as an unsurpassed accumulation of migration and distributional data.

In the present Bulletin a typical treatment of distribution contains seven sub-heads, viz., range, breeding range, winter range, spring migration, fall migration, casual records, and egg dates. These topics present an excellent outline of the subject. The difficulty is that when we examine these paragraphs for specific information we do not find it.

Let us make the matter clear by a simple illustration. The breeding range of the Coot is given on page 367. Breeding localities are mentioned for fifteen states (we refer to distribution in the United States only, for simplicity). We know that this does not tell the whole story of the breeding range of this bird. That is, the account is incomplete, and, therefore, unsatisfactory and disappointing in this particular. Likewise, breeding records of the Florida Gallinule are given for fifteen states (page 353).

Are we to conclude that these birds breed in only fifteen states out of the forty-eight? Or must we infer that the Biological Survey's records do not contain further information? With the extensive literature on North American birds it

should not be an impossible task to compile a correct and complete statement of the distribution of each species. This could be best done, of course, by means of maps. Such a complete compilation would be invaluable, and might be regarded as the most important service the Government could render to American ornithologists at the present time.

The question of expense might be raised, which should be immaterial, though it may not be. We observe, however, that fifty-five forms are treated in Bulletin 135, which, we may suppose, would require as many distribution maps. This Bulletin, as published, contains ninety-eight plates (most of which include two half-tone cuts) illustrating the birds, their nests and habitats. While we enjoy these pictures, and would not ask for their elimination, we yet believe that the distribution maps would be of greater value. The preparation of such maps, or a full statement of distribution in any form, would involve considerable labor; but considerable labor goes into the preparation of such reports, anyway, and a little more should not be prohibitive, considering the end in view.

We hope that this criticism does not fall upon the author, at least entirely; and certainly it does not concern the collaborator who prepared the paragraphs on distribution in this particular volume of the series. The plan of treatment seems to be the result of an evolutionary process. It does not follow Major Bendire's work, which seldom gives more than two lines to the Geographical Range. We notice, too, that Mr. Bent's more recent volumes give more space to distribution than do the earlier ones. It may be that another series of reports dealing with distribution only would supply the desideratum in a more satisfactory manner.—T. C. S.

DIRECTORY TO THE BIRD-LIFE OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION. By Joseph Grinnell and Margaret W. Wythe. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 18, Cooper Ornith. Club. Pp. 1-160. Pl. 1. March 29, 1927. Price, \$4.00.

In its general plan and execution the paper here reviewed may be regarded as a model local check-list. Three hundred and eighty-three species and subspecies are catalogued, of which three hundred and twenty-four are considered to be "full" species. Not many localities are fortunate in harboring so many kinds of birds.

The catalogue which constitutes the main body of the paper contains for each species a statement of its status, explicit or unusual locality records, and a brief reference list of writers on the particular form. We believe it would be helpful in a local catalogue of this kind to include the citation of the original description, in view of the rapidity with which new forms are being described. The nomenclature of the present list is so far away from the A. O. U. Check-list that the latter has little bearing. In our recent trip through the Yellowstone and the west we noted that the fastest automobiles usually bore California licenses. The introductory portion of the paper contains a list of recommended books, a bibliography of local lists, and a list of libraries and public museums in the San Francisco region. There is also included a list of species and subspecies arranged in the order of the new and proposed A. O. U. Check-list. We are prepared to like this new order, and trust that its final adoption and publication may not long be delayed.—T. C. S.

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF BIRDS. By Junius Henderson. Pp. i-xii + 1-342.
Published by The Macmillan Co., New York. 1927. Price, \$2.50.

In 1913 the University of Colorado issued a 48-page pamphlet on "The Practical Value of Birds," by Professor Henderson. This brief survey has now been expanded into a book of useful proportions. The book deals exclusively with the food habits of birds, notwithstanding its somewhat more inclusive title. The first seventeen chapters, or about one-third of the book, deal with general principles, e. g., the balance of nature, quantities of food eaten by birds, birds in relation to various injurious animals, as scavengers and carriers of disease, destruction, protection, etc., etc.

The remainder of the book, though not divided into chapters, presents a systematic survey of the bird groups and their food habits. The amount of literature condensed in this volume is enormous, and one of the most valuable features of the work is the bibliographic citation at the foot of each page. This, with the bibliography at the end, affords us the most complete source book on the subject of economic ornithology now extant. We note with surprise, however, the omission of any reference to King's early paper on the "Economic Relations of Wisconsin Birds" (Geology of Wisconsin, Survey of 1873-1879, Vol. I, pp. 441-610), which must be regarded as one of the important pioneer works in this field.—T. C. S.

THAT COLLECTION OF GEESE FROM THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA. By
J. D. Figgins. Proc. Colo. Mus. Nat. Hist., VI, No. 6. Pp. 33-40. Dec.
23, 1926.

This renewal of the controversy over the *Branta canadensis* group of geese is interesting to the bystander because it affords a glowing example of the utter tangle which can be reached in the understanding of and differentiation of subspecies. The follower of this controversy will have to read closely to keep his bearings. Maybe we are prejudiced, but we are much impressed by Mr. Figgins' presentation of facts and the logic of his deductions.—T. C. S.

GENERIC NAMES APPLIED TO BIRDS DURING THE YEARS 1916 TO 1922, INCLUSIVE,
WITH ADDITIONS TO WATERHOUSE'S "INDEX GENERUM AVIUM." By Charles
W. Richmond. Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., Vol. 70, Art. 15, 1927. Pp. 1-44.

This is a technical and scholarly paper of importance to all who are interested in taxonomic ornithology.—T. C. S.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE OKLAHOMA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE. Univ. Okla. Bull., Vol.
VI, 1926. Pp. 1-221. Dated Jan. 1, 1927.

Several ornithological papers are found in this volume: "A census of the song and insectivorous birds of Oklahoma County for 1924-25" and "Observations on Some Oklahoma Birds," both papers being written by George B. Saunders, Jr. There is another paper by Mrs. Nice on late nesting of Mourning Doves. Roberta Dean Ortenburger presents a paper on "Bird Records from Southern Oklahoma." We doubt the wisdom of using nomenclature which has not been passed upon by the A. O. U. Committee, as has been done in several instances in these papers. If the Committee adopts the terms little harm will be done; but if the Committee rejects the terms, then things are simply messed that much more by premature publication. We look forward to the day when proposed nomenclatorial changes will not, by common consent, be published at all until they have been passed upon by an organized national or international com-

mission. Mention might also be made of several papers on amphibia, fishes, reptiles, and insects appearing in this volume.—T. C. S.

10 AARS OPHOLD IBLANDT NORDISLANDSKE FUGLE. By G. B. Dinesen. Published by G. Dinesen, Dannebrogsgade 8, Kbhvn. V., Copenhagen, Denmark. (In Danish). Pp. 1-52. Price, 5 Kr.

This pamphlet records the results of the author's bird study in Iceland covering a period of about twelve years, from 1902 to 1914. Eighty-three species are listed, and apparently all records are based upon specimens collected.—T. C. S.

SINDBADS OF SCIENCE. By George Finlay Simmons. Pp. 1-75. Reprinted from the National Geographic Magazine for July, 1927.

Those who heard Mr. Simmons' lecture at the W. O. C. meeting in Chicago last fall will be glad to learn that the story of his long voyage in the *Blossom* is finally available in print. The fascinating story as told is no less so as written, and the ninety pictures greatly enliven it.—T. C. S.

A BIOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NORTH DAKOTA. By Vernon Bailey. No. Amer. Fauna No. 49. Pp. 1-226. Washington, D. C., December, 1926. Price, 60 cents.

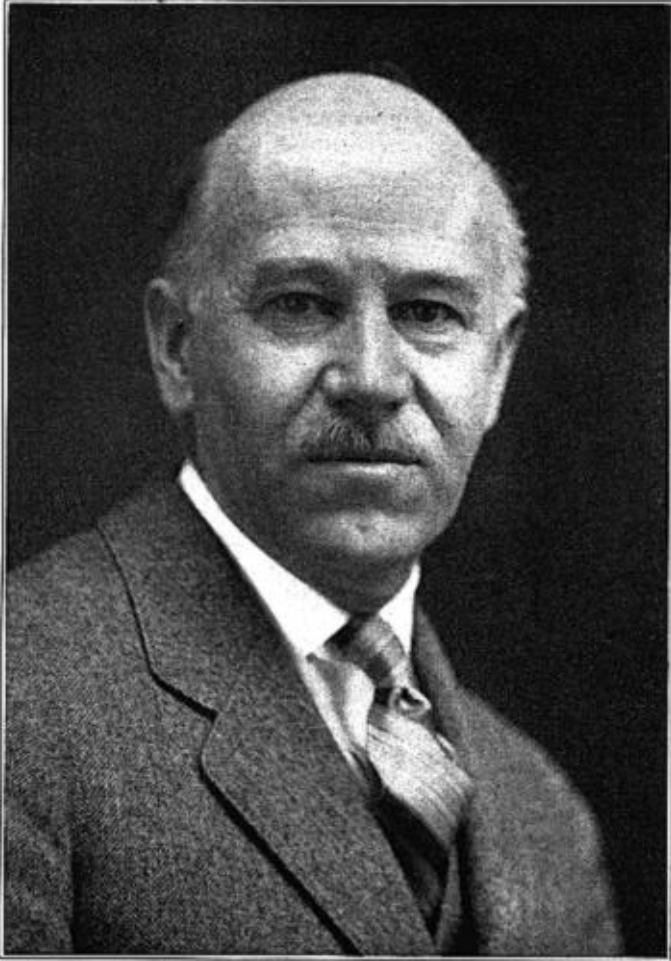
The greater part of this paper deals with mammals, but pages 3-16 deal with physiography and life zones. The latter discussion is of interest to the student of birds or other groups within this state. Lists of characteristic mammals, birds, and plants are given for each of the life zones represented in the state. The large inserted map shows that practically the entire state is within the Transition life zone; small extensions of the Upper Austral appear in the southwestern and southcentral portions of the state, while a still smaller region in the northcentral portion is marked Canadian.—T. C. S.

PRAIRIE BIRDS. By B. J. Hales. Published by the Macmillan Company of Canada, Limited, Toronto. Distributed in the United States by the Macmillan Company, 60 Fifth Ave., New York. 1927. Pp. i-xviii + 1-334.

The author presents in this booklet descriptive sketches of nearly two hundred and fifty of the common birds which inhabit the prairie regions, although many of the forms selected are strictly woodland types, as, for instance, the Red-eyed Vireo, certain grouse, woodpeckers, wood warblers, and thrushes. The author states in the preface that the book may be "quite as valuable for what it omits as what it includes," meaning that the beginner is often confused in his ornithological reading by the accounts of birds which are not to be found in his region. The list as selected, perhaps particularly for the region of Manitoba, contains certain species and omits others which we would omit or include in a corresponding list for the prairies of Iowa. The author's remarks in many cases give us new side-lights on certain species.—T. C. S.

THE SUMMER BIRDS OF CENTRAL NEW YORK MARSHES. By Aretas A. Saunders. Roosevelt Wild Life Station Bull., Vol. 3, No. 3, September, 1926. Pp. 335-475. Pls. 19, Figs. 64, Map 1. Price, \$1.00.

Mr. Saunders here gives us a very complete and original treatise on bird life in the marshes. The notes on the various species of birds are based upon the author's own field work under the auspices of the Roosevelt Wild Life Station. The paper is illustrated by means of two colored plates, showing eighteen figures, by Sawyer, and numerous half-tones from photographs, a few of which



LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES
1874-1927

are rather poor. The author discusses very thoroughly the value of marshes as conservators of many forms of wild life, and concludes that marsh birds are on the decrease because of extensive drainage of marshes—a fact which is not new, but which is here confirmed after careful study.—T. C. S.

THE AUDUBON BULLETIN. SPRING AND SUMMER, 1927. No 18. Illinois Audubon Society. Pp. 1-56.

As usual this bulletin is full of interesting reading matter. Mr. Schantz writes an entertaining account of a trip to the home of Robert Ridgway. Mr. Ridgway himself contributes a paper on the relations of birds to the farmer and fruit grower. An intimate sketch of Bewick's Wren reports it breeding in the sand Dunes of Indiana. Miss Sherman's article entitled "Down with the House Wren Boxes" is reprinted in full, from the WILSON BULLETIN of March, 1925. Announcement is made that a new and revised edition of the check-list of birds of Illinois is to appear early this fall.—T. C. S.

NECROLOGY

LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES. Born February 7, 1874, at Ithaca, N. Y. Died August 22, 1927, at Unadilla, N. Y., aged fifty-three years. Mr. and Mrs. Fuertes were returning from a week-end visit with Dr. Frank Chapman, at Oneonta Park, N. Y., when their car was struck on a dangerous railroad crossing. Mr. Fuertes was almost instantly killed, possibly the burning of the car contributing to the fatality. It is a fact to arrest our attention that Mr. Fuertes, after having made extensive travels through the wildernesses of South America and Africa, should meet a tragic death within the confines of civilization.

Mr. Fuertes won unusual distinction in two different roles. He was a great artist; as a painter of birds the world has produced no superior, and among American bird artists he was, by common consent, regarded as the leader. Then, as a man Mr. Fuertes was an unusual success. This is shown by the words of esteem universally expressed by those who came in contact with him. He was comrade and companion to those with whom he camped in the wilderness; he was counsellor and friend to the ambitious youth; and he was the wit and life at many professional gatherings, such as the meetings of the American Ornithologists' Union. So, in all these circles his absence will be mourned with genuine sorrow.

We cannot attempt here to give a complete biography, nor to enumerate the many bird books illustrated by his pencil and brush. It may not be generally known that Mr. Fuertes painted the backgrounds for many of the habitat groups in the American Museum of Natural History. On the recent Chicago scientific expedition into Abyssinia Mr. Fuertes was the official ornithologist. As such, his report, which consisted of paintings of Abyssinian birds and an uncompleted manuscript, was recovered from the ruined car. Mr. Forbush has stated that Mr. Fuertes had completed all of the colored plates for the second volume of the "Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States," and also some of the plates for the third and final volume.

Mr. Fuertes became an active member of the Wilson Ornithological Club in 1905, and maintained his membership continuously to the time of his death. Whatever may be the misfortune in this sudden and tragic death, few men have the privilege of erecting for themselves the lasting fame that will live with the name of Fuertes.—Wm. I. Lyon.