

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BRITISH CARBONIFEROUS PRODUCTI—II. PRODUCTUS (*sensu stricto*); SEMIRETICULATUS AND LONGISPINUS GROUPS. By Helen Marguerite Muir-Wood, M.Sc., Mon. Geol. Survey of Great Britain, Palæontology Vol. III, Pt. I, pp. 1-217, Pls. 1-12, Dec. 1928.

In Middle Devonian times there appeared the first representatives of the spinose brachiopods which are included in the sub-family group called *Productinæ*. This spine studded concavo-convex brachiopod innovation of the Middle Devonian had few species in the early stages of its history but from these a considerable number of species had developed in late Devonian times. The great differentiation of this group took place in the Carboniferous period. Preceding the decline and subsequent extinction of the group at the end of the Permian, no less than twenty genera had appeared.

Miss Muir-Wood's monograph deals with the British Producti of the period during which they reached the zenith of their differentiation into many curious and bizarre species.

Evolution produced in shells of the Producti not only an "almost infinite variation in size, contour and form which cannot be paralleled in any other group of closely related genera" but also the largest brachiopod shell known, *Productus giganteus* with a shell nearly a foot in width. Other diminutive species like *P. nystianus* having a shell width of 5 mm. were among the by-products of these Carboniferous experiments in producing giant spinose brachiopods.

The Producti are dealt with under the following sub-titles: terminology, morphology, evolution and range, *Productus (sensu stricto)* and the *P. semireticulatus* groups, classification and description of species.

The reviewer has examined no systematic work during the year which offers so little to criticise and so much to praise as this. The plates are admirably executed and the volume is in every way a credit both to the author and the Geological Survey of Great Britain.

Palæontologists using this volume will find (published in Amer. Mag. of Nat. Hist., Ser. 10, Vol. 5, pp. 100-108, Jan. 1930) a very useful supplementary paper by Miss Muir-Wood which supplies a key to the several genera of British Productinæ.—E. M. KINDLE.

"Systema Avium" for North America, north of Mexico. Published by the American Ornithologists' Union, Lancaster, Pa., 1931. Price \$4.00. Address: W. L. McAtee, 200 Cedar St., Cherrydale, Va.

At last the new Check-list is out! Previous editions are dated 1886, 1895 and 1910. A book of constant reference to every working ornithologist, the copies of the last edition have been worn to rags in the twenty-one years of hard use and none have been available for replacement. Consequently the appearance of new, sound, modern copies is welcomed as the old, obsolete, dog-eared volumes with shaky backs, loose leaves and feather edges are put to well-earned rest on the "bibliography" shelves.

Its preparation by the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature under the active Chairmanship of Dr. Witmer Stone was a herculean task. As by agreement with other learned bodies it is to form the North American volume of a world wide *Systema Avium*, the old, obsolete system of classification based on 1886 ornithology and retained through the years for reasons of expediency rather than of science had to be brought up to date and into agreement with other presentations of modern science. This alone was a task of some magnitude. Many were the conflicting ideas of detail which it took not only exact knowledge but judgment and restraint to harmonize. Fortunately we had a committee with these attributes, as the present volume demonstrates.

The resultant re-shuffling of orders, families, etc., will be confusing and disturbing to many who were raised on the old sequence and know no other, but to those engaged in extralimital ornithology it will offer no great difficulty and will be a great relief. At least it can be accepted as approximately correct in the light of present knowledge and a necessary reorientation of our concepts that will probably remain usable for the next fifty years as the old one has served for the past forty-five. Should it so stand this test of time and use we can congratulate the authors on work well done and feel that the throes of readjustment to the new scheme have not been useless.

But one goes over the pages of the volume with mixed feelings of approval and dissent qualified by appreciation of the difficulties encountered by the authors. After the first shock of the rearrangement of classification, appears the fact that the old A.O.U. numbers, while still present, are hopelessly mixed and out of numerical sequence. This, of course, is unavoidable unless the

CHECK-LIST OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS, Prepared by a Committee of the American Ornithologists' Union. Fourth Edition. Constituting the

items were all numbered anew, a process that would make confusion worse confounded in many egg collections and files. There is therefore appended a list of the old sequence with the pages on which they can be found in the new arrangement.

In running over the species a number of changes from the 1910 list will be noted. Some species have been eliminated, others added. Some species have been reduced to subspecific status and some subspecies raised to specific rank. Here and there new names appear as familiar ones have been dropped and older ones revived. On the whole though, to one who has followed the various supplements as they appeared in the *Auk*, the changes are not revolutionary and most of them are well-advised even if a bit disconcerting. Conservatism has been the rule and not the exception and we are informed that unless there was a majority of more than one in the committee of eight, no departure was made from the *status quo*. On the other hand it is well to remember that it is the work of a committee and probably nearly every decision has a dissenting minority. That all will be equally satisfied with the result cannot be hoped for; that even one working ornithologist will be entirely approving is doubtful; but that most ornithologists will accept it with only minor reservations as a good working compromise hypothesis is to be expected. All dissentients should immediately get their data in order, ready for the improvement and correction of the next Check-list when it comes to preparation.

Should we go over the list carefully and pick out all the items and details that offend us we should each, doubtless, fill many pages with objections. On the other hand no two such lists of protest would be alike and perhaps few even remotely similar. But even in a world of varying personal opinion a reviewer must take some standpoint, even if it is personal and he the only one that occupies it. Disregarding the strictly ornithological details and looking at the form and presentation alone the outstanding shortcoming of the list to this writer lies in its omission of all specific headings to subspecific groups. For instance, the Song Sparrow is presented as some twenty-six individual subspecies with nothing but the repetition of the middle name to show that they are but fractional parts of a specific whole. Each of these divisions is treated and typed with as much formality and impressiveness as the full species that are not trinomially divided. This is a retrograde step from the last edition. Scientifically it is a misrepresentation of relationship, psychologically it exalts the subspecies to the importance of the species and practically it

forces one to grasp the specific unit as a whole only by piecing its isolated fragments together as if it were a picture puzzle. Of particular offence to this reviewer's eye are the references to extralimital forms of the species by the formula "Allied races occur in Mexico" (or wherever it may be). This seems loose and amateurish, raising unsatisfied curiosity without furnishing legitimate information. It will be necessary to search a library of reference to complete the specific picture. The sequence of allied subspecies might also well have been improved upon. An attempt was made to list them in order of their genetic importance, a hopeless task and one upon which no more than a guess can be made. Much better would it have been if they had been placed chronologically, in order of description. There could have been no serious question as to position and it would have given the systematist at a glance that which he most usually desires,—the relative priorities of the races.

The distributions are considerably more extended than those of previous lists, and, as would be expected with the amount of work done in the interim, on the whole, more satisfactory but still to the critical eye they leave something to be desired. Probably they are as near accurate as any compilation of such a vast subject can be. The Committee here took counsel of a great number of active ornithologists in various parts of the country. This course is at once their weakness and their strength. No one person and no group of persons can possibly have all the factors of distribution of all the species of birds of this wide, diversified continent at their finger tips. No two persons can be equally well informed regarding individual species or localities and much of this abundant opinion has necessarily been conflicting. To adjudicate perfectly between many advisors would take the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job. That the Committee has succeeded as well as it has in this particular direction is perhaps a matter of congratulation rather than of criticism.

Following the main list of recognized species and subspecies is a "Hypothetical List" including those species that have been proposed for, or admitted to, the list at various times but are now omitted or removed through doubt of validity or occurrence. Reasons are given in each case.

A "Summary of Changes, Additions and Eliminations" in the present edition as compared with that of the third follows with explanatory notes where the changes have been radical.

Finally appears a "List of Fossil Birds of North America" by Dr. Alexander Wetmore filling about seventy pages, evidence of the remarkable activity in avian palæontology that has

occurred since the 1910 edition, in which the same list occupied only eighteen pages.

In make up, the book is on good white paper, thin yet substantial and giving promise of permanence. The type is clear and clean and this most exacting type of proof reading seems to have been excellently performed. It is well and strongly bound, firm but opening well, as befits a work that has to stand hard usage, in good cloth of a dark blue colour and pebbled surface that will stand abrasion and will not show dirt or grime. With all its virtues, which are many, and its faults which are not to be disregarded, it is a work that no American ornithologist can be without and for better or worse it will be standard for some years to come.—P.A.T.

THE HUNTING OF THE BUFFALO by E. Douglas Branch, Author of "The Cowboy and His Interpreters"; D. Appleton & Company, New York and London, 1929.

In his preface, the author of this book thus states its purpose:—"The range of the buffalo . . . enveloped nearly two-fifths of the entire area of North America. The restriction of this range, gradual, then suddenly ruthless; the coming of new peoples who hunted; the ways, the tools, the laws of the hunt: that is the meat of this narrative. . . . The history of the buffalo hunt is almost as scattered as the buffalo bones left to molder on the prairies. I have tried to do a decent job of picking up the pieces." This aim has been accomplished. A vivid narrative, with plenty of picturesque detail, is the story of the white man's contact with the American Bison, from 1521, (when he first met the species, far out of its native range, in the Aztec Emperor's zoo,) to 1926. The influence of the Bison on Indian

culture, both before and after their acquisition of the horse, and the use of the Bison as food by white men, first by the fur brigades, (of major importance in the history of the species in Canada,) and later by the railroad construction gangs, are both discussed, and the sport of buffalo hunting and the brief industry of gathering buffalo bones are noticed; but the fullest attention is given to the later, wholesale slaughter for robes. To the letterpress are added twenty-one illustrations, and there is a useful index. Some omissions are apparent, of which two must be mentioned here: There is no account of the attempt, supported by President Roosevelt, to retain the Pablo herd for the U.S.A., the failure of which permitted the removal of the herd to this country as is described here. Again, there is no discussion of the validity of the sub-specific distinction between the Bison of the Slave River region and the Bison of the plains and no mention of the "biological crime" of breeding out the difference between *Bison bison bison* and *Bison b. athabasca* by the release of the surplus animals from Wainwright in the range of the Wood Bison, although this transfer is mentioned. There is only one reference to "Wood bison" in the index, and it is only a speculation as to whether the Bison of Pennsylvania might have become sub-specifically distinct if they had not been exterminated. There is no reference to "Bison" in the index; the author uses the more popular term "Buffalo" almost entirely.

For the natural history of the American Bison, this book does not supplant,—does not attempt to supplant the older, standard authorities such as Allen and Hornaday, to which, and to others, it contains many references; but the student will here find the chief facts and many details of the disappearance of the species.—R.O.M.

THE NEW A.O.U. CHECK-LIST

Now that the new Check-list is available, contributors of ornithological material are requested to conform to its decisions in nomenclature. In cases where this is not possible, the contributor should state definitely that the 1910 Check-list, or other authority, is adhered to.—

Editor.



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