

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

ALASKA BIRD TRAILS. By Herbert Brandt. Illustrated by Major Allan Brooks and others. Bird Research Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio, 1943:7½ × 9¾ in. xviii + 464 pp. \$10.00.

"Alaska Bird Trails" is the detailed story of a five-man ornithological expedition which set out from Fairbanks, Alaska, on March 20, 1924; made its way by dog-sled over the Alaska and Kuskokwim ranges by way of Nenana, Lake Minchumina, McGrath, Iditarod, Flat, Holy Cross, and Mountain Village, to the mouth of Hooper Bay—an 850-mile trip requiring 40 days; and surveyed the bird-life of that region for several weeks. The author, who had organized and led the party, left Hooper Bay on June 26, returning to Nenana by boat, while the others (H. B. Conover, O. J. Murie, Frank Dufresne and Jack Warwick) remained there to continue collecting specimens and banding waterfowl. A vast amount of work was accomplished. Splendid collections were brought back, numerous fine photographs were made, and, best of all, a careful diary was kept. Mr. Brandt's book is based largely on his diary—and a very beautiful, very readable book it is.

What the reader will note instantly in "Alaska Bird Trails," and not soon forget, is its enthusiasm. Its author is, in the best sense of the phrase, a lover of nature. The beauty of birds stirs him deeply. He is thrilled by their color, their songs, their behavior, their habitat. Since he is especially interested in their nesting habits, he feels that he does not really know them until he has found their eggs, watched them brooding, examined their newly-hatched young. His book bubbles and runs over with the high joy of discovery, and so vivid is his account that we find ourselves marching back and forth across the tundra with him, hunting Godwit nests in the rain, flushing Steller's Eiders from their down-cradled eggs, and watching Savannah Sparrows run off like mice through the short grass. It is good to read a book of this sort now and then—for there is something youthful and invigorating about it. Specimens are mentioned now and then, of course, but these are far from any stale-aired museum, and what we feel as we move from page to page is fresh wind from the sea, soft moss underfoot, and firm, smooth-shelled eggs in our hands.

Since many of the common birds of the region are little known, Mr. Brandt's graphic accounts of them are a welcome contribution. Of special interest is what he reports concerning the Steller's and Spectacled Eiders, the Pacific Godwit, Black Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, and Alaska Yellow Wagtail. His comparison of the behavior of various shorebirds at their nests is particularly good (pp. 298-300), and his descriptions of the downy young of such species as the Black Turnstone, Emperor Goose, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Western Sandpiper merit special mention. Two detailed color-plates, by Edwin R. Kalmbach, illustrate the natal plumages of these and four other little-known water birds.

An appendix of more than a hundred pages is devoted to an annotated list of the species recorded by the expedition. Here data pertaining to specimens collected are so presented as to make it possible for a taxonomist or student of molts and plumage-sequences to ascertain exactly what material was preserved; problems of distribution are discussed; and many facts concerning nests mentioned in the narrative part of the book are enlarged upon. Eggs are described in great detail.

Throughout the narrative the common bird-names are somewhat confusing. Thus, when we come upon the name 'Alaska Jay' we wonder momentarily whether the bird belongs to the genus *Perisoreus* or *Cyanocitta*. Had the bird been called the 'Alaska Whiskey Jack,' or, better still, simply the 'Whiskey Jack' or 'Canada Jay,' we would have known instantly what species was referred to. Similarly, the name 'Alaska Ptarmigan' is misleading. 'Willow Ptarmigan' would have been better. The name 'Eastern Snow Bunting' is inadequate, if not downright inaccurate in that (a) it implies a western or Alaskan race of *Plectrophenax*

*nivalis* (McKay's Snow Bunting is given full specific rank by many authors); and (b) it wholly fails to take into account the Old World distribution of the species. Such names as 'Siberian Rough-legged Hawk' and 'Pacific Black-bellied Plover' are ponderous and of doubtful value, first because the author devotes very little space to discussion of geographical races or of any species' over-all distribution, as such, and second because some of these geographical races are of very dubious validity. Anyone who is eagerly reading for facts about the behavior of Alaska birds, or following the fortunes of an expedition, does not want to find his thinking muddled by nomenclatural surprises. The place for long, complex trinomial is the appendix.

The A.O.U. Check-List is, at least to some extent, to blame for these unsatisfactory common names. In future editions of this widely-used work it is to be fervently hoped that the Committee will be content with common names for full species only, or find common names for the subspecies which will take into account *all facts* concerning the species as a whole. 'Eastern Snow Bunting' and 'Eastern Goshawk' are excellent examples of common names which deny the species any Old World distribution whatsoever. American ornithologists will win for themselves, and deserve, a reputation for provincialism if this unfortunate custom continues.

Most interesting is Mr. Brandt's discussion of the specific distinctness of the Cackling Goose and Lesser Canada Goose. Personally I agree with him wholeheartedly; but my experience with Richardson's Goose (*Branta canadensis hutchinsi*) on Southampton Island, where this exceedingly small race nested almost side by side with the rarer *Branta canadensis leucopareia*, leads me to feel that failure of the two forms to mate together does not necessarily constitute "good evidence that they are specifically distinct" (p. 276). I should call the Richardson's Goose and the Lesser Canada Goose only subspecifically distinct. Yet on Southampton Island they certainly summer together.

The color-plates in "Alaska Bird Trails" are a delight to the eye. Those by Major Brooks are splendid examples of his work, and they have been exceptionally well reproduced. The full-page photographs are artistic and interesting, that of the Snowy Owl at its nest (opp. p. 128) being especially exciting.

All in all, "Alaska Bird Trails" is a most timely work. Although it does not cover the whole territory of Alaska it will serve as a guide to the ornithology of this region until a more complete work appears, and its glowing account will lead many an ornithologist of future years to travel northward to tackle the unsolved problems of that glorious wilderness north of the Yukon.—GEORGE MIXSCH SURTON.

THE ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK. By Howard L. Mendall and Clarence M. Aldous. Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, Orono, Maine, 1943: 9 x 6 in., x + 201 pp., 11 figs., 14 pls., 19 tables.

Since the publication of my treatise on the life history of the American Woodcock (Pettingill, *Mem. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.*, 9, 1936:167-391), which was based chiefly on investigations in New York, two important papers have appeared dealing with activities centering about the Woodcock's singing fields in Illinois (Pitelka, *Wils. Bull.*, 55, 1943:88-114) and in Pennsylvania (Norris et al., *Jour. Wildl. Manag.*, 4, 1940:8-14). This new treatise is based on further investigation of the Woodcock's life history (although concerned primarily with matters that have a direct bearing on management). The bulk of the text consists, in fact, of life-history data and discussions of such topics as distribution and migration, food and feeding-habits, and cover-preferences. Only 60 pages deal with management as such.

Fortunately Mendall and Aldous were able to carry on their study in eastern Maine, which undoubtedly has the largest breeding population of Woodcocks in the United States. The results obtained, therefore, warrant some comparison with

the Pitelka and the Norris investigations, which were conducted among relatively small populations.

Mendall and Aldous agree with my concept of the breeding territory as consisting of two parts—the male domain and the female nesting territory. The former is divided into a diurnal territory (the male's chief abode) and a singing field (locality of his courtship performances), and "tendencies were shown for the singing grounds to be fairly close to both the diurnal territories and the nesting territories" (p. 74). Active defense of the singing fields was commonly observed. No evidence was found that the female nesting territory is, or is not, a defended area, but numerous instances were recorded of several males remaining on the diurnal territory in apparent harmony. It thus appears that where there is a large Woodcock population, territories are crowded, so that competition is noticeable on the singing fields though competition for nesting and diurnal territories does not seem to exist. In the light of these observations it is perhaps doubtful whether nesting and diurnal "territories" are indeed *territories* as defined by Nice and others (i.e. defended areas). Mendall and Aldous find, as did Pitelka, that the *cackling* note is given only by the male in the presence of another male, or males, as a form of intimidation; it was not found to be associated with the mating act. They doubt whether the females ever utter the *peent* calls. Fewer males are reported during the morning display periods than during the evening. In New York I found both periods equally well used, and I am under the impression that the activities of the morning periods were more vigorous. It is the opinion of Mendall and Aldous that the Woodcock is monogamous. However, monogamy might be characteristic of the population of one area, though not of the species as a whole; the type of territoriality shown by the male is conducive to polygamy in a degree equal to the type of territoriality (i.e. *crowing grounds*) in certain gallinaceous birds and I feel that polygamy will be found to be characteristic of at least some populations. Mendall and Aldous present new circumstantial evidence to support my statement (1936) that incubation "is carried on usually, if not entirely, by the female."

Careful studies of nesting conditions showed slight egg loss and low juvenile mortality. For a ground-incubating species, the figures are remarkable: successful hatches were recorded in 67.2 per cent of the 125 nests under observation; the rate of juvenile mortality did not exceed 10 per cent.

As in all investigations of well-known game birds, much ill-founded lore pertaining to the Woodcock has again been put to the test and "exposed": females were not observed to carry their young even though family groups were watched more than 400 times; there was no evidence whatever that the Woodcock raises more than one brood per year; and no facts were found to support the frequently repeated statement that the Woodcock is able to prevent the issuance of scent while incubating.

In the part of the paper preceding the life history section noteworthy information is given on distribution and migration. It is gratifying to learn that there is an unusually large breeding population on Prince Edward Island, where the Woodcock has always been considered uncommon. The bulk of the winter Woodcock population is now known to be restricted to the Lower Mississippi Valley (the northern three-fourths of Louisiana and a few localities of western Mississippi and extreme southeastern Arkansas). Only recently the bird was thought to be rather evenly distributed throughout the southeastern United States during the winter. Fairly direct flight lines seem to be established between the lower Mississippi wintering grounds and all northern points of the Woodcock's breeding range except in the Northern Atlantic States, where there is a distinct coastal route as far south as Cape May, New Jersey, and Cape Charles, Virginia, and then (supposedly) a cross-over from these coastal points to the Lower Mississippi.

In the last section of the paper, which is devoted to management, the authors discuss quite thoroughly the various techniques employed in carrying out their investigations. Of the census methods used, they recommend a yearly count of occupied singing fields as yielding the best index of breeding populations. The regularity of display in the evening and morning allows an accurate estimate of all males and (unless the Woodcock is polygamous) of all females in a given area. The best method to use in banding Woodcock is to capture juveniles after the broods of fledglings have been found by a trained dog. By this method Mendall and Aldous banded 485 juveniles in six years. They advise against the use of dogs for finding nests because, in their experience, a nesting Woodcock has greater fear of a dog than of man and is likely to desert the nest after being flushed by a dog.

Mendall and Aldous conclude that there are "but two limiting factors which are of very great importance to the Woodcock and which at the same time are readily controllable by man," namely, hunting and cover deficiencies. They suggest several possible counteractants. Among these is the creation, by artificial means, of singing fields. This has been experimented with successfully in Maine, but one wonders whether the great expense involved in the creation and yearly maintenance of singing fields would be justified by the results, since each singing field would be occupied by but one male.

This publication is an extensive contribution to our knowledge of an important game bird and will serve to guide those persons whose responsibility it is to effect a much-needed management program. It is well-organized, attractively published, and laudably free of typographical errors. There are numerous photographic illustrations (though many of these are not accredited). A bibliography concludes the work. There is, unfortunately, no index.—Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.

CUBAN ORNITHOLOGY. By Thomas Barbour. *Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*, No. 9, August, 1943, 144 pp., 2 pls. Publ. by the Club, Cambridge, Massachusetts. \$4.00.

This useful volume is a revision of Dr. Barbour's "Birds of Cuba," published in June, 1923, as Number 6 in this same series of *Memoirs*. The present work is completely reset, in a larger font of type, and includes much new material, so that in the opinion of this reviewer the author has acted wisely in giving the book a new title as an aid to students who need to cite passages in it. The original introduction has been omitted for a new one that outlines the influence of the well-known scientists, Brother Léon and Dr. Carlos de la Torre, in training students who have been active in furthering studies in the natural history of Cuba, and includes a summary of modern trends in conservation that have led to Cuba's participation in a convention for nature protection throughout the Americas and the establishment of reserves for the preservation of the fauna and flora of the Republic.

The annotated list that forms the body of the book covers 297 forms, an increase of 24 over the 273 listed in the earlier volume. The new material includes data obtained from banding records of migrants from the North, additional information on occurrences and habits, and discussion of the validity of some of the forms.

One of the principal additions is in the form of notes made in the gardens and grounds at the Atkins Institution of the Arnold Arboretum near Soledad, Santa Clara Province, which the author visited annually, and where he was instrumental in promoting protection for the birds.

It is interesting to note the recent change in status of the Herring Gull from rare to abundant, due apparently to actual increase of these birds in the North; equally of interest are the author's notes on the Florida Burrowing Owl at Grand Bahama with a reference to Bond's published record of the first specimen

reported from Cuba. Reading through the pages brings again to mind how little we know of the breeding of many West Indian birds; e.g., the eggs of the Little Pine Crow (the *Cao Pinolero* of the Cuban countryman) are said to be still unknown though it should not be difficult to discover the nest. (Bond's description in "Birds of the West Indies," 1936, p. 269, apparently refers to the eggs of *Corvus palmarum palmarum* of Hispaniola.)

To the student of the ornithology of Cuba this revised work will be invaluable, and it may be added that bird lovers in general will find this an interesting book because of the many fascinating passages in the graphic style that seems to flow so easily from Dr. Barbour's mind and pen.—Alexander Wetmore.

A PRELIMINARY LIFE HISTORY STUDY OF THE FLORIDA JAY, *Cyanocitta c. coerulescens*. By Dean Amadon. (Results of the Archbold Expedition No. 50). *Amer. Mus. Novit.* No. 1252. Jan. 24, 1944. 22 pp.

If proof were needed to demonstrate that opportunities for adding to our knowledge of birds exist all about us and only await our serious attention, this paper would serve to carry the point. Amadon spent about a month at Lake Placid, Florida, picked a bird quite new to his own field experience, and in that short space of time succeeded in adding more to what is known of its habits than one would have thought possible.

Although a denizen of bushy thickets, the Florida Jay was found to be bold and easily studied. It buries food by thrusting it beneath the sand and then placing dead leaves or other objects over the place. Later, when searching for buried food, the bird swings its head from side to side, throwing the sand to either side with the bill. Courtship feeding is a character of the species, and is continued throughout incubation and even after the young hatch out. Both sexes participate in nest-building, but only the female incubates. Incubation begins with the laying of the first egg. Both sexes help feed the young, but only the female broods. The number of feedings given the young birds increased from 2-3 times an hour during the first week to 5-12 by the second week.

That the author is candid about the indefiniteness of some of his observations is refreshing and gives all the more reliability to those about which he is more explicit. Thus, in writing of a "whisper song" given by both sexes, he states that it "seems to express either physical well being or mild perplexity." His field techniques are well planned and well carried out; the paper should be useful to others for these alone.—HERBERT FRIEDMANN.

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## NEW LIFE MEMBER



OSCAR M. ROOT graduated from Harvard University and has done graduate work at the University of Michigan and Woods Hole. He is a very active bird bander and is a member of the Council of the Northeastern Bird-banding Association. Since 1933 he has taught biology and mathematics at Brooks School, Andover, Massachusetts. His particular interests have been natural history, conservation, and ornithology, with special emphasis on ecology, distribution, and populations of birds.

## AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

THE TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY was founded at Nashville, in October, 1915, with a nucleus of five members, two of whom are still active in its work. A definite program of ornithological investigation was laid out at the beginning and was closely adhered to in the years that followed. Membership was made selective with a view to developing and promoting bird study as a worthwhile avocation for adults, particularly those of scientific inclination. Full page illustrated write-ups, covering various phases of bird study, were furnished to newspapers in the state's four large cities, and these brought in new members. "A Preliminary List of the Birds of Tennessee," a 32-page pamphlet, was published in 1917 under the direction of the elected curator. In 1931, with the cooperation of the membership, a 64-page "Distributional List of the Birds of Tennessee" was published.

In 1930, it became evident that, if the state-wide membership was to be increased and the work further developed, a periodical would be necessary to coordinate activities. Accordingly, *The Migrant* was founded and has appeared quarterly since that time—it is now in its fifteenth year, and about 1,250 pages comprise a complete file. *The Migrant* is edited by Albert F. Ganier, of Nashville. Under his capable management *The Migrant* has become the repository of much valuable information about birds in Tennessee and holds high rank among state ornithological journals.—ALFRED CLEBSCH, *Secretary-Treasurer*.

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Herbert Friedmann—2 reprints	O. S. Pettingill, Jr.—1 reprint
Byron E. Harrell—1 book	William H. Phelps—1 reprint
J. J. Hickey—1 reprint, 18 journals	Hustace H. Poor—2 reprints
Frank J. Hinds—1 book	Dayton Stoner—2 reprints, 1 bulletin
Lynds Jones—258 journals	Gustav Swanson—4 books
Leon Kelso—1 book, 27 pamphlets	M. G. Vaiden—2 reprints