

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WOODPECKERS. By Arthur Cleveland Bent. United States National Museum Bulletin 174, 1939, 334 pp., 39 pls. \$.50 of Supt. of Documents, Wash., D.C.

Each of Mr. Bent's "Life Histories" is a mine of information on distribution, plumages, voice and "habits," and one marvels at the amount of patient labor represented. We owe a great debt to Mr. Bent, and the books with their fine photographs and entertaining text with quotations gathered from far and near are a bargain at the prices asked.

In going through this volume on woodpeckers, one is impressed with the shocking gaps in our knowledge of the elementary facts such as length of incubation and fledging, and definite information as to share of the sexes in the care of the young even in our most common species. Apparently the nest life of only one species has been adequately studied in this country, namely the Yellow-shafted Flicker by Miss Althea Sherman and this study is a masterpiece. Our knowledge of our woodpeckers compares most unfavorably with that in England and Europe.

Some important information has been missed: A. F. Skutch's "The Male Flicker's Part in Incubation" (*Bird-Lore*, 39, 1937: 112-114), and G. K. Noble's "Courtship and Sexual Selection of the Flicker (*Colaptes auratus luteus*)," (*Auk*, 53, 1936: 269-282). The importance of Shelley's instance of inbreeding Downy Woodpeckers is not pointed out, nor is his third item on the brother-sister pair, telling of their nesting together for four years (*Bird Banding*, 7, 1936: 135) given; no mention is made of the communal nesting of the California Woodpecker, and little use has been made of the files of *Bird Banding*, in which many items appear on age, dispersal, etc.

Some quotations might better have been omitted: the accounts of Gairdner's and Pileated Woodpeckers with eggs throwing out chips "as a ruse to deceive," (pp. 49, 191); of Red-shafted Flicker parents' placing food in crevices to teach the baby to pick it out (p. 290), and the "learning by experience" of California Woodpeckers that did not store acorns extensively until after a "lean year" (p. 218). As to the first instance of intelligence, against what enemy but an egg collector would it be successful? As to the second, I feel sceptical until I hear of more instances. The third seems to call for higher mental ability than we would expect in a bird that sometimes stores acorns in places where it cannot retrieve them or even fills the bark of trees with pebbles.

It was a pity to include G. W. Morse's record of a Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting in a willow near Tulsa, Oklahoma; Tulsa has oak-hickory savannah on one side and prairie blue-stem on the other, but is a hundred miles away from the pine forests in which this species is a very rare resident, having been recorded some seven times in the last 47 years. (The range extends only to *southeastern* Oklahoma, not to northeastern as stated (p. 79), the records from Copan and Tulsa being erroneous.) Mr. Morse was carried away by enthusiasm for new records, and many of his "finds" had to be ignored by other workers in the State. In May 1926 he sent me a sketch of his Red-cockaded Woodpecker that decidedly did *not* match this species, but had considerable resemblance to a Downy Woodpecker.

Woodpeckers are a particularly interesting group of birds. Sexually dimorphic as a rule, at times strikingly so, but occasionally both sexes alike; the male incubating and brooding at night and doing more than his share of the care of the family; short incubation periods; usually rather anti-social, but at times the opposite—woodpeckers in this country offer an almost unexplored field for intensive life history and behavior studies.—M. M. Nice.

THE MIGRATION OF AMERICAN BIRDS. By Frederick C. Lincoln. Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., New York, 1939: 7½ x 10 in., xiv + 189 pp., 12 pls., 22 figs. \$4.00.

One who desires to read a popular book on bird migration will find Frederick C. Lincoln's "The Migration of American Birds" the very volume he is looking for. There are twelve chapters written in a straightforward, concise style that provides easy and quick reading. Together these chapters review the history of migration and what is known of its origin and evolution, the mechanics, dangers, times, and various types of migration, the distances covered in migration, the flyway systems of American migration, and bird-banding as a method of migration study. The two latter subjects are discussed at great length, and appropriately so, for the author, as Chief of the Section of the Distribution and Migration of Birds in the Bureau of Biological Survey, has studied the flyway systems in detail and has been one of those in charge of bird-banding in this country for many years.

One who has read other books on bird migration, whether popular or technical, may be disappointed in the contents of the present volume. There is little freshness in presentation and information. New facts and hypotheses are to be found but they do not receive deserved emphasis; too often they are submerged by the already well-known, spectacular findings of bygone days. Two statements are based on inaccurate information. The "hummingbird" (p. 26) is said to make possibly 200 wing strokes per second, whereas motion-picture film from the Edgerton-Germeshausen-Grier stroboscopic high speed camera has shown that the Ruby-throated Hummingbird beats its wings from fifty to fifty-five times per second while hovering and seventy-five times per second when in forward flight. The Cape May Warbler (p. 88) is said to breed in "northern Michigan and northern Minnesota" but no nests have ever been found in either of these States.

The author has found it impractical in a popular book of this sort to credit all writings from which information has been taken, to name the persons conducting important investigations, and to include the names of banders when banding records are cited. Too numerous references and names quite obviously detract from the general story. But the reviewer takes strong exception to the fact that no bibliography whatever is included, that important investigators' names are not mentioned anywhere in the text, and that a list of persons who have cooperated extensively in bird-banding is not given. If a layman's interest is to be stimulated by this book, he will want to read further with the aid of a bibliography; if a reader becomes fascinated by a certain investigation, quite naturally he will be curious to know the person's name; if numerous individuals are to continue their cooperation with the Biological Survey by bird-banding, they will certainly expect encouragement by simple recognition when the records they have helped establish are used.

The book is attractively bound and printed and there are a satisfactory number of maps illustrating various types of migration. The color plates are unbelievably poor reproductions of the extremely beautiful paintings done by Louis Agassiz Fuertes for Eaton's "Birds of New York." The colors in no way match the accuracy of the originals, the artist's signature and side sections of the paintings have in some instances been partially blocked out, and a general haziness prevails. The misuse of such masterly paintings is deplorable.—O. S. Pettingill, Jr.

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF TENNESSEE. By Alexander Wetmore, Proceedings of United States National Museum, 86, No. 3050, 1939: 175-243.

The National Museum has recently commenced a "biological survey" of the east-central States. The present paper reports on 186 forms of Tennessee birds

seen or collected by the museum's field parties during 1937. Reference is also made to older specimens, now in the National Museum, collected by W. H. Fox and A. H. Howell. The form and style are similar to Dr. Wetmore's previous paper on West Virginia birds.

A number of species were critically studied, and the author resurrects several names usually relegated to synonymy, as well as recognizing a number of newly described races. Reference is usually, though not always, given to nomenclatorial changes since publication of the last A. O. U. Check-List. The type specimen of *Quiscalus versicolor* Vieillot was examined in the Paris Museum and found to be the same as Ridgway's *aeneus*. This necessitates the use of the former name for the Bronzed Grackle, which Wetmore considers to be a full species.

We note some ten races, mostly western forms or recently described subspecies, which are apparently additions to the avifauna of the State, but there is no indication in the text that such is the case.

A brief description of the faunal divisions of Tennessee would have been useful, especially to the reader unfamiliar with the region.

The main value of this report, aside from its rather considerable local interest, is in the careful revisionary work included, which will have an influence far beyond the geographic scope of the paper.—P. Brodtkorb.

FOOD HABITS OF NORTH AMERICAN DIVING DUCKS. By Clarence Cottam, U. S. Dept. Agric. Tech. Bull. No. 643, 139 pp., 10 pls. (4 color pls. by Allan Brooks). April, 1939. \$.30 of Supt. Doc., Wash., D.C.

Without doubt this is the best publication on the feeding habits of ducks which has appeared in this country. The author has made full use of stomach analyses by the Biological Survey, but also he has drawn on the findings of other investigators to give a more complete picture of food preferences. Results are based on analyses of 6,665 adult and 140 juvenile stomachs. Mergansers are not included. The "inland divers," excepting the Greater Scaup, are found to be predominantly plant feeders, while the reverse is true of the sea ducks. Tables show the volumetric percentages of the various foods of each species, and other tables summarize the findings concerning the plant feeders and the animal feeders. Ninety-seven titles are listed, an indication of the thoroughness which characterizes this study.

This is a most valuable presentation of new information and summary of published material. It is ably and interestingly presented.—M. D. Pirnie.

FOOD OF THE GAME DUCKS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. By A. C. Martin and F. M. Uhler, U. S. Dept. Agric. Tech. Bull. No. 634, 156 pp., colored frontispiece, and 152 uncolored plates. March, 1939. \$.40 of Supt. Doc., Wash., D.C.

Part 1 is a summary of the duck foods data in the Biological Survey files, as indicated by the examinations of 7,998 stomachs of 18 duck species, chiefly by McAtee, Mabbott, Kubichek, Holt, Cottam, Kalmbach, Sperry and Uhler. Tables show the volumetric percentages and frequency for the more important items. For all regions combined, plant foods amounted to about 73 per cent and animal foods almost 27 per cent. In one region the animal foods equaled as much as 46 per cent and in another as low as 7 per cent, no doubt partly due to the season in which the collections were made.

Part 2 gives a very detailed account of the better-known food plants, touching upon: "value for food, parts consumed, identification, environment, propagation, and related species." Maps give the principal range, region of greatest abundance, and isolated records for nearly all the plants discussed. Of 83 pages, only 5 are

devoted to animal foods. Eight plates illustrate the animal food types and 144 plates (all in black and white) depict the plant foods, habitats, and the contents of a few stomachs.

Part 3 deals thoroughly with the propagation of food plants and the development of feeding grounds—a most timely and useful presentation for wildlife managers—with plenty of good material for students of any phase of aquatic or marsh ecology. A bibliography of 91 titles is followed by the 152 uncolored plates and an index.

The reviewer of such a comprehensive publication is at a disadvantage, for who outside of the Biological Survey has a continental grasp of this subject? At once the many merits of this report will be discovered. Here is a very comprehensive and no doubt accurate presentation of the essential facts about most of the better known and most commonly used plant foods of the ducks. This is the only publication which at all covers this subject, and it is a very fine job. It is much to be regretted, however, that the plan of the work over-emphasizes the importance of plants and will leave most readers unaware that animal items probably would have made up from a third to a half of the menus of nearly all ducks, if adequate samplings had been available for all months of the year. Utah, Wisconsin, the lower Mississippi, and the coastal regions are best represented, but locality representation is far from satisfactory. There were only 44 stomachs for Manitoba, 47 from Michigan, and only 20 from Minnesota—to represent not one, but 18 species! A careless reader may be misled by the graphic representation of the plant food volumes, a treatment omitted with the animal foods. The authors have frankly stated the handicap of having to make collections from only 247 localities serve for so large an area, and they have tried to make certain adjustments by “scaling down” the data from poorly represented areas; but this cannot make up for such lack of data as having only 25 Black Duck stomachs for the entire “Eastern Region!” Perhaps a “species by species” treatment is best, after all, in presenting the food habits of birds.

This bulletin should be in the hands of all who are seriously interested in marsh and aquatic plants or in the foods used by our native ducks.—M. D. Pirnie.

**MOULTS AND SEQUENCE OF PLUMAGES IN THE ROCK PTARMIGAN (*LAGOPUS MUTUS* (MONTIN)).** By Finn Salomonsen, *Videnskabelige Meddelelser fra Dansk Naturhistorisk Forening*, 103, 1939: 1-491, figs. 1-57, folding pls. 1-7.

Following Jonathan Dwight's epoch-making studies of avian molts and plumages there was a period of lessened activity in this interesting field of research. Fortunately, of recent years these studies have steadily increased in number and excellence and now we have a large book devoted to an account of the molts and plumages of a single species.

In the preparation of this thorough study the author examined molting birds in the field (in Greenland) and then worked over nearly 1,300 museum specimens of this species as well as more than 250 specimens of the Willow Ptarmigan and 300 specimens of certain weasels and other mammals which similarly turn white in winter. The specimens belonged to 23 different museums (including 3 New World institutions), a fine example of the cooperative nature of the best modern museum research.

Ptarmigan, of course, molt three times a year and, as the author shows, the process is a complicated one. He describes the molts as fully as his material allowed and makes a determined, if not wholly successful, effort to learn the causative factors. He states that the molt into white plumage takes place quite independently of the presence of snow cover and that the whiteness seems not to be

primarily of importance as a protective coloration factor—rather it is “no doubt a thermo-regulating adaptation.” The author also confirms the report that ptarmigan are more extensively and densely feathered in the winter plumage. There is no space here even to mention other of the author’s many interesting conclusions but the book is one of outstanding importance which everyone interested in the molts and plumages of birds will have to study carefully.

The book concludes with an excellent bibliography of 318 titles and a 35 page Danish abstract, the quality of which we did not test.—J. V.

BIRDS OF CANADA. By P. A. Taverner. David McKay Co., Philadelphia, Pa., 1938: 6½ x 9 in., 445 pp., 488 text figs., 87 col. pls. \$4.00.

This is an American edition, unchanged except for minor corrections, of the author’s well known and widely used “Birds of Canada,” first published by the National Museum of Canada in 1934. Many of the illustrations and notes on field characters will prove extremely helpful to students whose activities are confined to northern United States.—J. V.

THE LIFE HISTORY OF HENSLOW’S SPARROW, *PASSERHERBULUS HENSLOWI* (AUDUBON). By A. Sidney Hyde, University of Michigan Museum of Zoology Misc. Publ. No. 41, July [issued Aug. 8], 1939, 72 pp., 4 pls. \$.75.

To the growing list of American birds singled out for special, intensive study over a number of seasons may now be added the Henslow’s Sparrow. If the results of three seasons’ work, as presented in the paper here under review, are less exhaustive and complete than in the case of other species so treated, we must remember the unusual difficulties attendant upon watching so elusive and inconspicuous a bird and assume more an attitude of thanks for what the author has been able to gather than of criticism for the gaps and omissions. However, the latter are so conspicuous that we may well ask ourselves if it would not be better to leave ecologically “difficult” forms to those so situated as to spend many, many years on them, and direct our studies to those equally interesting birds that lend themselves more readily to the life history investigator. It is rather surprising to find a monographic account of a sparrow with almost no mention of the whole question of territory (and no real data on it), and with all too little on the subjects of courtship and mating, especially in view of the possibility of promiscuity that is hinted at in the loose social organizations mentioned by the author. Even in topics where the data available are more extensive, the treatment is somewhat inadequate. Thus, the data on distribution and migration are unfortunately compiled by States (with a rather perfunctory summary, at least as far as migration is concerned) instead of worked into a more readily comprehensible picture that would serve the reader to better advantage and be more translatable into the biology of the bird. There is disappointingly little on local migration in the area where the author did his field work; nothing at all involving any intensive study.

In those sections dealing with the nest, eggs, and young, the author makes his fullest contributions to our knowledge of Henslow’s Sparrow. The female builds the nest without any assistance from the male (how were the sexes distinguished with certainty?), but it seems that both parents feed the nestlings. The incubation period is surprisingly short,—ten to eleven days, and the nest life of the young is also very brief,—nine or ten days. Is this an adaptation to the fact that dangers beset chiefly the eggs and nestlings? Henslow’s Sparrow should be compared with other ground nesting sparrows with this in mind.

The author avoids the question of the two subspecies *henslowi* and *sussurans*, merely stating that, ". . . conclusions are withheld until the evidence becomes more complete." It seems to the reviewer that ample evidence could have been gotten together from our various museum collections to enable the author to settle this point. On the whole, the reviewer has an impression that the author has brought together all that was previously known of this bird, but that he has not added to it as much as might have been hoped for from three seasons in the field. Field studies at best are beset with difficulties; why pick birds that seem to increase the obstacles to accurate observation?—Herbert Friedmann.

SHORT PAPERS

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- BENNETT, L. J., and P. F. ENGLISH. The Fall Foods of Ringneck Pheasants and Bobwhites. *Pennsylvania Game News*, 10, No. 1, April, 1939: 8-9, 29.
- BRIGHTON, E. M., JR. "Lazy Eagles." *Jack-Pine Warbler*, 17, No. 3, July, 1939: 59-63, figs. 1-3.—Bald Eagle nesting on level ground near Roscommon, Mich.
- BROOKS, A. The Downy Young of Some Nearctic Limicolines. *Ibis*, 1939, No. 3, July: 450-3, col. pl.—Downy young of Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Dowitcher figured in color.
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