

BOOK REVIEWS.

THE BIRDS OF THE BELGIAN CONGO

BY JAMES P. CHAPIN.

Part III

being Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History,
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The first part of Dr. Chapin's work was published as American Museum of Natural History Bulletin Vol. 45 in 1932 and covered the families Ostriches to Button Quails inclusive. The second, Vol. 75 of the Bulletin series, appeared in 1939. It dealt with the remainder of the Non-passerines, ending with the Woodpeckers. The third, the present part, has occupied Dr. Chapin for 15 years, subject to wartime interruptions. It comprises the Passerine families of the Pittas and Broadbills, Larks, Wagtails and Pipits, Bulbuls, Cuckoo-shrikes, Babblers, Warblers, Thrushes, Flycatchers and Swallows. The remaining Passerines will be dealt with in Part 4, which will appear as No. 75B of the Bulletin in 1954.

The reviewer is impelled to say at the outset that he is quite sure all interested in African ornithology, indeed bird-lovers everywhere, will wish the author health and strength to complete this great work with his own hand.

The plan of Part 3 adheres to that of previous volumes. Each family is prefaced by a key to the genera which the family comprises. Then each bird, be it race or monotypic species, is dealt with in a separate article. Where a bird has not yet been recorded for the Congo, but probably does occur there, it is given a short article but under an italicised heading in square brackets. Keys to the species, and occasionally to races, precede the treatment of the forms to which they relate. There are 14 plates of photographs at the end of the book before the index and 36 figures in the text.

The contents of the separate articles are arranged in the following order : —synonymy and literature-references, specimens examined, distribution, indication of differences between races so far as concerns the Congo and neighbouring areas, habitat, and finally general field notes, nests and eggs. In this last Dr. Chapin, where he may not have material of his own, occasionally permits himself to reproduce, with acknowledgements, the observations of others.

One feels that this is a book by an ornithologist for ornithologists, and so willingly dispenses with long detailed descriptions for which reference can be made to existing works. So also with 'English' names : Dr. Chapin points out how inapt such a name as Crombec is for the Sylviettas, and he

might have gone a good deal further. Roberts' invaluable book is, for the English reader, disfigured by scores of names which have obviously had to be invented for the occasion and which he can neither pronounce, understand, or remember. It is found that European boys quickly learn at least generic names in the simple 'Latin' of scientists, and it is surely better to refer to a bird as a *Bradypterus* than as a Swamp Warbler when it neither lives in swampland nor sings.

In general, the families and genera in this book follow the order of Sclater's Systema, but Dr. Chapin emphasizes that in the Timaliidae, Sylviidae and Muscicapidae the dividing lines are not always clear. Here, as in the matter of size of genera and deciding how much difference from a near relative entitles a bird to be regarded as a separate species, and how much as a geographical race only, opinion must come in. One qualified person may take one view, another another. There is no mathematical formula which can be applied to express the numberless degrees of relationship; we have at most only three words to express what a form may show, and must just do our best. It seems to this reviewer that Dr. Chapin steers a fair midway course between "lumpers" and "splitters". In the matter of other people's naming of races, one senses that if a competent ornithologist living so to speak on the spot, and with an obviously adequate mass of material before him, has decided that such-and-such a population constitutes a nameable sub-species because of the (stated) differences which it exhibits, then Dr. Chapin does not lightly cast that name into a synonymy. If in such a case he does reject the name, he gives his reasons and the reader is in a position to judge for himself. Would that this example might be generally followed.

Birds do not recognize political boundaries. Especially in the particular case of the neighbouring forests of Ituri and West Uganda, there is such a close resemblance between the avifaunas of the Congo Belge and the British territories in East Africa, that there is little Dr. Chapin writes that can be said to be without bearing on some bird or birds within our borders. To go into every such relationship would take up space greater than can be allowed for this review, and the reviewer has therefore looked at the matter from the standpoint most natural to himself as a resident in Kenya and selected some of what seem to him the most interesting cases which affect our Kenya birds, whether in systematics or nomenclature; at the same time reminding the reader that other selections might equally well be made from the viewpoint of a birdman for the other territories.

To give some details:—

First, the family Alaudidae. The singing bushlark so commonly heard and found breeding at Magadi in the rains (if they fall) is shown, following Grant and Praed, to have been wrongly named *cheniana* in the Systema: it should be *Mirafra cantillans schillingsi* Rchw. In a footnote Dr. Chapin suggests that the matter may be carried still further: the race name

may more properly be *meruensis* Sjostedt, and the whole *cantillans* group be referred to the south-eastern species *javanica* Horsfield. That would make, if both suggestions are adopted, our bird *M. javanica meruensis*. *M. albicauda*, also found in Kenya, e.g. at Nakuru, must be closely related to *javanica* also, it would seem, although specifically distinct. This reviewer can vouch for it that the songs of the Magadi birds are strikingly like that of *M. cheniana* in the Orange Free State, but that neither is ordinarily a mimic, such as are both *javanica* in Australia and *albicauda* in Kenya.

Dr. Chapin is not satisfied of the correctness of the division of the plain-backed pipits (Fam. Motacillidae) into two sibling species, a light coloured one *vaalensis* and a dark one *leucophrys*. He would leave all in *leucophrys* (the earlier name). The form *goodsoni* (found at Nakuru) thus remains *Anthus l. goodsoni*. Otherwise it would become *A. vaalensis goodsoni*.

Most of Van Someren's new races described from the Chyulu Hills are sustained, upon the principle, no doubt, to which reference is made above.

The colour-differences between the various Yellow Wagtails (to which the generic name *Motacilla* is restored instead of *Budytes*) are carefully described: only one species, *flava*, is recognized for all.

There are three small Bulbuls found side by side in Kavirondo forests, *Andropadus c. curvirostris*, *A. gracilis gracilis* and *A. ansorgei kavirondensis* (the *Charitillas g. kavirondensis* of the Systema). The differences are pointed out: it lies now with field observers in that locality to see whether nests and eggs can be distinguished.

For the *Pycnonotus* bulbuls the specific name *barbatus* is used to include all the species from North Africa to the Cape Province except *capensis* and *nigricans*: and there is at least a hint that these two, and *xanthopygos* of Syria and Aden, might also be brought into the same category. Field workers would agree: there is scarcely any noticeable difference between any of them in habits, voice, nest or eggs, and the existence of overlap anywhere is doubtful.

The co-existence of *Phyllastrephus terrestris* and *P. strepitans* on the coastlands of East Africa is accepted. It would be of interest to know exactly what differences there are in nests and eggs in those areas.

The genus *Nicator*, hitherto placed among the Shrikes, is removed to the Bulbuls, and the East African form *gularis* is accorded specific rank. Neither of these decisions will command universal acceptance, but reasons are given.

In the *Campephagidae* the species *Campephaga quiscalina* is separated, but the rest, in which the males may have a red or a yellow shoulder-patch, or none, are treated as intergrading geographical races of one widespread

species *phoenicea*. This seems a good and natural solution of a long-standing difficulty.

The forest-inhabiting babblers which up to now have been variously grouped under the genera *Alcippe*, *Turdinus*, *Ptyrticus*, *Illadopsis* and *Pseudoalcippe* are re-arranged into three genera — *Malacocincla*, *Ptyrticus* and *Pseudoalcippe*; and, as is done in Jackson, the bird formerly called *Alethe poliothorax* is added to the assemblage as a *Malacocincla*. We have in Kenya, of these little known birds, *M. fulvescens* and *M. rufipennis* represented by races at Kakamega, and *M. pyrrhopterus* and *P. abyssinicus* at higher levels. For *M. poliothorax* a locality in Kavirondo is given.

In *Turdoides*, the 'Happy Family' genus of scrubland Babblers, the suggestion is made that *plebejus* and *jardinei* form but one species. Of these, *plebejus* is the older name. That would give us in Kenya two races of *plebejus*, namely *kikuyuensis* from the Escarpment to Mau, and *cinereus* in the Nyando Valley and north to the Turquel. But note that *T. melanops* (not hitherto questioned as a separate species) is found alongside *plebeius* at Naivasha and Kisumu so that care in identification is necessary since this is a genus of which all members are much alike in habits, voice, nests and eggs.

Coming to the *Sylviidae*, Dr. Chapin agrees with Austin Roberts that by priority the yellow-bellied, grey-backed Eremomelas ought to be called *E. icteropygialis* and not *E. flaviventris* or *E. griseoflava*, since there is but one species and the first is the earliest name. Another group of Eremomelas, *pusilla-canescens*, are also brought together into a single species, for which the name must be *pusilla*. Our one form in Kenya (Highlands west of Rift) becomes *E. p. elgonensis* VanS. (incidentally, the reference to the B.B.O.C. near the top of p.269 should be to Vol. 62, not Vol. 61).

The genus *Apalis* (for which we may congratulate ourselves on the fact that no given 'English' name seems to have a chance against the scientific one) has long created taxonomical trouble, in the two widespread groups which may be called the spot-chests and the bar-throats respectively. In the former, the *flavida-caniceps* group, Dr. Chapin considers all should be united under one specific name, though Dr. Van Someren and Messrs. Grant and Praed think otherwise. Once again, it is mainly a question of the ordering of known facts, though we might usefully have more skins from the area of alleged overlap of species on the east side of Lake Victoria. In the second, the bar-throats, we have as a comparatively recent addition to our avifauna *griseiceps* from Chyulu. This is treated by Dr. Chapin as probably a race of *thoracica* of South Africa, which would lead to the welcome simplification of there being but one species all the way up from the Cape with, however, some striking racial differences en route.

We may thank the meticulous care which Admiral Lynes devoted to the genus *Cisticola*, for the fact that so few forms, considering how large a

genus it is, have been added since his day. The chief change, for which indeed Lynes himself was prepared, is in the transfer of the species *angusticauda* to *Cisticola* from *Apalis*. One cannot yet feel altogether satisfied that *chubbi* and *hunteri* may not form a single species, but Dr. Chapin merely raises the point without deciding more than that they are closely inter-allied, as field acquaintance shows.

The question of the best arrangement of the forms commonly grouped under the genus-name *Calamocichla*, and in particular whether we have to do with a sibling pair of species, does not seem to the reviewer convincingly settled. Dr. Chapin finds there are in fact siblings, both widespread, a smaller one *gracilirostris* with in Kenya the races *leptorhyncha* on the coast, *jacksoni* at Kisumu and *parva* in the Highlands; and a larger species *rufescens* which so far as we in Kenya are concerned occurs only on Lake Victoria, in the race *nilotica* side by side with the small bird *jacksoni*. Against this, nobody else has questioned that the Naivasha bird, *parva*, despite its unfortunate name, must be regarded as a large species, since the type measured in the wing 78 mm., well inside Dr. Chapin's key measurement of "males usually exceeding 73 mm". Dr. Chapin, however, considers that another criterion may be usefully applied; for he says that all the races of *gracilirostris* in tropical Africa differ from *rufescens* in having the base of the mandible pinkish-buff and the lining of the mouth bright orange. Yet Dr. Van Someren writes of *nilotica* (1922 p.231) that it has the gape orange in the adult and yellow at earlier life-stages. The nests shown in the text-figure on Dr. Chapin's p.448 as those of *rufescens* are very like, both in structure and attachment, those of *parva* found in papyrus on Lake Naivasha, and quite unlike those of *jacksoni* at Entebbe, whose eggs, also, are noticeably smaller than *parva*'s. Jackson (p.1046) describes nests of *parva* at Naivasha but seems to imply that they were not built in papyrus but in reeds near papyrus. If that is what he means, such a site for any *Calamocichla*'s nest has not been seen by the reviewer, who has found many in the papyrus. Can Jackson's nests have been those of the smaller sibling? And may it be that he just did not happen to come across the nests of the larger species in papyrus? Here is some work for the young and keen to take on. We need much more material.

Chloropeta, undoubtedly in all its habits a genus of Warblers, is removed, one hopes for good, from the flycatcher family. *C. similis* Richmond, the forest-dweller, is recognised as being distinct from the brushwood and river-margin inhabiting *C. natalensis*. For two birds whose songs are so dissimilar, it is surprising that it is so hard to find any consistent difference in the eggs.

The removal of *Hylia* to the Warblers is perhaps not so clearly justified, but if it does not deserve a family to itself it at all events is no Sunbird: nidification and egg show so much. Among *Turdidae*, *Erythropygia barbata* of the coast and the next belt of country inland is taken into the

southern genus *Tychaedon*, while the migrant *Galactotes*, which in its races *syriacus* and *familiaris* is a winter-visitor to Kenya, becomes a member of *Erythropygia* as has long been suggested by writers. The *zambesiana-leucoptera* assemblage, now treated as one species, and the distinct species *hartlaubi*, are all that is left of *Erythropygia* as it formerly was. This is another useful simplification: there is much variation in the amount and depth of breast-markings in these 'African Nightingales' as the Percivals of Mamandu used to call them, as might be expected with a bird widespread over differing levels, but all the nests and eggs are much alike.

The robin-like *Sheppardia cyornithopsis lopezi* is noted as occurring in Kavirondo. *S. sokokensis* Van S. from the Sokoke Forest can hardly be more than a race of the same species, constituting one more instance of a bird found in the country about Lake Victoria and turning up again at the coast in slightly different form, with no near relatives on the intervening higher ground.

Large specimens of the Common Wheatear appear from time to time in Kenya as winter migrants. These are now tentatively assigned by Dr. Chapin to *Oenanthe oe. rostrata*. But 'Ibis' 1931 p.234 should be referred to. Another migrant wheatear is common about Nairobi and Karen buildings at the same season; its name is now *Oe. pleschanka* again, this antedating *leucomela* which has been for some time in use.

Neocossyphus, a rare bird but a striking one, must surely have been omitted from Jackson by oversight. It occurs sparsely in the coastal scrubs of Kenya.

The changed systematic arrangement of the better known thrushes of the genus *Turdus* will cause some surprise among field ornithologists. Dr. Chapin rests his conclusions, however, on field observation as well as on the study of skins of all forms involved. The result is that the Kurrichane Thrush of the Systema, which is there accorded a distribution from the Transvaal right up to Senegal, is now limited to the south of a line which may be roughly described as Tanganyika, Katanga, North Angola. Uganda birds (*centralis*) which have been considered as conspecific with the Kurrichane and are very like that bird in habits, nests and eggs, are now placed in one species with the Olive Thrush of the Cape (*olivaceus*): this species is now treated as extending over most of the continent north to Eritrea on one side and the Gambia on the other. But excluded from *olivaceus* are the forest Thrushes found from Mlanje Mountain north and north-eastwards through Ruwenzori, Kivu, Kenya and the eastern highlands of Tanganyika to Abyssinia and Eritrea, in suitable localities of course. These now become races of *T. abyssinicus* Gmelin whose type-locality is Abyssinia. *Turdus tephronotus* from Lamu and parts of that coast does not fall to be considered closely by Dr. Chapin, and there is also a form near *centralis* in the Kerio Valley which is at present of uncertain status. It

would be interesting to see a series of skins from the Eritrean high plateau where it would seem that *olivaceus* and *abyssinicus* may meet.

In the flycatcher family, the *Muscicapidae*, the species *Alseonax cinereus* is transferred to the genus *Hypodes*, of Cassin, and its race *cinereus* is considered to include all Kenya birds of the species. It should, however, be kept in mind that van Someren (1922 p.96) found that his race *kikuyuensis* from Kyambu could be distinguished from Voi and Tsavo birds, and that Slater agreed with this differentiation.

The difficulties in the taxonomy of the sibling pair, and perhaps others, in the genus *Bradornis* are not wholly cleared up. Perhaps study of nests and eggs might help to a solution, for in Ukamba we find the siblings side by side (*microrhynchus* and *pallidus* or *griseus*), the former making a stoutish though small nest lined with feathers or at least generally with some feathers in it and laying uniform olive eggs, while the latter makes a smaller transparent nest and lays heavily marked eggs. *Pallidus* ranges from Nyasaland right up to Eritrea and its eggs, though varying in size, are always of one type: *microrhynchus*' eggs are not yet known except from the drier parts of Kenya and from north-eastern Tanganyika.

For *Alseonax minimus* (Heuglin) Dr. Chapin substitutes the specific name *adustus*, thus making the races in Kenya (*interpositus*, *marsabit* and *chyulu*) all geographical forms of the Dusky Flycatcher of South Africa. Field naturalists will probably find that this conforms to their own ideas.

The lake-side flycatcher which uses old weavers' nests to lay in, and which is called by Jackson *Alseonax aquaticus*, is put back into *Muscicapa*. The race at Kisumu is *infulata* Hartl. In the genus *Diaphorophyia* (small forest flycatchers not unlike Batis in appearance and habits) the name of the species which we know as *jamesoni*, which inhabits Nandi, is changed to *blissetti* and the Nandi bird in consequence becomes *D. b. jamesoni* Sharpe. Another change in this genus is that *D. ansorgei silvae* of Jackson becomes *D. concreta graueri* Hartert. This is found in Kavirondo.

Terpsiphone (this name is restored for the Paradise Flycatchers in place of *Tchitrea*) is bound to go on causing systematic difficulties owing to the (assumed) hybridisation in West Africa whose effects have spread far to eastward and are observable in Kenya. The crossings have been between two western forest-inhabiting species, *rufiventer* and *rufocinerea*, with *viridis* of bushland and savannas. What Dr. Chapin does is to give us (figs. 28-31) drawings which, if they do not say the last word, will at least help the student to grasp the salient elements in a position so complex that it may fairly be said to have no parallel in the bird-life of the Ethiopian Region.

The Blue Flycatchers which have generally been called *Erannornis* now revert to the older name *Elminia*. From experience, this has the merit of

being easier to spell than the other, but it may be confused in memory with that of the warbler-genus *Eminia*.

One of the three forms of crested and fantailed flycatchers (genus *Trochocercus*) found in Kenya, *T. b. vittatus* Rchw., has its name changed to *T. cyanomelas bivittatus* Rchw. This name is considered by Dr. Chapin to apply to all birds of the species from the coast inland to Mr. Urageess: but Dr. Van Someren has distinguished central forest birds by reason of larger size.

There are few changes among the *Hirundinidae*, but the generic name of the Grey-Rumped Swallow becomes *Pseudhirundo*, and the Rock Martin of Kenya is to be *Ptyonoprogne fuligula rufigula* instead of *F. r. rufigula* as it is in Jackson. Dr. Chapin seems to suggest that *Hirundo aethiopica* of the tropics might be treated as conspecific with the South African bird *albigularis*. Habits and nidification are the same, and the only differences are in size and the continuity of the breast-band, which seem hardly enough to rest a specific differentiation upon.

This review has emphasized the taxonomic value of Dr. Chapin's work because it is primarily scientific in character and outlook: but in almost every article there will be found something to interest the lover of birds and much also for the general reader, dealing as it does with what is still largely an unspoiled part of a fascinating continent. Those who have already had some experience of nature as it reveals itself in the dark forests of Africa may well, as they read, imagine themselves treading once more on the carpet of damp leaves under the dense shadow of great trees and thick undergrowth, listening awhile as human footfalls cease and the creatures of the primeval wilderness begin to move again, to the rustle of small animals and the voices of a hunting-party of birds following up a line of safari ants for what they can get in the way of insects, be it only the ants themselves.

The reviewer apologises if he has been insufficiently critical. He just does not feel able to criticize. But he can and does appreciate and thank the writer, and with him the native assistant Nekuma, for good work done.

C.F.B.

A PRELIMINARY LIST of the BIRDS OF NATAL and ZULULAND, with a short account of the status of each; prepared by P. A. CLANCEY, Director, Museum and Art Gallery, Durban. October 1953. Published by the Durban Museum. pp. 85.

Zululand is part of the Province of Natal, yet is so often thought of as being a distinct area that Mr. Clancey did well to include the name in his title.

The list comprises 561 species as compared with 875 for the whole Union in Austin Roberts' book.

In general, the arrangement is that of Vincent's Union-wide list (Jack Vincent, *A Check List of the Birds of South Africa*, Cape Times, 1952). Inevitably, there are departures from Roberts, a highly individualised work, in the treatment of species and races as well as of genera. There is no general agreement on such matters, and there will be no uniform result in print till some accepted outside body acts as arbiter.

The subdivisions of which Mr. Clancey makes use are Orders, Sub-orders (where convenient), Families and Genera. As is done in 'The Ostrich' the names of species are printed in capitals, the same as family-headings. The particular race or races of each species occurring in the area are given in italics below the species-name, and in every case the author of the name, specific or racial, is given following it. Generic names are placed, in roman type, at the head of the species which they comprise. On the right hand side of the page is the English name, and beneath that a few words indicating status. A serial number is given to each species, the series running right through. There is no index, but the list of Families at the beginning enables a reader who has some idea of his birds to find any species he wants speedily.

The whole layout is clear, concise and easily scanned; it would, this reviewer thinks, have been still clearer had specific names been printed in roman type, leaving capitals to family-headings.

One notes a tendency to enlarge the genus beyond what is usual. Examples are:—the genus *Erythrocnus* disappears in *Butorides*, *Stephanoaetus* in *Polemaetus*, all the other Bustard genera in *Otis*, *Cinnyris* and *Chalcomitra* in *Nectarinia*, etc., etc. Some of these look like stretching the notion of genus even beyond the bounds of what is convenient. Without question, Roberts' narrow view met with scant approval from ornithologists working outside South Africa, and parochialism must be avoided: but it has to be kept in mind that a whole generation almost of young South African bird-lovers have to be brought back gently to the right road if they are to be brought back at all. Mr. Vincent has shown the way: one only hopes that Mr. Clancey may not have overshot the mark by his drastic expansions. It is most important to have the country behind its natural leaders in the science, and understanding why.

In some cases it is thought that Mr. Clancey has been over-ready to accord specific rank where the modern current runs in favour of treating the forms in question as subspecific only. Such instances are *Haematopus moquini*, *Charadrius marginatus*, *Larus hartlaubi*, *Upupa africana*, *Motacilla lutea*, *Nilaus nigritemporalis*. No two systematists seem able to agree on what should be done with *Calamocetor* (or *Calamocichla*) and Mr. Clancey's English names for these birds do not cast any further light. Indeed, necessary as a purge was to get rid of some at least of the names which Mr. Clancey stigmatises as "egregious", it might have been better not to disturb Mr. Vincent's ones for this genus.

There are a lot of cases where it seems best to cut the Gordian knot by using the scientific name as the English one. *Nicator*, where Mr. Clancey does this, is a good case in point: it is easy to remember, it does not prejudice the issue of whether the bird is a Shrike or a Bulbul or something else altogether, and every naturalist who knows the bird uses it already. Why not treat *Batis* the same way? and why not *Cisticola tout seul* in the case of another much-referred to group?

Mr. Clancey's List is a most useful contribution to the mosaic of work on the ornithology of the Ethiopian region which by the efforts of many is gradually being shaped into unity; but there are still many almost-blanks to fill, some larger, some smaller. Every ornithologist who concerns himself with Africa must look forward to the day when someone will do for this generation what Reichenow did for an earlier one. The model is there, and could hardly be improved upon, but there have been advances in systematics since Reichenow's day and an enormous mass of material has accumulated awaiting analysis and utilisation. It is a life's work for somebody, English, American or may it be German as before, and it will entail the expenditure of much money: but it will have been worth it if it can be faithfully done.

C.F.B.

A CHECK LIST of the BIRDS of NYASALAND (including data on ecology and breeding seasons). By C. W. Benson, B.A. (Cantab.). Published by the Nyasaland Society (P.O. Box 125, Blantyre), and the Publications Bureau, Secretariat, Lusaka, 1953. Price 6/- (to Members of the Nyasaland Society 5/-).

The author's aims are set out in his Introduction. Since Belcher's book was published in 1930, about 150 forms (including races) have been added to the Nyasaland list, mostly by Mr. Benson or through his efforts. There has thus been a great increase in our knowledge of the birds of the Protectorate: indeed, thanks to the fortunate circumstances of there being on the spot a worker so well equipped for obtaining and assessing information, the rate of ornithological advance has been greater in Nyasaland than in any other part of the Ethiopian Region that comes to mind. Mr. Benson's material has, in the main, already been published from time to time in ornithological journals, but these are not easy of general access and it was an excellent idea to give it now to the general public in this form. Rarely can there have appeared a book on birds in which so much detail has been compressed into so small a compass without loss of clearness or accuracy. The reader must at the outset remember that this is a scientifically-framed list of birds inhabiting or visiting a particular area, and not an account of their habits or a description of their appearance: for such, recourse must be had to other works, to which Mr. Benson makes reference.

The nomenclature, with few exceptions, is that of Praed and Grant in their work on the birds of eastern and north-eastern Africa now in course

of publication; where that is departed from, a reference is given to the authority followed.

After the Introduction, the first part of the book is a description of the various kinds of bird-habitat which are to be found in Nyasaland, divided first into dry and wet areas and then each of these subdivided again into areas which by reason of their distinctive vegetation or other differences in character exhibit corresponding differences in bird life. Every field-worker knows how birds are affected by type of locality, but it has not often been set out so methodically in print for a large area.

The List itself is immediately preceded by a Table of Families which can be scanned at one opening so that, index apart, a species can be found in a moment or two.

With 609 species to be enumerated, all unnecessary matter must, one sees, be cut away; and there must be constant resort to abbreviations. The result cannot help reading a little bare and skeletonized to one who casually dips into the book — the average entry must take up less than an inch — but a little patience will show the ornithologically-minded that this is a veritable mine of exact information, at once a conspectus of the individual species and a guide to amplified accounts. It is thought that a better idea of the nature, scope and value of the book will be given by example than description, and here is one taken at random, which happens to deal with one of the smaller hawks, the kestrel of England and of South Africa :

“ 61. *Falco tinnunculus*. Kestrel. B.57, R.123.

(a) (PM) *F. t. tinnunculus*. Once; Bembeke 1. (67).

(b) *F. t. rupicolus*. Above 2,000 ft. Rocky Hills, on which breeds, also tobacco barns.

(Br.) VIII, 1. Lisiye, tobacco barn (Rf.) 36. 67. ”

That terse note, expanded by reference to interpretations of its abbreviations, all to be found in the book, conveys the information that the Kestrel is dealt with in Belcher's *Birds of Nyasaland* at p.57 and in Roberts' *Birds of South Africa* at p.123. Next, that two forms of it have been found in Nyasaland; firstly the type race as a palaeartic migrant but with only one record, an occurrence in the month of January at Bembeke, a place 6 miles S.E. of Dedza Boma, which was published in 'The Ibis' for 1940 at p.284, and secondly the South African race as a permanent resident at levels above 2,000 ft. a.s.l., where it inhabits, and nests in, rocky hills. It also nests in the high brick barns in which tobacco is cured on the plantations. The sole breeding record of this resident form in Nyasaland relates to a nest found at Lisiye 8 miles north of Mphunzi in Dedza district in the month of August in a tobacco barn. Finally, further references are given to the Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, U.S.A., and to "The Ibis".

This will indicate sufficiently how much is told, and how little space wasted.

After the main List, there follow six appendices. The first gives 15 species listed by Belcher but which are for one reason or another now rejected. The second is a list of 'possibilities' — 29 in number. Appendix 3 is a full, if highly compressed bibliography. No. 4 is a gazetteer of all localities in Nyasaland which are mentioned in the work. No. 5 is an alphabetical list of native names of birds, with authorities. Finally, No. 6 is a short 'Addenda'.

There is an Index of Genera, which is all the index an ornithologist needs to any bird-book.

One obvious criticism is that the name of the original describer of the species by the scientific name which it bears in the text, is not given. This is usually done in a work of the scientific importance of Mr. Benson's book, though it was not done by Robert's. The direct uses of giving it are several. A name may be resuscitated after a long interval, or it may be a quite recent bestowal; and in either case one would like to know, why the change? At other times one wishes to be able to check a priority. Or, again, so simple a matter as a mistake in spelling seems to be on the tapis, and yet in certain cases such a mistake must stand; is this one? There are, indeed, few spelling mistakes to be suspected in the present work, but one does seem to see such in 'baboecala' (415) 'aibifrons' (556) and 'Pogoniu-lius' (287 and 288). It is perhaps not of great importance to English readers whether the 'umlaut' is there or not in words of German origin such as 'fülleborni': but it changes the pronunciation, and in fact it is the better practice to insert it, if in the original.

There are some items of interest to ornithologists in Mr. Benson's book to which particular attention may be drawn. The evidence for local breeding of the Osprey (nestlings being fed) is convincing if the observer was reliable. Ten occurrences of *Porzana marginalis* indicate that this rail is not so rare as had been supposed. *Clamator jacobinus* is considered responsible for some at least of the blue eggs found in *Turdoides*' nests. It may be remembered that all of this Cuckoo's eggs in South Africa are white, as also was one taken from the oviduct by Jackson at Namanga in Kenya. But Abyssinian eggs described by Erlanger were blue, as are all Indian ones. The data given concerning *Centropus* suggests that possibly the *senegalensis* and *monachus* groups may be conspecific. (The reference to *C. s. burchelli* under No. 212 is not quite clear). Every field naturalist who knows the birds' calls will agree with Mr. Benson in placing *Caprimulgus fervidus* as a race of *C. pectoralis*; one wonders if the same test will confirm the conspecificity of *C. guttifer* with *C. poliocephalus*, which also has a most distinct call. The specific name *narina* for the more common of the two Trogons may or may not be a person's name; one would like to know the origin of it in Stephens' mind. Mr. Benson accepts the view,

rejected by Dr. Chapin, that the long-billed pipits belong to a sibling pair of species, the dark *leucophrys* and the light *vaalensis*. Priority must decide, but it seems a pity that we have to label so common an African species as Richard's Pipit '*novaezeelandiae*'. Mr. Benson indicates that he considers Syrian bulbuls of the genus *Pycnonotus* to be conspecific with tropical birds by using for the latter the specific name '*xanthopygos*', but does not show why the earlier '*barbatus*' should be superseded. A most interesting observation recorded under species No. 433 suggests doubts as to the distinctness of *Camaroptera brachyura* and *C. brevicaudata*. Possibly hybridisation? At the same time as Mr. Skead is finding evidence of crossing between *Zosterops virens* and *Z. capensis* in the Ciskei, Mr. Benson emphasizes the difficulty of separating *Z. virens* from *Z. senegalensis*. These species seem distinct enough in Kenya; but the whole genus in Africa needs a review in the light of more material than at present seems available. The occurrence of the Mascarene Martin (No. 465) at Lake Chilwa in mid-winter is something wholly new for Africa. A suggestion that *Ploceus nigriceps* is conspecific with *P. spilonotus* and *P. cucullatus* would, if translated into actuality, simplify the taxonomy of a difficult group; *cucullatus* appears to be the oldest name.

In deciding for his list the question, good species or only a race? — Mr. Benson has leaned towards the older school (perhaps following Messrs. Grant and Praed whose first volume alone has up to now been seen by the public) and away from the biological concept used by Mayr and other modern American writers; but he frequently points out the alternative without adopting it. There are cases of doubt throughout the list: in particular, one notices that of the various Yellow Wagtails, usually treated as conspecific but here as separate species. Differences of opinion will always exist on this head; the unfortunate thing is that until there is some recognized arbiter on at least the Anglo-American level, the differences will go on perpetuating themselves in print, to the puzzlement of the novice who will be the ornithologist of tomorrow and needs encouragement.

This is indeed an excellent book, which everyone interested can afford and should order while it is still in print. It seems to the reviewer as good value, having regard to contents on one side and price on the other, as has been put before African bird-lovers for a very long time.

C.F.B.

THE BIRDS OF WEST AND EQUATORIAL AFRICA by David Armitage Bannerman Vol. One, Struthionidae to Picidae — Vol. Two, Eurylaemidae to Ploceidae. In all pp. 1526. 1953, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh. £6.6s. net.

These two volumes represent the pith of the matter contained in the author's great work on the Birds of West Africa which was published by the Crown Agents under governmental authority in eight volumes, of which

the first appeared in 1930 and the eighth in 1951. That larger publication is now hard to obtain: we noticed it recently in a bookseller's catalogue priced at £48 with no indication of condition. The present work is no ordinary abridgment, but a complete rewriting, and in consequence it makes admirable reading. There is an abundance of those black-and-white drawings which do so much more than one would have thought possible to reproduce a bird's true appearance and so facilitate identification, with, for full measure, 54 beautifully executed plates by Lodge, admirably produced. A change of title will be noticed. It was found that three-quarters of the 1536 forms inhabiting West Africa range right across the continent, so that the Congo Belge, the British Territories in East Africa, and the Sudan have geographical representatives of them, if not the identical species or race. These eastern forms are now dealt with in the text, which gives the two volumes a positive advantage over the larger work for ornithologists in East Africa. The merits of the lesser bulk need not be stressed. The same drawings of heads and feet to illustrate family characteristics are here, as in the earlier volumes, and there are as many keys as the field-worker could possibly want. There is less detailed scientific matter, and more general talk about the bird; which is really what is most appreciated by the seeker after retainable knowledge: if one misses anything it is the abundant field notes which were so liberally disposed through the larger work; these have had to be compressed into more general statements of fact from the nature of the new book. We hope that everyone who can do so will get himself a copy of this book while it is still in print: it is an addition to one's library that will surely never be regretted.

C.F.B.