

not been able to find much—practically nothing—in support of the Cormorants in any of my peregrinations, and the few articles I have read, by authors making an attempt to support them, have been quite inadequate; consequently, I am very sceptical with regard to their theory—in fact, I consider it all a fallacy.—
Yours, &c., THOS. P. AUSTIN.

Cobbora (N.S.W.), 13/7/19.

Reviews.

[“The Birds of Australia.” By Gregory M. Mathews, F.R.S.E.]

IN spite of the many difficulties of publication during war time, and the great increase of costs of all kinds, the parts of this great work continued to appear with commendable frequency. With the end of the war, and the removal of the risk of further loss, the recently-published parts have come to hand. Vol. vi. has been completed, the lost part (No. 3) being generously supplied by publisher and author. Four parts of vol. vii. are also to hand.

The work maintains well its high standard. The death of the famous bird artist, Keulemans, has proved a heavy blow. Some of the later plates, including that of the Great Brown or Laughing Kingfisher, so well known to Australians, are not up to the excellent standard usually achieved. Printers and publishers continue to do their share well. The author develops his particular section—the research into literature and the tracing of specimens and early descriptions—with admirable thoroughness. Masses of material and reference otherwise not available to Australian workers are here heaped up lavishly for the benefit of scientists of the future. Mr. Mathews’s fine work in this connection is generally appreciated here, though one or two individuals may say, “Give us more of the bird and less of the controversial literature.” But knowledge of the bird can, fortunately, be readily added in Australia, while knowledge of the literature is not likely to be so added. It is hoped, therefore, that Mr. Mathews will continue to pursue his painstaking and candid investigations and criticisms of all disputed points, and record them, so that those less fortunately situated can have the benefit of his mature experience and full knowledge in this realm, where Mr. Mathews is admitted to be one of the leading authorities of the day.

The fine generic divisions previously alluded to continue the rule. Of the 37 genera treated in these four parts of vol. vii., 31 (over 80 per cent.) have one species each, and 5 have two species; the remaining genus (*Lamprococcyx*) contains four of the Bronze-Cuckoos. A genus with four species is a unique feature in the classification of birds *à la* Mathews. The fine splitting has been extended upwards. The birds of the Frogmouth, Roller, Kingfisher, Bee-eater, Nightjar, and Swift families were all included in the “1913 List” by Mr. Mathews in the order

Coraciiformes; now, without explanation or definition, each of these families is placed as a separate order.

Sub-species are still being created in a wholesale fashion, "strict recognition of geographical range" being counselled. Does this mean that the scientist may not at times be able to name the sub-species in a hand specimen without the help of the locality label?

Australians are pleased to hear that there are now good prospects that Mr. Mathews will complete his great work. We wish him continued success.

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE OOLOGY.

THE late Prof. Alfred Newton once, writing to an Australian, stated that "it cannot be denied that in certain respects oology has disappointed some of its votaries, but the same may be said of many other branches of study which were at one time thought to promise remarkable results, and I consider that this is no valid reason for the abandonment of oological investigation."

However, a Museum of Comparative Oology has been founded at Santa Barbara, California, and has set itself the task of accumulating the phylogenetic evidence offered by the eggs of the birds of the world. Its ambitions in this direction are boundless. The promoters are very confident. They claim "that there are great truths to learn, laws to be pointed out, in the humble realm of oology," and the museum "was founded in the belief that laws so discovered would throw a flood of light upon the trend of Life itself, and that the EGG from which all life comes, if properly interrogated, will tell us something of Life's whence and, mayhap, of Life's whither. At any rate, there is not in the entire realm of the bird-world a structure more significant, nor a record more eloquent, than that furnished by the painted oval which forms at once the fragile cradle and the enduring monument of the race."

A charter was issued on the 27th January, 1916, by the State of California to a board of trustees, fifteen in number, as a self-governing body pledged to the maintenance of the Santa Barbara institution, whose every resource is dedicated to the cause of ornithological science, and in particular "to the exploitation of that knowledge which may be acquired through a study of birds' eggs."

Although the institution has been in existence for over four years, and has made good progress, *The Journal of the Museum of Comparative Oology* (a double number) has only recently (26/3/19) been published; thereafter it is intended to be a quarterly issue. From the original number may be gathered the history and scope of the M.C.O., with photographic evidence of "the Museum" itself (temporary quarters), "Main Building, Showing 3-Unit Cases," "The Annex Giant Cases, 7-Unit (Cubic Yards), &c.," "Tricoloured Redwing Series of Eggs," "Drawer Showing Eggs

of 30 Living Orders," "One of the Duck Drawers," showing 24 clutches in their down. Then there are groups of "Well-collected Nests," and what not to do—"An Overcrowded Arrangement," &c.

As at present constituted, the institution has a "Board of Visitors," among which are two hon. members of the R.A.O.U.—namely, Prof. Robt. Ridgway and Dr. Robt. W. Shufeldt. There are also "Fellows," "Patrons," "Members" (a subscription of five dollars a year), "Patron Collectors," "Field Members," "Exchange Collectors," "Corresponding Members," and "Authorized Collectors." The president is Mr. Joel R. Filhian, and the secretary Mr. Wm. Leon Dawson, at present engaged on "The Birds of California," and who has been "an incorrigible collector of birds' eggs" for 35 years and has never missed a season! A good recommendation for field work, not to mention health. For the rest of the contents of a breezy journal on nature study one must refer to its pages for "Our Present Equipment," "Museum Functions," "How to Collect and Preserve Birds' Nests," "To the Scientific Collector of Birds' Eggs," &c. Upon request a free copy of the first issue will be mailed to any person interested in the M.C.O. who has not received one. Additional copies are 25 cents each.

As an encouragement for others "to do likewise," it may be noted that our enthusiastic member, Mr. Rowland H. Archer, in 1917 presented the M.C.O. with 42 sets of Australian eggs. Again last year, he sent 43 sets—fourteen with nests. This lot contained "a prized egg of the Lyre-Bird (*Menura*)."

[*"In Australian Wilds: the Gleanings of a Naturalist."* By Charles Barrett, C.M.Z.S., author of *"From Range to Sea," "The Wide Horizon,"* and *"The Isle of Palms."* With illustrations from photographs by the author. Melbourne Publishing Co. 1919. 6s.]

"It is a book to read and keep for company's sake, in the same sense that a picture is so often aptly described as 'good to live with.'" Thus Mr. Donald Macdonald concludes his introduction to this volume, and the estimate is sound. There is little need to introduce Mr. Barrett to that growing body of the Australian public which cares for natural things in their proper settings, least of all to ornithologists, for his work as a patient observer, a keen photographer, and a telling writer is already well known. *"In Australian Wilds"* reflects the author at his best. The chapter headings will indicate its width of range: "The Bush Hut," "Gippsland Wilds," "Sea-Birds' Haunts," "The Mallee Country," "Through the Big Swamps," "Eyre Peninsula," "Where the Pelican Builds," "Across the Plains," "Among the Palms," "Coral Isles." More than 100 photographs have been reproduced to illustrate the attractively written narrative. It would be safe to predict a ready sale for this excellently-produced addition to the list of works on nature in Australia.

From Magazines, &c.

The "Report of the Royal Commission on Victorian Fisheries" makes good and instructive reading. The following R.A.O.U. members gave evidence before the Commission, namely :—Messrs. A. W. Alexander, M.A., Dudley Le Souëf, C.M.Z.S., A. H. E. Mattingley, C.M.Z.S., and Lieut.-Col. Semmens, while Mr. R. H. Croll, Assistant Editor of *The Emu*, was thanked by the Commissioners for "his earnest and skilful attention to the duties of the Commission" as secretary.

Naturally, the subject of "Cormorants" was dealt with, and opinions of such observers as Mr. Donald Macdonald (the *Argus*) and Mr. H. L. White, of Belltrees, were quoted; but Mr. F. Esling puts the case in the proverbial "nut-shell." He says (page 16) :—
"The natural increase of fish in the rivers is absolutely inadequate to keep up the supply, even for food purposes—that is to say, as *settlement advances* the rivers automatically become depleted. That has been found in America from time to time, and it has been the experience generally throughout the world. We have found it here also."

Appendix W., on "The Cormorant and its Diet," for interest, is worth reprinting :—

"Mr. P. A. Taverner, one of the best known Canadian ornithologists and biologists (says *Fishing Gazette*) has been investigating the habits of the Cormorants of the estuary of the Gaspé River. At Perce Mr. Taverner found that the Cormorants nested only on the top of Perce Rock, and he places the number breeding there at about 1,300. At Gaspé Basin he found two colonies of 180 and 540 respectively. Throughout the day all the Cormorants which are not incubating or brooding young are found on the estuaries of the rivers, and their feeding-grounds are the wide tidal areas which are just awash at low tide, and covered by 2 or 3 feet of water at high tide. The food of the Cormorant consists practically entirely of fish, and Mr. Taverner found that one of these birds requires about 3 lbs. of fish per day. He says :—'Assuming two full meals per day per individual would give for the Gaspé Basin 600 lbs. of fish per day consumed by Cormorants, or 45 tons per season. Should the Cormorants of Gaspé turn their attention to fish of economic importance their possibility of damage would be considerable.'

"Mr. Taverner does not suggest that the Cormorants should be exterminated. As our contemporary, the *Canadian Fisherman*, says :—
'The fact of the matter is that the inter-relations of the various forms of wild life are so complicated, so inextricably interwoven, that the general public has no idea of them, and it often taxes the knowledge and trained powers of observation of the biological expert to unravel them. A species may seem to be useless or even harmful to man, but if it is exterminated, or much reduced in numbers, we find, sometimes too late, that it had a definite function in the economy of Nature, and that it kept in check some other species more injurious than itself. Thus, the birds of prey, and some mammals, such as foxes and weasels, are usually regarded as "vermin"—as forms of life to be eliminated as far as possible. Yet, when this was done,



Mathews, Gregory Macalister. 1919. "Reviews." *The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 19(2), 148–151.

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