

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

MENABONI'S BIRDS. By Athos and Sara Menaboni. Rinehart & Company, New York and Toronto, 1950: $9\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{3}{8}$ in., 132 pp., 53 halftones and 32 unnumbered colored plates by Athos Menaboni. \$10.00.

It is time that books featuring "bird art," which, in this country at least, has unhappily become segregated as a more or less distinct subdivision of art, and at times been regarded by some misinformed critics as nothing more than a form of two-dimensional taxidermy, be forced to stand on their own merits, rather than upon the claims of various publishing houses motivated primarily by thoughts of cash profits. There has been a regrettable tendency on the part of more than one publisher to announce each forthcoming work with such risky superlatives as "the greatest, the most beautiful, the truest to nature," and so on. If any qualification is made at all, it usually takes the form of "since Audubon," thus serving to perpetuate the awe which still largely paralyzes public thought in regard to the admittedly laudable, but far from superhuman, artistic efforts of the woodsman-artist. Perhaps a new high in ballyhoo has been attained by Rinehart and Company in the advance publicity for "Menaboni's Birds."

"This is a collection," we are told, "of the most beautiful, most faithful bird portraits painted in America in more than one hundred years. Not since Audubon's great Folio, have any American bird pictures created as much excitement. Menaboni's birds in flight, his meticulous detail and realistic settings have surprised and excited the naturalists. Critics and art connoisseurs, praising the unusual technique, the subtle shadings, and the radiant colors of the originals, call Athos Menaboni the greatest living portrait painter of bird life." Strong words! Beautiful some of the pictures may be, but it is a large order to live up to claims such as these; certainly opinions will vary widely. Possibly the statement about the excitement caused is true. If so, it is a testimonial to modern promotional methods. The naturalists have been surprised, there is no question; but "disturbed," rather than "excited," best describes the reactions of those with whom I have discussed this book. As far as the "critics and art connoisseurs" vaguely alluded to in the blurbs are concerned, they are no more qualified to elect the greatest living (or dead) *portrait painter* of bird life than would a Martian who had never seen a man be qualified to choose between Sargent, Al Capp, and Picasso as human portrait artists.

In the first place, let us make it plain that we are here discussing what is sometimes called academic art. That is, art which embodies a strong element of craft, and which requires no phony special genius or divinely-imparted mystic inspiration for its understanding. Those who invariably shout "bourgeois," or "mere illustration" in response to any timid request for truth in the painting of nature need read no further.

A portrait is a likeness. We are told that Menaboni's paintings are portraits of birds, and it seems fair, therefore, that they be so judged. A portrait of a person may be painstakingly executed, the details of hair, skin, and clothing rendered with consummate skill, yet if the carriage is wrong, if the relationships of the bones and features of the head are wanting in accuracy, the portrait fails. The likeness is not there; the essential character is lacking. And who shall judge this success or failure? Surely the acquaintances of the subject should have authority in the matter at least equal to those who have never seen him. Does it not follow that the evaluation of a bird portrait, at least as far as the likeness is concerned, is a province for the ornithologist as much as for the "art critic" whose experience with birds is limited to cursory glances at the pigeons of a Manhattan tower?

Menaboni's paintings reveal a pleasing grasp of the essentials of design and composition, and an excellent feeling for, and use of, color. They are characterized by a surprisingly uniform

delicacy of treatment. The artist is good at painting feathers,—remarkably good, yet he has apparently fallen prey to a fascination with diffuse, reflected light, to the extent that, in his paintings the softly abundant plumage of a Great Horned Owl, the fluffy feathers of a kinglet, the iridescent ones of a grackle, and the coarse, boardlike feathers of an eagle all appear to have approximately the same texture. The same is true of his work with plants. Many of the small flowers, twigs, and tendrils are painted with grace and delicacy, but he misses completely the strength and mass and rugged textures of a great bole or stump.

His greatest weakness is in structure. With all his painstaking study of plumages and feathers, his work shows an entirely inadequate grasp of the form, of the bony anatomy, of a bird. This is most evident in the larger species in which this anatomy is less conveniently cloaked in plumage, and results in a vague, disturbing superficiality which affects most of the plates. Particularly bad in this respect are his flying Cardinal (title page), Summer Tanagers, flying Marsh Hawk (resembling an old and poorly stuffed specimen with shiny new feathers), Golden Eagle, Sparrow Hawks, Pileated (consistently mis-spelled "piliated") Woodpeckers, Little Blue Herons, and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Faulty observation is revealed by the fact that many of the birds in flight have too many primaries and/or secondaries. This is painfully evident in the drawing of the flying Cardinal already mentioned above. Allowing the proper number of nine primaries, we find that this individual has eleven, rather than six, secondaries! No wonder this boneless wing looks peculiar.

Menaboni has had difficulty with his perspective in places, being troubled by the admittedly trying task of making a wing go away from him (Belted Kingfisher, Great Horned Owl). The size relationship of the sexes is in error in his drawing of Boat-tailed Grackles. He fails miserably in catching the facial "expressions" so important in portraits, the treatment of hawks and eagles being particularly unsympathetic in this respect.

Several of the plates, notwithstanding, are very good. I personally consider the Kentucky Warblers, Screech Owl, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Canada Geese well above the rest, and the half-tone of the two Black Skimmers is a masterpiece of decorative design. Menaboni is at his best with the small black and white vignettes scattered through the text. Many of these are extremely pleasing.

It is difficult to account for the way in which the plates are captioned. The brief description accompanying each appears on the back of the plate, facing the next one. This feature may lead to considerable confusion among non-ornithological readers.

The text by Sara Menaboni is a rambling, sometimes interesting, sometimes dull account of the Menabonis' life with birds, featuring a great deal of reference to various pets, and small experiences with nature. It is a most difficult task to write such a commentary without becoming at times trite and puerile, which pitfalls Mrs. Menaboni has not entirely avoided. Considerable anthropomorphism appears in the text, which seems to reveal the authors as sentimental amateur nature lovers rather than as scientists.

The Menabonis are to be congratulated on their perseverance and their deep love of wild-life. Had the book been publicized as a sincere expression of this love, beautifully produced and expensively illustrated with attractive and decorative pictures (which it is), rather than as one of the most authoritative ornithological works of decades, with the most faithful bird portraits (which it is not), there would be little fault to find with it.—Robert M. Mengel.

SUMMER BIRDS OF LINCOLN COUNTY, MAINE. By Allan D. Cruickshank. National Audubon Society, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York City, [1950]: 6 × 9 in., 51 pp., 1 map. Paper. 50¢.

Maine's Lincoln County, lying on the coast, has many deeply cut harbors and inlets, and several offshore islands. Much of the forest cover is coniferous. Such is the general setting of this annotated list, one of the most detailed yet written on a specific area in the state.

Most of the information is based on observations made during summers, beginning in 1936, by the author and others while serving as instructors at the Audubon Nature Camp on Hog Island in Muscongus Bay. Notes and records have been admirably summarized; the status and local distribution of each species have been clearly indicated. Thus the booklet's principal purpose—to help future bird students know “which species to expect and where and when to look for them”—has been well met.

The author states in the introduction that 255 species have been recorded during the four summer months. This impressive total has been derived by including all published records (e.g., the occurrence of the Great Auk in Muscongus Bay about 1605 and the brief residence of the European Migratory Quail following its introduction during 1879 and 1880) and by counting two races of *Ammospiza caudacula* as separate species. Authorities for noteworthy records are given in parentheses, but it is usually impossible to determine, especially in the case of records antedating 1936, whether the authorities are authors of publications from which the records are taken, or persons who have supplied notes in unpublished form. This confusion could have been avoided by following standard citation practices.—Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.

A STUDY OF BIRD POPULATIONS IN THE APPLE ORCHARDS OF THE ANNAPOLIS VALLEY, NOVA SCOTIA, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE EFFECTS OF ORCHARD SPRAYS UPON THEM. By John P. Kelsall. Canadian Wildlife Service Wildlife Management Bulletin No. 1, Series 2, 1949: 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., iv + 69 pp. (processed), 12 figures. Obtainable on request from Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario.

The study was conducted from May 14 to September 16, 1946, to determine whether certain sprays were detrimental to the bird life. The method was to inspect each orchard by cruising back and forth in parallel strips with two rows of trees intervening. An attempt was made to count each individual bird in the area on each trip. The trips to each area varied from two to seven and were usually quite widely separated, in some instances encompassing both the latter part of the spring migration and first part of the fall migration as well as the breeding season. Schedules of trips to different orchards varied considerably with respect to the time of year covered. Trips were not designed to ascertain before- and after-spraying condition of the bird life, but rather the over-all differences in populations in sprayed and unsprayed orchards, and in orchards with and without insect infestation. The investigator stated that qualitative and quantitative data of a type desirable in a bird population study were frequently not recorded because they were not considered pertinent to the major line of investigation. Thus no distinction was made between migrants, wanderers, and breeding birds on the basis of territorial behavior or calendar period of observations.

The sizes of the orchards varied from 1.2 to 12 acres; some had turf strips between the rows, and some were cultivated completely. All but two of the orchards were sprayed with lead arsenate, calcium arsenate, or nicotine mixtures.

Conclusions were that the sprays did not have any directly injurious effect on bird life since no dead or sick birds were observed. In so far as the sprays were effective in materially reducing the insect population it reduced the bird population also. Birds were much less common in orchards in which insects were scarce than in those which were suffering outbreaks of eye-spotted budmoth or aphids. Birds were determined to be more than twice as numerous in orchards infested with budmoth as in those wherein no outbreak occurred. There was no evidence that birds were effective in keeping the insects under control since they ate only a small part of the larvae present. Song Sparrows, Robins, Chipping Sparrows, Savannah Sparrows, and Slate-colored Juncos made up over 80 percent of the total number of birds observed in all orchards. The Song Sparrow was the most numerous single species. It was

thought that aphids were favored by the smaller insectivorous birds and in orchards infested with these insects Yellow Warblers, Redstarts, Yellow-throats (*Geothlypis*), Myrtle Warblers, and Nashville Warblers made up 50 percent of the birds observed.

Bird populations of all orchards were considered to be smaller than those of other habitats in surrounding areas. However, there did not seem to be much difference between numbers of birds recorded in unsprayed orchards (12.7 birds per acre) of a single habitat, and surrounding areas of mixed habitats (13.7 birds per acre) when dates of observation were strictly comparable.—John W. Aldrich.

THE BIRDS OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK. By Fred Mallery Packard. Nature Association, Estes Park, Colorado, 1950: $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ in., iv + 81 pp., 12 figures, 1 map. Paper. 75¢.

Every year hundreds of bird students visit Rocky Mountain National Park. Packard's photo-offset booklet, the most attractive and complete booklet of any sort thus far published on the Park, will supply trained observers with necessary background material in the form of bird records. Though a more definitive list of species than any hitherto brought out for the region, it is admittedly incomplete in certain respects. The author calls special attention to the inadequacy of our knowledge concerning one highly interesting ornithological phenomenon—the upward movements of birds after midsummer.

The region covered is Rocky Mountain National Park plus the area around the town of Estes Park on the east and Grand Lake on the west, all in northern Colorado. This comprises over four hundred square miles of mountainous terrain, all above 7,000 feet elevation and ranging upward to over 14,000 feet. A sketch map, giving principal place-names but without indication of altitudes, is included, and there is a brief summary of altitudinal zonation of major plant communities; a comprehensive list of pertinent references; and an index to the common names of bird species discussed.

Brief descriptions and notes on seasonal and altitudinal ranges are given for 219 species and subspecies of birds, thirteen of which are included, according to the author's expressed belief, on questionable grounds. Twelve line drawings of birds by Roger Tory Peterson are primarily decorative. Neither they nor the descriptions are designed to aid the beginner in bird identification. The booklet is primarily for observers already familiar with the avifauna of the region in general. Used with an adequate identification manual it should be of great help to those wishing to list or study the birds of the park.—Gordon Alexander.

BERKSHIRE BIRDS. By Bartlett Hendricks. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Boston, 1950: 6 × 9 in., 57 pp., 15 drawings, 6 maps. Paper. 60¢.

This 57-page check-list of Berkshire County birds is essentially a reprint, in convenient booklet form, of a series of articles which appeared recently in ten numbers of *The Bulletin of the Massachusetts Audubon Society* (Vol. 32–34, 1948–50). Aside from a field list published by the Berkshire Museum in 1941, it is the first full account of Berkshire birds since Faxon's and Hoffmann's "Birds of Berkshire County," published in 1900. The fact that the new check-list gives 271 forms compared to 197 in the earlier book is ample evidence of the growth of ornithological interest in the county in the past fifty years.

A 14-page introductory section includes such matters as topography and migration routes, the county's ornithological history, a section on bird identification (which might well have been condensed or perhaps omitted altogether), and helpful preliminary lists (of permanent residents, transients, etc.). Then follows the main list—the common name (without the scientific name) of the bird, each with a letter symbol (A to E) designed to indicate its frequency of occurrence, a graph by months (an ingenious invention of the author) which shows

the duration of stay of the bird in the county, and a summarizing statement or two concerning the known status of each, with instances of occurrence and authorities for the rarer species.

The records are based almost entirely on sight identifications. There is no collection of scientific bird skins in the county and there has been little or no deliberate collecting there for many years. For the most part the author, who for more than a decade has been the spirited leader of a corps of enthusiastic observers, has used good judgment in evaluating the records, but there can be no doubt that many of the sight records are open to question. Of 26 accidental visitors listed, apparently only four are supported by specimens.

The booklet is attractively and artistically illustrated with six maps and 15 black and white drawings of birds by Robert F. Seibert. The bird names used do not always conform to those of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-List (*Canvas-back* and *Buffle-head* are not hyphenated, the apostrophe and *s* are dropped from *Wilson's Phalarope* on page 29, and *Red-winged Blackbird*, perhaps consciously, is used for *Red-wing*). In two cases, at least, plural verbs are used with singular subjects. There appear to be some inconsistencies in the listings. For instance, 21 permanent residents are listed on page 10, but only 20 in the summary on page 13; 86 migrants are listed, but 87 are counted in the summary. The Hoary Redpoll and Clay-colored Sparrow are listed as winter and accidental visitors respectively, but omitted from the text, the only two out of 40 to be so slighted. Of the two extinct species listed, the Passenger Pigeon is accounted for in the text but the Heath Hen is not.

In spite of the skepticism that may well attach to a check-list making such extensive use of sight records, this booklet should prove a helpful guide to the many New Englanders, as well as outsiders, who go birding in the Berkshires.—George J. Wallace.

HOW TO CHOOSE AND USE FIELD-GLASSES. By E. M. Nicholson. British Trust for Ornithology, Field Guide Number Two, The Potter Press, Oxford, 1950: $8\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ in., 8 pp. (unnumbered). Ninepence.

In this pamphlet the British Trust for Ornithology presents a complete guide on the use and care of field glasses and telescopes for ornithological work. Magnification, field of view, light-gathering power, weight and general design are discussed in relation to specific purposes for which the glasses are to be used. Simple tests are given for determining the quality of a glass.

Though not in wide use, a telescope is indispensable for certain types of bird watching. Mr. Nicholson comments that "Telescopes, in contrast to binoculars, have seen no fundamental improvement in external design since the time of Gilbert White, although coated models are now available. It is evident to anyone who glances at a party of ornithologists trying to use telescopes on a mud-flat that sooner or later either the telescope or the bird-watcher will have to be entirely redesigned." He adds, encouragingly, that a distinct improvement over the traditional telescope has been made in a new type of mirror telescope recently invented in Holland.

Ornithologists contemplating the purchase of new field glasses will do well to obtain a copy of this pamphlet by writing the Secretary, British Trust for Ornithology, 91 Banbury Road, Oxford, England.—Andrew J. Berger.