

FLIGHT OF HORNED OWLS IN CANADA by J. Dewy Soper, Preston, Ont. (pp. 478-479). In this the author observes that whilst the above species were unusually abundant in October and November, 1917, at various points in southern Ontario, they were abnormally scarce in the country north-east of Lake Superior where they are usually common.

P. A. T.

THE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF COLOR AND OTHER VALUABLE CHARACTERS IN THE GENUS JUNCO; a new aspect of Specific and Subspecific Values. By Jonathan Dwight, M.D. Bull., Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist. Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 269-309, June, 1918.

Whether one does or does not agree on every point with the author of this paper, it must be regarded as an important contribution not only to the difficult subject of the genus to which it refers, but to zoology in general and ornithology in particular. In it Dr. Dwight offers a new solution to the confusion of differentiated forms of this highly variable group, and attempts to point out a way in which like problems can be simplified in other departments of zoology.

He cuts the gordian knot of the multitude of intergrading subspecies by raising several of them to full specific rank and regarding the intermediates as hybrid. As criteria between specific and subspecific variations he divides them into qualitative and quantitative characters; qualitative characters being new qualities, or characters, and hence specific in value and quantitative being an increase or reduction of quantity in qualities or characters already existing in the parent form and hence of subspecific value only. This is to replace the older hypothesis that species are wholly isolated units and that intergradation between extreme variations are proof of this subspecific relationship. It must be acknowledged that this is largely according to the trend of modern thought which is coming to regard the specific unit of systematists with growing distrust and as an unstable division. Whilst this view from a paleontological standpoint is unassailable the writer cannot but regard it as being misplaced in considering modern zoological problems. Through geological time species are uncertain if not fluid quantities flowing imperceptibly one into the other, but at any one given moment of time through any given geological horizon I cannot see how we can refuse to recognize their individual isolation from contemporary forms, without making confusion worse confounded and destroying our perspective of current events. The fact that species may be extremely variable within themselves and on the point of giving rise to new ones is not sufficient ground for rejecting the specific concept altogether.

Whether or no we can frame a satisfactory definition for the species does not alter the specific fact, it merely indicates upon the limitations of our present knowledge. The fact that hybrids (as usually understood) between acknowledged species are usually rare, but constantly occur without swamping or mongrelizing the species seems evidence that the unit is a real one and not a figment of the imagination.

Dr. Dwight's distinction between quantitative and qualitative quantities seem subject to the question, which is which? He regards the black head and the red back of *J. oregonus* as qualitative, yet the gray head of *hiemalis* is but a reduced blackness, and the red back of *oregonus* but the persistence and increase of a color present in juveniles of the opposite race. It does not seem that these characters offer any better or perhaps as good a means of specific determination as those heretofore applied.

The characters of Dr. Dwight's hybrids also seem to lack the appearance logically to be expected in such individuals. True hybrids between specifically distinct forms usually show pie-bald mixtures of parental characters seldom even blendings of them. Our finest example of this arises from the crossing of the Red and the Yellow-shafted Flickers. These species hybridize most freely and the resultant shows if not in the first generation at least in the succeeding ones, a bewildering array of mixed pure characters in every possible combination, rarely a blending of them. Thus the moustache mark may be black or red or red and black, but rarely if ever, brown, which would be half-way between and a blending of the two. Dr. Dwight's hybrids on the contrary are all perfectly even blendings, one form imperceptibly gliding into the other, with very little reversion to pure parental characters. The very constancy of each type also raises a certain amount of suspicion. In every character true hybrids should show dominant, recessive and mingled resultants in such varied combination that duplicate individuals are the exception, not the rule. Dr. Dwight's postulated hybrids, however, are as constant in type as they are in blending. On the whole, while we admire Dr. Dwight's serious purpose and the amount of concentration he has brought to bear upon the subject, it does not seem that his attempt to form new standards of specific relationship will be more acceptable than the old ones.

In untangling the relationships between these confusing forms, however, the author has rendered a great service. Whilst his explanation of the causes may not be entirely acceptable, the facts he has brought out have probably simplified the subject considerably and in the light of his painstaking re-

searches we are in a much better position to elucidate the snarl. I have not the space in which to go into the details of his many valid conclusions, but

must refer all who are interested in the genus *Junco* to the paper itself.

P. A. TAVERNER.

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

RE SIGHT IDENTIFICATIONS.—The following is from the pen of that veteran ornithologist, Wm. Brewster, whose status as Dean of American ornithology is unchallenged. It appears in his *Birds of the Cambridge Region*, *Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*, No. IV, Cambridge, Mass., 1906, Preface, pp. 5-6.

"My early training and experience have lead me to believe that with certain exceptions to be specified, the occurrence of birds in localities or regions lying outside their known habitats should not be regarded as definitely established until actual specimens have been taken and afterwards determined by competent authorities. No doubt it is becoming more and more difficult to live up to this rule because of the ever-increasing and, in the main, wholesome, popular feeling against the killing of birds for whatever purpose. Nevertheless I cannot admit that the mere observation of living birds met with in localities where they do not properly belong, or where they have not been ascertained to occasionally appear, should often be considered as establishing anything more than possible or probable instances of occurrence—according to the weight and character of the evidence."

"Exceptions to the rule may and indeed *should* be made in the cases of species which like the Turkey Vulture, the Swallow-tailed Kite, and the Cardinal, are easily recognized at a distance and which are reported by persons known to have had previous familiarity with the birds in life. Sight identifications of species somewhat less distinctly characterized than those just mentioned, if made under favourable conditions by observers of long field experience and tried reliability, may also sometimes be accepted with entire confidence. But on no authority, however good, should a mere field observation of any bird that is really difficult to identify, be taken as establishing an important primal record."

It may also be said that Dr. J. A. Allen, another of our old veterans of ornithology whose standing is beyond question, in reviewing the above work in the *Auk*, XXIII, 1906, p. 470, heartily endorses the above. After quoting the substance of the above, he remarks:

"This is the basis of the author's rulings in the present paper—a proper and the only safe basis in view of the present day method of numerous amateur observers, who are too often burdening ornithological literature with ill-advised records."

It may be added that the editorial policy of THE OTTAWA NATURALIST agrees heartily with these sentiments. We ourselves have many sight records which we are morally certain are correct but without specimens, except under the most exceptional circumstances, we do not feel justified in publishing them as more than hypothetical and then only with as many details in substantiation as possible that the reader may judge for himself of their sufficiency.

P. A. TAVERNER.

ORIGIN OF PLACE NAMES IN OTTAWA VALLEY.—I was much interested in the note by Mr. Douglas in THE OTTAWA NATURALIST for November, 1918, regarding the origin of the name Gatineau as applied to Gatineau River. While a very reasonable conclusion as far as it goes, there still seems to me some reason to doubt the connection between cause and effect in this case, owing to the vagueness of the proof that Monsieur Gatineau ever reached the river said to be named after him.

This doubt of mine is strengthened by the fact that I was given a very different derivation of the name by the late Mr. Lindsay Russell, who was for many years Surveyor General for Canada. He had an intimate knowledge of all the Ottawa tributaries, particularly the Gatineau and their peoples and to my personal knowledge a very considerable familiarity with their language.

He told me that the name Gatineau was Indian, that it was derived from the Cree word Etinos, meaning "The People"; i.e., the people of any particular district, and means "the river of the people", who lived in its territory. Might not this to some extent account for the Wright's spelling it Gatineau.

He also told me that one of the large tributaries marked on the map as Jean de Terre was wrongly so marked, as the original name was "Les Gens de la Terre" and was a literal translation of the name of the main river.

As to the G. sound beginning the name, anyone who is interested in Indian languages knows how prone they are to throw around their consonants loosely, as witness Mitchi, Kitchi, Gitchi, each meaning great, or grand, and Nippi, Tibbi, and Sibbi, a body of water, and all in use in the same district. This was probably due to the language not being a written one.

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Taverner, P. A. 1919. "The Geographic Distribution of Color and Other Valuable Characters in the Genus Junco." *The Ottawa naturalist* 32(7), 133–134.

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