

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

A NATURALIST IN CUBA. By Thomas Barbour. Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1945: $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8$ in., x + 317 pp., 16 pls. \$3.00.

Probably no American is better qualified than Thomas Barbour to write about Cuba. His more than thirty trips to Cuba in the past thirty-six years have taken him to even the most remote parts of that beautiful island. His devouring curiosity and his encyclopedic knowledge of all fields of biology have enabled him to profit fully from his great opportunity. The result is a book worthy of a place on our shelves with the classic "naturalist" volumes of Bates and Belt.

The two chapters devoted to birds will not only provide a delightful introduction to Cuban birds for many beginners, but they will also furnish more advanced students with much valuable data on the habits and the status, past and present, of Cuban birds. Unfortunately, scientific names are largely omitted from the bird chapters (although they are invariably used in full in the chapter on bats, which follows), and even the vernacular names are in some cases hardly adequate for identifying the species being discussed without recourse to the author's "Cuban Ornithology" (1943)—from which, indeed, a number of the bird accounts are copied in full. Following the modern trend, the publishers have removed the capital letters from the proper names of birds in most cases (forgetting to do so in the case of the Caracara and the Jacana) and have thus provided further difficulties for the reader. In certain examples, these two practices result in passages which will surely be confusing to some readers. On page 132 we find ourselves reading about "little yellow rails." I am afraid that few readers will instantly realize that Barbour is talking about *Porzana flaviventer*, the little neotropical rail related to our Sora, and not *Coturnicops noveboracensis*, the Yellow Rail of all North American bird books. A possible third complication in the field of vernacular nomenclature results from Barbour's sometimes following that curious custom which we ornithologists have of using two or more vernacular names for a single species. We head our account "Bob-white" and then write entirely about "quail"; or we list the "Osprey" and then discuss the "Fish Hawk."

The additional chapters of especial interest to the naturalist deal with reptiles and amphibians, mammals, cave hunting (which here means hunting *in* caves), and the Soledad garden. Six other chapters (one of them called an appendix), describing and interpreting the island and its people, complete an absorbingly interesting book on Cuba as seen by a great naturalist.—J. Van Tyne.

BIRDS OF KENTUCKY. By Jesse Dade Figgins. University of Kentucky Press. Lexington, Kentucky, 1945: $6\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{5}{8}$ in., 366 pp., 9 pls., 2 figs., 1 map. \$2.50.

This dull, poorly illustrated, thoroughly disheartening book was published under a grant from the Haggin memorial trust fund. Since it obviously was not designed to rouse popular interest (the only bird picture in it is a Goshawk drawing by Fuertes, used without giving credit, and forced into service as a diagram to show a bird's topography), we naturally expect it to be an authoritative reference work to which we can turn for concise information concerning bird-life *in Kentucky*. What we find instead is a mass of carelessly chosen general information about species which may or may not have been recorded from Kentucky; sketchy, often inaccurate, descriptions of these birds; and discursive, futile comments as to the subspecies known or thought to occur within the boundaries of the State. Stumbling page by page through the book in our vain search for migration dates; for maps showing the distribution of such species as the Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, and Carolina Chickadee, which are known to be represented by more than one race; for occasional reference to specimens in the principal bird collections made within the State, or for evidence that

these collections have been studied; and for reference to such important extralimital work as that carried on by A. F. Ganier at Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee, we marvel that in such an 'enlightened age' as ours it is possible for so poor a book as this to appear. Furthermore, bearing in mind that younger bird students are even now being confused and misled by it, we earnestly wish there were some way of recalling the whole edition before more harm is done.

The University of Kentucky Press is wholly to blame for this gross misuse of funds. This publishing house could have secured the editorial assistance of some able Kentucky ornithologist or of some out-of-State authority and brought out a book which would have given bird students a sound basis for further work. To be sure, a good editor would have thrown out completely such sections as that on 'Color Terminology' (pp. 35-39); rewritten and considerably enlarged the introduction; presented a complete, accurate bibliography rather than a hit-and-miss list of titles; and, most important of all, worked out a valid philosophy and central purpose for the book. He would have spent long hours in re-evaluating the work of early authors, and possibly would have discarded as worthless the statements of Gilbert Imlay. He would have hunted down meagre but dependable data on old stuffed birds in hardware stores and in the museums of small colleges. He would have identified with great care specimens collected recently in this extremely interesting part of the United States. His list very likely would have been smaller than the present one. He would have indicated clearly that certain species were included on doubtful grounds. But the soundness and vitality of such a book would now be stimulating a desire to tackle and solve the problems of Kentucky bird distribution rather than killing enthusiasm for such work, as this volume does, through its cynical and lazy assumption that because a given bird has been recorded in an adjoining State, or somewhere along the Mississippi or Ohio River, it is practically a Kentucky bird anyway and therefore hardly worth going after; and through its repeated and ill-considered reference to the American Ornithologists' Union Committee on Nomenclature as a mysterious hierarchy bent on settling all subspecies problems independently of any taxonomic work the rest of us may do.

Now for the list itself. The author states (p. 39) that 354 bird species and subspecies "occur, or formerly occurred" in Kentucky; yet 361 forms, including four which have been introduced, are listed and discussed. Of these at least two should not have been even mentioned—the Mottled Duck (p. 84) and the American Raven, *Corvus corax sinuatus* (p. 219). The author's inclusion of these invalidates to some extent every statement in the book, causing us seriously to question his sight records for the Brewer's Blackbird (p. 300) and Boat-tailed Grackle (p. 301), and even to suspect that his specimen of Bicknell's Thrush (p. 245) may not actually have the measurements of this small race. Thus distrustful do we become of anyone who can hypnotize himself into believing it possible to distinguish *Corvus corax sinuatus* from *Corvus c. principalis*, or a female Mottled Duck from a female Mallard, in the field in Kentucky without obtaining so much as a feather in corroboration. In strict fairness to the author it should be said that we have not seen his original manuscript and therefore are not certain that it was his intention to give the American Raven and Mottled Duck full ranking in his list. Perhaps the editor was wholly to blame for such serious errors as these.

It is not possible, even with careful reading of the book, to determine whether certain species have actually been taken in Kentucky, or found breeding, or observed in migration. Most of the subspecific names, fortunately, are based on Dr. Wetmore's careful studies of Kentucky specimens; but it is all too plain that no effort was made by author or editor to find additional examples of this or that geographical race in the collections of A. F. Ganier, Burt Monroe, Robert Mengel, the Western Kentucky Teachers' College, or the State Teachers' College at Morehead.

In short, an adequate, up-to-date 'Birds of Kentucky' remains to be written. It is to be hoped that ornithologists will not feel obliged to refer to the present work too frequently lest, in so doing, they lead the younger generation into consulting, and possibly into imitating, an unworthy work.—George Miksch Sutton.

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AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

THE GEORGIA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY completed a major project on March 15 with the publication of "Birds of Georgia. A Preliminary Check-list and Bibliography" (University of Georgia Press), the first complete check-list and bibliography that has been compiled for the state. The Society plans to follow this technical publication with a popular bulletin on common birds of the state to supply the demands of schools, Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, garden clubs, and others. Thus the Society is devoting its energies to compiling and publishing material designed to stimulate active interest in ornithology.

Despite the fact that all the younger and most active members of the Society have been in the armed services, the Society has maintained its membership and improved its financial position during the past year. Publication of the *Oriole* has continued. A spring meeting, consisting of a business session, a field trip, and the showing of colored movies by Thomas D. Burleigh, was attended by about 45 members.—EUGENE P. ODUM, *President*