

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD, Vol. 6. By James Lee Peters. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1948: 6 X 9 in., xi + 259 pp. \$6.50.

The sixth volume of Peters' monumental check-list of world birds completes his account of the non-passerine birds. The woodpeckers are the only North American family treated in this volume; the other families listed are: jacamars, puff-birds, barbets, honey-guides, and toucans. (The wry-necks are included in the woodpecker family.)

Three of ten woodpecker genera of the A.O.U. Check-List are changed: "*Centurus*" and "*Balanosphyra*" are included in the genus *Melanerpes*; "*Hylatomus*" is placed in the genus *Dryocopus*, along with four other New World species and two Old World species. Many readers will be very curious to know the facts behind these changes, and I hope Peters will publish a brief analysis of these cases in an ornithological journal, as he has previously done in the case of certain hawks, doves, owls, and toucans.

The "publisher's note" on the jacket contains the good news that in this volume the author has followed the definite policy of listing all synonyms published since 1900 (the date of volume 2 of Sharpe's Hand-list—the last previous complete revision of most of these families).

Two preoccupied names have been replaced: *Picus canus* "*ricketti*," of south-eastern China, and *Melanerpes* (*Centurus*) *rubricapillus* "*rubriventris*," of Yucatán.

Peters' total of 395 species in the order Piciformes shows remarkably close agreement with the 389 species estimated for the order by Ernst Mayr in 1946 (*Auk*, 63:66).

Below is a tabulation of the genera, species, and subspecies treated in this volume:

	Genera	Species	Subspecies
Galbulidae, Jacamars	5	16	38
Bucconidae, Puff-birds	10	33	76
Capitonidae, Barbets	13	78	255
Indicatoridae, Honey-guides	4	13	36
Ramphastidae, Toucans	5	41	87
Picidae, Woodpeckers and Wry-necks	38	214	855
Totals	75	395	1347

There is a surprisingly marked change in the type used in this volume compared with that used in the earlier ones. Unfortunately, the paper used is even poorer than that used in volume 5, which was far poorer than that used in volume 4.

It is hard to understand why a University press cannot sell for less than \$6.50 an unillustrated, partly subsidized, 260-page volume for which there is an assured sale of a thousand copies.

I have nothing but praise for the author's work on this volume. His excellent judgment and uncanny accuracy in handling the extraordinary amount of detail involved have resulted in a volume which will be of the greatest help to ornithologists everywhere.—Josselyn Van Tyne.

CATALOGUE OF BIRDS OF THE AMERICAS. By Charles E. Hellmayr and Boardman Conover. Field Museum of Natural History, Zoological Series, 13, Part 1, No. 2, August 18, 1948: viii + 434 pp. \$4.10 postpaid.

This long awaited part of the indispensable Catalogue of Birds of the Americas covers the following orders: Sphenisciformes, Gaviiformes, Colymbiformes, Procellariiformes, Pelecaniformes, Ciconiiformes, and Anseriformes. There still remain to be published volumes containing the Falconiformes and the Charadriiformes. According to the preface, which is by the junior author, literature (as given in the Zoological Record) has been taken into account up to 31 December 1944. Some new forms described since that date and before 31 December 1946 have been included, and a few important recent papers are mentioned in the footnotes.

The general arrangement of this part is uniform with previously published parts and requires no comment, but perhaps some departures from current treatment of various groups, especially where the treatment differs from that accorded in the A.O.U. Check-List, may be mentioned.

*Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (Gmelin) replaces *Ph. olivaceus* (Humboldt), *Ardea occidentalis* Audubon is regarded as the white phase of *Ardea herodias wardi* Ridgway, and being of earlier date, replaces it. *Botaurus lentiginosus peeti* Brodtkorb is recognized. The Lesser and Greater Snow Geese are maintained as specifically distinct. The White-cheeked Geese are divided into four species: *Branta leucopareia leucopareia* and *B. l. occidentalis*; *B. minima*; *B. canadensis parvipes*, *B. c. moffitti*, *B. c. interior*, and *B. c. canadensis*; *B. hutchinsii*. *Mergus serrator major* Schiøler is recognized as a valid race breeding in Greenland north to Upernavik and Scoresby Sound and wintering in southern Greenland.

The splitting up of the genus *Anas* comes as a shock—*Querquedula*, *Chaulelasmus*, *Mareca*, *Eunetta*, *Nettion*, *Punanetta*, and *Dafila* are restored, although two of the most aberrant species, *A. specularoides* and *A. specularis*, are retained in *Anas*.

The radical rearrangement of the Anatidae proposed by Delacour and Mayr is referred to in a footnote on p. 283, but none of their proposals is adopted.

Some readers find statistics interesting, and for this reason it may be noted that the volume deals with 118 genera and 401 forms divided among 20 families.—J. L. Peters.

ISLAND LIFE: A STUDY OF THE LAND VERTEBRATES OF THE ISLANDS OF EASTERN LAKE MICHIGAN. By Robert T. Hatt, Josselyn Van Tyne, Laurence C. Stuart, Clifford H. Pope, and Arnold B. Grobman. Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin No. 27. Copyright 1948: 179 pp., frontispiece, 43 figs., 1 map. \$4.00.

In the northeastern part of Lake Michigan, off the western shore of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, lies a group of islands whose members vary in size from a few acres to nearly sixty square miles and in character from mere sand or gravel bars rising a few feet above lake level to wooded islands whose greatest elevations rise over 450 feet. Some are but a few yards from shore, others are situated fifteen or more miles from the nearest point on the mainland. While some scattered field work had been done previously on these islands, it was not until 1937 that the Cranbrook Institute of Science inaugurated a serious attempt at a faunal survey of the group as a whole. In cooperation with members of the staff of the Museum of Zoology of the University of Michigan, parties visited all of the larger and many of the smaller islands in the group, beginning early in the summer of 1937 and continuing during the summer months in 1938, 1939, and 1940. While observations were made in fields other than vertebrate zoology, this report covers amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

The book contains several chapters dealing with the geological and cultural history of the islands and their physical features, as well as accounts of the verte-

brate groups mentioned above. There is also a brief account of the modification of habits noted among certain species and a discussion of the factors of distribution. The results of the survey show what one would expect to be the situation in an island group such as this, namely, the absence of many mainland species for no apparent reason.

The book is most attractively gotten up, sturdily bound, and printed on an excellent grade of paper.—J. L. Peters.

LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN NUTHATCHES, WRENS, THRASHERS, AND THEIR ALLIES. By Arthur Cleveland Bent. United States National Museum Bulletin 195. 1948: xii + 475 pp., 90 half-tone plates. \$1.75.

This is the sixteenth volume in "Bent's Life Histories." It deals with the nuthatches, creeper, wren-tit, dipper, wrens, mockingbird, catbird, and thrashers, a total of 28 species. The basic scheme of organization of Bent's life-history accounts is now well known to most students of birds. Those not familiar with them and without access to any of the recent volumes can refer to earlier, more extensive reviews (for example, Linsdale, 1942. *Wils. Bull.*, 54:219-220; Rand, 1947. *Wils. Bull.*, 59:179-181).

The species accounts, in this as in past volumes, consist of a series of topical headings under which a variety of information is assembled. Especially under such headings as "nesting" and "behavior," this information is a mixture of observational data and interpretive comment that runs the gamut from meaty, conscientiously phrased statements of carefully gathered facts to loose reporting loaded with appalling anthropomorphisms. Thus, in the account of the White-breasted Nuthatch, we have excerpts from the fine paper by Butts thrown into proximity with an absurd note, taking up more space than the first, on an incident between nuthatches and woodpeckers reported in 1918 in *Bird-Lore*. The latter might better have been omitted. We do not need to appeal to the ante-bellum period of the study of bird behavior in America to make the subject "lively."

The present volume deals with some of the most intensively studied American birds. The account of the House Wren draws heavily on the papers of Kendeigh and Baldwin for its most informative paragraphs, and accounts of the Mockingbird and Wren-tit, for example, rely in varying degrees on the expert studies by the Micheners and Erickson, respectively. The account of the Wren-tit, by the way, prepared by Miss Erickson herself, is a well-written, simplified version of her previously published work.

It follows from these comments that "Bent's Life Histories" are not the definitive studies they are sometimes thought to be. They are compilations, some of them authoritative summaries, most of them sketchy and fragmentary in their treatment of a species. The serious student must consult the literature to which Bent's accounts will often refer him. The published papers on the House Wren, for example, probably already exceed this volume in bulk. "Bent's Life Histories" would seem to serve two main purposes: first, to provide a general, more or less narrative description, following a topical outline, of the "haunts and habits" of North American birds useful to the reader who wants more information than our standard bird books offer; second, to provide students with clues to source materials and with items of information not otherwise available. In these respects, Bent's volumes are a real contribution to ornithology.

Contributors to this volume, other than Erickson, are W. M. Tyler (accounts of the White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper), A. O. Gross (House Wren and Catbird), R. S. Woods (Cactus Wren and California Thrasher), and A. Sprunt, Jr. (Mockingbird). There is an excellent and especially large series of photographs included in this volume. (The lower figure of plate 30 is inverted.) A bibliography of 23 pages and index of 15 pages are provided.—Frank A. Pitelka.

BIRDS OF ARCTIC ALASKA. By Alfred M. Bailey. Colorado Museum of Natural History, Popular Series, No. 8, April 1, 1948: 6¾ × 10 in., 317 pp., 101 photos, 1 map. Cloth, \$4.50; paper, \$3.00; postage \$0.10.

This book is a compilation of previously published and new information resulting from the expedition of the Colorado Museum of Natural History to northwestern Alaska in 1921-22. The chapter on the vegetation of the Arctic Slope of Alaska, by Joseph Ewan, is excellent; it includes an historical account of previous collecting and a discussion of plant distribution and ecological relationships. Ewan mentions the "epochal and comprehensive Flora of Alaska being published by Dr. Eric Hulten of Stockholm," a much deserved recognition of that industrious scholar.

Bailey's narrative account of his expedition (104 pages) familiarizes the reader with the environment and gives a vivid picture of migration and bird activity.

In the annotated list Bailey does not attempt to give extensive life history data, but includes whatever life history and migration observations are warranted by the rarity of given birds. As an example, the first hand information on the nesting of the Yellow-billed Loon is very welcome. As might be expected, an interesting mingling of Siberian and Alaskan species was found.

Some difficult taxonomic problems are dealt with. When Bailey undertakes to clarify the status of the forms of Canada geese occurring in western and northern Alaska he inevitably runs into the perplexities that have puzzled other workers with these birds. His study of downy young of geese reveals significant differences, as well as similarities, among several forms; his data are a contribution to the subject, but his conclusions, although tentative, will probably arouse some disagreement.

In northwestern Alaska such birds as the Siberian and American Pintails, Rough-legged Hawks, Gyrfalcons, and Peregrine Falcons, find a meeting place. This may also be said of a few birds of the eastern Arctic and of western Alaska, such as the two Golden Plovers and the Solitary Sandpiper. The problem of the races of *Erolia ptilocnemis* appears to have been satisfactorily solved by Conover, whom Bailey refers to, though in my opinion there are some cases that still do not fit in.

Bailey agrees with the recent decision of the A.O.U. Committee on Nomenclature in recognizing *barrovianus* as a subspecies of the Glaucous Gull. There can now be no question about the validity of this race, which has been the cause of so much heated argument in the past. But we need breeding specimens from many localities in the Arctic to understand properly the nesting distribution. The whole question of the relationships of the Arctic gulls still deserves critical attention.

The reader must be impressed with the fact that the Colorado Museum of Natural History chose an area of unusual interest when they sent their expedition to northwest Alaska, where so many taxonomic-distributional problems await solution.

The illustrations on the whole are excellent and useful. Although photographs of dead birds are generally not appealing, the view of the three Yellow-billed Loons is of interest to anyone interested in external bird anatomy. Bailey has more than usual success with photographs of mounted groups; yet such photographs are always less satisfactory than those of living animals. However, it is hard to criticize the photograph of the polar bear group facing page 89, which is an outstanding artistic creation.

This book brings together a valuable lot of information on the ornithology of northwestern Alaska, with a number of new records of occurrence, nesting, and migration, with analyses of several important taxonomic problems, including many measurements and color comparisons. It will continue to be a useful reference work on the Alaskan avifauna—Olaus J. Murie.

THE FEEDING AND RELATED BEHAVIOR OF HUMMINGBIRDS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BLACK-CHIN, *Archilochus alexandri* (Bourcier and Mulsant). By Frank Bené. *Memoirs of the Boston Society of Natural History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, October 1946: pp. 395-478, pls. 22-33, 4 figs. Cloth, \$2.50; paper, \$1.50.

The rather ambitious title of this paper is misleading. The publication contains detailed original work on one species of hummingbird, *Archilochus alexandri*, with some references to published data on feeding habits of other species. The observations on which the paper is based were made in Phoenix, Arizona, during the spring and summer months, 1939 to 1942.

Trapping and marking hummingbirds is admittedly difficult, and Bené felt that this difficulty was "overcome to a large extent by adopting a system of identification in which notations were made of individual differences in physiognomy and habits." However, I believe that Bené's methods of identifying individual birds cast a shadow of doubt on some of his results based on field observations. The type of reasoning that Bené used in identification of individuals is illustrated by the following passage (pp. 419-420): "There could be no question that this bird was one of the five or six that had been visiting the feeders the previous year. But which one of them? I resorted to the rule of elimination. She made no attempt to build her nest in the yard and ignored the nasturtium of which F1 [F indicates female] was very fond. So, tentatively, she was not F1. She spent very little time in the yard, unlike F3. . . . She was a fully grown adult. Apart from F1 only one female adult had been patronizing the feeders last year. Therefore, she was probably F2. She was in the habit of entering the yard from the north and leaving in the same direction, a routine which corresponded with F2's last year. Her nest was probably in an oleander across the alley where a neighbor, while trimming it, had found an old nest prior to this bird's arrival. The location of the nest corresponded with the direction of her departure from the yard. Therefore, in light of these clues I labeled her F2?"

Bené discusses "the quest for the optimum in breeding and feeding," "selection and defense of breeding and feeding territories," "feeding routine," "food consumption and regulation of diet," "feeding adaptation and technique," "flower preference," "sensory perception and recognition of sources of food," and "learning to feed." There is no question that many valuable contributions are to be found in this imposing list of topics. However, Bené's anthropomorphic treatment of the topics makes it very difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. Bené also goes into considerable detail, the value of which I question, on the behavior of sick and injured hummingbirds.

Bené did not claim to be an experienced ornithologist. The present study was carried on during a period of illness preceding his death in 1943, before publication of this paper. He deserves credit for working under what must have been a tremendous physical handicap.

Although scientific names, some incorrectly spelled, are given for most of the plants, no attempt has been made by either the author or the editor to include scientific names of all the hummingbird species mentioned. The paper is well printed but there are several typographical errors. Many of the citations in the bibliography are incomplete. Since the paper was published after Bené's death, it seems to me that much of the responsibility for these obvious faults belongs to the editor.

The twelve plates in the paper reproduce some interesting photographs of hummingbird habitats, feeding and flight postures, and food plants.—Harrison B. Tordoff.

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See also *Distribution and Taxonomy*: Lowe.

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See also *Anatomy*: McDowell. *Ecology*: Marshall.

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See also *Anatomy*: Boyd and Alley.

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See also *Life History and Behavior*: Davies and Keynes. *Techniques*: Michener and Farner.

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**TECHNIQUES (including banding)**

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