

Stark's Birds of South Africa. Volume I.¹ Thirty-three years ago appeared Mr. E. L. Layard's 'The Birds of South Africa,' published at Cape Town in 1867, a new edition of which, revised and augmented by Dr. R. Bowdler Sharpe, was brought out in London, 1875-84. Layard's unpretentious first edition was for many years a most useful handbook on South African birds, and for many years was the only one available for English readers. It was greatly amplified and modernized by Dr. Sharpe, but, through the rapid progress of our knowledge of South African ornithology, it had again fallen behind and was becoming antiquated when Dr. Stark took up the work, for which he was so well fitted through his intimate personal acquaintance with the birds in life, acquired during many years of research and extensive travel in South Africa.

It is greatly to be regretted that before his task was finished he should have fallen a victim in the unhappy strife now raging in that country. After spending some time in London last year to see his first volume through the press, he returned to South Africa in September. On the outbreak of hostilities, he joined the medical staff of the British Army as a volunteer, and on Nov. 19, 1899, was killed at Ladysmith by a shell. Apparently the second volume was not well advanced, as 'The Ibis' for January, 1900 (p. 220), says: "We fear that it will be very difficult to find anyone to continue the work for which our much-lamented friend was specially competent from his long personal studies of the birds of South Africa in their native wilds."

The present volume "is the first of a series in which it is proposed to give an account of the Fauna of Africa south of the Zambesi and Cunéné Rivers," under the general title 'The Fauna of South Africa,' and under the editorship of Mr. W. L. Sclater, Director of the South African Museum at Cape Town. The birds will occupy several volumes, of which the first, here under notice, includes about one half of the Passerine birds. In the general plan and arrangement, the Bird volumes are similar to Mr. Eugene Oates's 'Birds of British India.' The classification adopted, as regards the higher groups, is that proposed by Dr. P. L. Sclater in 1880, which divides birds into 21 orders. The subdivisions of the South African Oscines are mainly as proposed by Dr. Sharpe in 1891, and include 20 families, of which 12 are treated in the present volume, and include 182 species and subspecies. Of these 3 belong to the family Corvidæ, 16 to the Sturnidæ, 3 to the Oriolidæ, 60 to the Ploceidæ, 23 to the Fringillidæ, 29 to the Alaudidæ, 19 to the Motacillidæ, 16 to the Nectariniidæ, 1 to the Certhiidæ, 4 to the Promeropidæ, 4 to the Zosteropidæ, and 6 to the Paridæ.

The bird life of South Africa is, of course, of a strikingly different type from that of North America, the families prevailing there being entirely

¹The | Birds of South Africa | By | Arthur C. Stark, M. B. | Vol. I. | With a map and illustrations | London | R. H. Porter | 7 Princes Street, Cavendish Square, W. | 1900 — 8vo, pp. i-xxx + 1-322, 80 text cuts.

unrepresented with us, although shared with other parts of the Old World. The sixty species of Weaver Birds described in the present volume, the thirty species of Larks, the sixteen species of Starlings, and the sixteen of Sunbirds form five ninths of the birds treated in the present volume. Of these only the Larks have any American representatives, the genus *Otocoris*, alone of this immense family of more than 120 species and subspecies, reaching America. The Ploceidæ are practically 10 primaried Finches, but uniformly differ from the latter in building covered nests, which are often exceedingly elaborate, retort-shaped affairs, or massed into compound structures containing "from twenty to more than three hundred separate habitations, which have no communication with one another beyond being under the same roof," as in the case of the Social Weaver Bird. The collective nest is added to each year, "until either the tree in which it is built gives way, or its branches can afford room for no more material; fresh nests are then built in neighboring trees by the younger birds, about twenty pairs joining together to work at each." Besides the Weaver Birds, many other South African birds either build covered nests or occupy holes in trees or rocks, yet very few of the species breeding in covered nests or in holes lay white eggs. In fact, some of the Weaver Birds, as the species of the large genus *Hyphantornis*, are remarkable for the variability of color of even eggs of the same pair of birds. In the Masked Weaver Bird (*H. velatus*) "they are of some shade of white, cream colour, pink, green, or blue; often unspotted, but more frequently marked, more or less thickly, with small spots and dots of various shades of red and brown; less often they are blotched and clouded heavily with large masses of the same colours." The nest is retort-shaped, but is without a neck.

Dr. Stark's 'Birds of South Africa' is a well arranged 'manual,' giving the characters of all the higher groups, with keys to the genera and species, full references to the literature, very full descriptions of the species, including variations of plumage with sex and age, the geographical range, and short life histories. The cuts, drawn especially for the work by Mr. H. Grönvold, mainly illustrate structural features, the head, or head, wing and foot, being usually figured for each genus; and several of the remarkable nests of Weaver Birds and Sunbirds are also illustrated. The book is beautifully printed, on heavy paper, and is in every way as attractive as the text is satisfactory and authoritative. — J. A. A.

Publications Received. — Bangs, Outram. (1) On a Small Collection of Birds from San Sebastian, Colombia. (Proc. N. Engl. Zoöl. Club, I, pp. 75-80.) (2) The Gray-breasted Wrens of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. (*Ibid.*, pp. 83, 84.)

Batchelder, Charles F. An Undescribed Robin. (Proc. N. Engl. Zoöl. Club, I, pp. 103-106.)

Bonhote, J. L. (1) On the Moults and Colour Changes of the Corn-



1900. "Stark's Birds of South Africa. Volume I." *The Auk* 17, 189–190.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4069195>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/54122>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/4069195>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/89704>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Smithsonian

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.