

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE <sup>1</sup>

BIRDS AROUND NEW YORK CITY. By Allan D. Cruickshank, American Museum of Natural History. 1942: 5½ x 8 in., xvii + 489 pp. End maps, and 36 photographs. \$1:75.

The New York City region, which includes northern New Jersey, all of Long Island, and the southern part of New York State, is, with the possible exception of the Boston region, the most thoroughly worked area its size in North America. The records, made by hundreds of observers, and spanning a period of nearly a century, constitute a volume of material so great that this book is necessarily a synthesis rather than an analysis. If some of Cruickshank's discussions seem a little too generalized, it must be remembered that it is no longer possible to go into minute detail about a region where such a tremendous volume of data has accumulated. Even rarities eventually become commonplace. For example, when Ludlow Griscom wrote his *Birds of the New York City Region* in 1923 there were two records of the Little Gull; now there are 60! Whereas in 1923 there were three records for the Arkansas Kingbird on Long Island, there are now 63, with the number growing each year. There were but three definite records in the New York City area for the Ring-necked Duck; now there are *hundreds*, and the bird can be found on several ponds on any winter's day in numbers up to 150.

Great changes have taken place in the bird life of the northeast during the last quarter of a century. Speaking about this at the 1942 A. O. U. meeting in Philadelphia, Griscom stated it was his belief that those years have seen a far greater change in the status of many birds than any previous period of the same length. Happily there have been many more increases than declines. The author has ably discussed these changes under each species. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, he was not able to devote a chapter to a summary of these changes. It seems inconceivable that as many changes can take place in our avifauna during the next 20 years as have been evidenced by the past 20.

A total of 405 species and subspecies, including eight birds now extirpated, are included in the volume. In addition, three well-known hybrids are treated, though the various duck hybrids are wisely omitted. I myself have seen wild hybrids of Black-Mallard, Pintail-Gadwall and Gadwall-Mallard in the New York City area. Needless to say, any book of this sort is in a sense out of date as soon as it is published. As an example, on July 5, several weeks after the book came out, I found the nest and eggs of a European Goldfinch, which extended the egg dates, as given by Cruickshank, by over one month.

Although the New York City region has been so disturbed by civilization that it is hard to separate it into ecological units, Cruickshank lists 15 major ecological blocks, such as open ocean (two to ten miles out); (2) ocean (from shore to two miles out); (3) ocean beaches and sand dunes; (4) coastal bayberry; etc. Under each is listed the dominant and sub-dominant birds and their seasonal occurrence. There is a splendid discussion of the ornithological year, giving the approximate groupings and dates of arrival of migrants. The bulk of the book is taken up by an annotated list of birds, with an attempt to portray their approximate distribution, some of the reasons for this distribution—extreme dates, average dates and breeding status. Recognizing that each writer has his own concept of such words as *common*, *rare* and *casual*, Cruickshank has often indicated how many individuals of a species can be seen by a top-notch observer (such as himself) on a peak day. This has a concrete comparison value. Since not many people enjoy collecting privileges, and it is impossible to use such privileges in many places such as city parks where rare birds turn up, it is fortunate that so many of the rarities have been seen and checked by a number of observers; in these cases there can be no question of authenticity. In cases where a single person saw

<sup>1</sup> For additional reviews see pages 237 and 249.

a rare bird, Cruickshank has had to use his own judgment regarding the reliability of the observer, and he has handled this ticklish problem superbly.

Although there are minor points one might quibble with, such as the omission of a few records that probably did not come to his attention, the dynamic Mr. Cruickshank has written an excellent book which might well become a model for regional publications. The volume is attractively illustrated with 36 full-page reproductions of some of the photographs for which the author has become justly famous.—ROGER T. PETERSON.

BIRDS OF NORTH CAROLINA. By T. G. Pearson, C. S. Brimley, and H. H. Brimley.

North Carolina Department of Agriculture, State Museum, Raleigh, N. C., 1942: 6 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$  in., xxxii+416 pp., 18 plain and 17 colored pls., 141 text figs. \$3.50.

In 1919 Pearson and the Brimleys published their excellent book on North Carolina birds, the first comprehensive study of the birds of that region. Now, after 23 years, they have brought out an enlarged and completely revised book which includes 396 forms, 54 more than in the first edition.

One of the most noticeable improvements is in the illustrations. Some of the worst pictures—and they were sometimes very bad—have been replaced by new drawings by Roger Tory Peterson. In addition, Peterson and the publishers of his famous "Field Guide" have contributed the use of several of his full-page plates (four in color), figuring a large number of species. These plates are printed here with broad margins and therefore appear surprisingly larger than in the "Field Guide." The reproduction of the Peterson color plates is not as good here as in the original, but the loss is not serious. More of the poor color plates from the 1919 edition might better have been discarded since they only duplicate Peterson's much superior pictures of the same species. The majority of the text figures are still the Brasher drawings from the 1919 edition, often characterized by strange, oval eyes—and in some cases quite unidentifiable except for the accompanying legend (for example, three *Hylocichla* thrushes, the Bluebird, and the Phoebe).

We wish the authors had given us more on the habits of birds as observed in North Carolina in place of the many accounts, some not very pertinent, of the senior author's observations in distant places. Strangely, there is no general discussion of bird distribution in North Carolina, and far too many records are unnecessarily vague, with no mention of any locality more exact than the county.

Although North Carolina's ornithological history is a long one—the authors have carried it back to 1584—the true status of many species is still very little known. Clearly there is needed much more field work backed by thorough and discriminating collecting.

Some of the life-history information is sadly out of date. For example, we find quoted Chapman's 1907 statement that only one nest of the Connecticut Warbler has ever been found. It is disappointing, too, to read in a modern book about the "social outcast" Cowbird whose young are "selfish." The implication (p. 171) that any gull insists on unpolluted drinking water is too absurd to mislead any amateur, however untutored.

We suppose that the three full-page portraits of the authors were insisted upon by their enthusiastic friends.

The bibliography seems fairly complete and even includes some 1942 titles. Unfortunately volume numbers are given in the out-dated and easily mis-read roman numerals even when the original was written in arabic numerals. In view of the presence of 1942 titles in the bibliography it is surprising to note that earlier important papers like those of Wallace on the Gray-cheeked Thrushes (1939) and Griscom on the crossbills (1937) have been ignored.

In spite of the several minor faults, which this reviewer has probably over-emphasized, this book is an important contribution to ornithology and will do much to stimulate and guide further work in North Carolina and nearby states.—J. Van Tyne.

**FADING TRAILS: THE STORY OF ENDANGERED AMERICAN WILDLIFE.** By Daniel B. Beard, Frederick C. Lincoln, Victor H. Cahalane, Hartley H. T. Jackson, Ben H. Thompson. MacMillan, N. Y. 1942: 5½ x 8¾ in., xv + 279 pp., 20 pls. (4 in color), 16 line drawings. \$3.00.

In barest outline, the thesis of "Fading Trails" is this: "The arrival of a large number of well-armed and well-equipped white men on the continent of North America caused the greatest natural disturbance since the Ice Age. Man's imprint was made much more quickly than that made by the slow and tedious pace of a changing earth. Within the short space of some three hundred years, the rich wildlife resources had been reduced to a remnant of their former abundance and some species were gone forever. Many other species which became endangered in those years are today still on the verge of extinction, and are yet to be permanently saved" (p. viii) . . . "But most of the waste and greed and useless slaughter is in the past. Species have been rescued and saved" (p. 264).

The details of this sequence have been built up in a thoroughly interesting, and equally scholarly, way. An account of the early abundance of wildlife leads to brief discussions of its exploitation by market hunters (including commercial fisheries and whaling), poachers and game-hogs, and collectors, and of the effects of environmental change—"Human machinery, tearing away at the earth, disturbs conditions which nature has been countless centuries in creating. The reclamation of marshland for agriculture, the plowing up of prairie to plant corn, the dumping of sewage into clean rivers—such artificial conditions have within three centuries done more to decrease the numbers of American wildlife than the half-million years required by nature to deplete a species" (p. 11). The body of the book relates these causes to the animals which are now in gravest danger of extinction: the Bighorn, Woodland Caribou, Sea Otter and other rare fur-bearers, Manatee, Wolf, Mountain Lion, California Condor, Nene, Trumpeter Swan, Pinnated Grouse, Hudsonian Godwit, Everglade Swallow-tailed and White-tailed Kites, Florida Crane, Roseate Spoonbill, Whooper, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Puerto Rican Parrot, Great Lakes Whitefish, Atlantic Salmon, Lobster, Green Turtle, and American Crocodile. A final chapter treats of an even longer list of animals (many of which, however, are geographic races) which are "close to the shadows." The final word is one of optimism: "Wildlife long ago stood at the crossroads. Today, in spite of scattered examples, it is definitely on the trail to recovery" (p. 264). To some, this may sound a bit over-optimistic.

The foreword warns the reader not to expect "natural history stories"; despite this, the book is fairly crammed with first-rate natural history and ecology.

Walter Weber's striking illustrations add a great deal to the interest of the book, but I must confess that I am not familiar enough with most of the subjects to judge the illustrations fairly.

The conservation movement has snowballed during the last ten or fifteen years, but there has been a too-general belief that it is primarily, or even wholly, a job for Government bureaus. It is a good sign that this book, written by "Bureau" men, lays the final responsibility on the public: the public must decide that the job shall be done and, once the ground-work of fact, land purchase (where needed), and regulation, has been laid, the individual must curb his trigger-itch and give the remnant populations a chance to build up again.—Frederick N. Hamerstrom, Jr.

**CUCKOO PROBLEMS.** By E. C. Stuart Baker. H. F. and G. Witherby, London, 1942: 5½ x 8½ in., xvi + 207 pp., 12 plates, eight colored. 25 s.

This book is the result of a life-long study of the cuckoo, first from the standpoint of an oologist and secondly from that of a field ornithologist. The author has in his collection nearly 6,000 cuckoo eggs, 1,500 of which are from Europe, 3,000 from Asia and the remainder from other parts of the world. Many of these eggs were collected by himself or by men under his direction, and others were

added by securing the collections of other people. He has traveled much and has spent many years in India, where he gained first-hand knowledge of native species. The seven appendices at the end of the book, covering twenty-seven pages, give a quantity of tabulated information concerning the collection, which includes eggs of thirty-eight species and subspecies of cuckoos, distributed among nine genera. Twelve of the forms fall under the genus *Cuculus*, and six are subspecies of *Cuculus canorus*, the species common in England and continental Europe. The eight colored-plates show eggs of various cuckoos and of their respective hosts.

The problems discussed are largely old ones. He shows that in western Europe the eggs of different races or gens of *Cuculus c. canorus* variously resemble those of their usual hosts, the Reed Warbler, Meadow Pipit, and Pied Wagtail, and that in west-central and western Europe, the eggs of another race resemble those of its host, the Garden Warbler. In Hungary ninety per cent of the cuckoo's eggs are laid in the nest of the Great Reed Warbler, whose eggs they closely resemble, and so on. The author explains in a plausible way how he thinks evolution has brought about this similarity of eggs, through the hosts' desertion of the nests or rejection of the cuckoo's eggs, when these eggs showed too strong a contrast to its own in color or size. The greater the contrast, he believes, the stronger is the host's tendency to destroy the eggs. His argument for a "need" of such evolution or adaptation, however, is not at all convincing.

He describes two methods of laying—direct laying and the projection of eggs into the nest by pressing the cloaca against the opening—but thinks there must be a third, since in some instances it is difficult to see how either of these first two methods could have been used. He makes the time-worn suggestion that the egg is placed in the nest by picking it up in the beak, and for proof he repeats a number of current stories, which, however, fail to prove the point.

To distinguish a cuckoo's eggs from those of a host, he explains, is often difficult. If color, size and shape are not sufficient, weight and texture of shell are additional aids. In most cases cuckoo's eggs are heavier than other eggs of the same size. The shell is hard though brittle, and feels gritty when handled. Under a lens the shell shows pores and grooves.

Baker considers most female cuckoos as having territory though they are not very closely attached to it. When they have used all the nests of a given area, they move to another area and perhaps later come back to the first. In such cases the territory may extend several miles. He believes that the number of eggs laid by *Cuculus* in a season is between fourteen and twenty. Mating, he thinks, is promiscuous. To explain evolution of egg types under this condition he favors the old and dubious theory that inheritance of kind of egg is through the females only.

The chief value of the book lies in the broad treatment of the many species of cuckoos and their eggs. In this field the work stands, and perhaps will remain, unrivaled. The biology, including the discussion of habits, however, is weak, especially when compared with that of Edgar P. Chance in his recent book, "The Truth About the Cuckoo."—Harry W. Hann.

THE VERTEBRATE EYE AND ITS ADAPTIVE RADIATION. By Gordon Lynn Walls. Bulletin No. 19, Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills, Mich. 1942: xiv + 785 pp., 197 figs., 1 pl. \$6.50.

In the preface the author defines as the aim of this book: "to interpret comparative ocular biology as a whole to those who want to know what the eye is all about, but are repelled by the pedantic terminology of anatomy texts, the mathematics of physiological optics, the scatteredness of the ecological literature, and the German language." This sounds almost like an advertisement for a popularizing pamphlet. Yet the author has much higher ambitions. In fact, on picking up the weighty volume of 800 pages, one may very well feel inclined to

doubt the sincerity of the above quotation. With the same length of print H. G. Wells could explain the structure and function of the whole universe, and this book pretends simply to be a biology of the vertebrate eye, understandable for any "amateur naturalist" and of "particular benefit to zoologists and ecologists, medical and veterinary ophthalmologists, and comparative psychologists." The amazing thing about this book is that it fulfills all these promises. It gives a very complete review and an intelligent interpretation of the accumulated knowledge about eyes, especially that of the last century. Though no attempt is made to spare the reader by withholding procedures or results of meticulously planned and detailed investigations, the book reads like a fascinating novel, almost from the first to the last page. After all, man is eye-minded. In ever new ways do we find that the eye is the window through which we get our views of the universe and through which the outer world enters our conscious minds. There are, therefore, but few subjects in the study of nature that command an interest equal to that of the eye.

The subject is presented in many interestingly varied aspects. A first part contains the basic information concerning the morphology of the eye and the visual process. The second section treats of the adaptations of eyes to the exigencies of general as well as specialized environmental conditions. In the third part the eyes of the vertebrates are intercompared group by group from anatomical as well as physiological viewpoints. Such a triple treatment necessarily involves some repetition, though much of it is avoided by means of a rather unusual system of cross references. The comparative morphology convinces us that the human eye, though one of the most perfected types, is still outclassed by the eyes of many birds, which clearly reach the highest degree of perfection, at least in resolving power. One learns about the thirty theories that have been brought forward in the effort to explain the elaborate morphology of the pecten of the bird's eye, which is intimately correlated with the perfection of visual accommodation, and yet plays no obvious part in its mechanism. Emphasis is placed on evolutionary relationships such as appear in the sauropsidan type of retinal elements in monotremes and marsupials. The eye alone of these lower animals is convincing evidence of the reptilian origin of the whole mammalian class.

The foreign literature, especially the vast and important German portion, is extensively reviewed. Enjoyment of the book is greatly enhanced by about 200 well-chosen text figures (mostly original drawings), but especially by the strictly personal, and always highly expressive style of the author. Indelibly imprinted on the reader's mind remain the "primitive insectivoran knot-hole" through which "squeezed" whatever the higher placentals retained of primitive structural elements—and the phylogenetic tree upon which color perceptions first appeared "like Christmas decorations."

Here is a book that delights while you read it and remains a ready store of information when placed in your library.—Emil Witschi.

#### SHORT PAPERS

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WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB LIBRARY

The following gifts have been received recently:

- Jack von Bloeker, Jr.—5 reprints
- C. W. G. Eifrig—78 reprints and pamphlets
- Adrian C. Fox—35 bulletins and reprints
- Alfred O. Gross—9 bulletins and reprints
- Harry W. Hann—2 reprints
- Leon Kelso—1 pamphlet
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