

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD, Vol. 5. By James Lee Peters. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1945: 6 x 9 in., xi + 306 pp. \$5.00.

The publication of another volume of Peters' Check-list, which now covers 92 families, 1,009 genera, 3,344 species, and 8,007 subspecies of birds, is news of the first importance to ornithologists everywhere.

This new volume fully maintains the very high scholarly standard set in the earlier parts; it even exceeds them in fullness of treatment, detail of synonymy, and number of helpful annotations. Only the physical make-up of this volume has suffered; war-time conditions have forced the use of a poorer, less opaque, paper and the elimination of the protective gilt top.

Peters gives us no statistical recapitulation of his results, but because such a summary is of general interest and real biological importance, a tabulation of the numbers in each category under the twelve families treated in this volume is given below.

	Genera	Species	Subspecies
Trochilidae, Hummingbirds .....	123	327	688
Coliidae, Colies .....	1	6	29
Trogonidae, Trogons .....	8	34	103
Alcedinidae, Kingfishers .....	14	87	337
Todidae, Todies .....	1	5	5
Momotidae, Motmots .....	6	8	45
Meropidae, Bee-eaters .....	7	24	50
Leptosomatidae, Ground-rollers .....	1	1	3
Coraciidae, Rollers .....	5	16	37
Upupidae, Hoopoes .....	1	1	9
Phoeniculidae, Wood-hoopoes .....	2	6	27
Bucerotidae, Hornbills .....	12	46	104
TOTALS .....	171	561	1437

Peters has listed the Leptosomatidae first in the suborder Coracii, but otherwise follows exactly Wetmore's (1940) arrangement. Five new names are proposed in this volume, but they represent mere changes in "labels" applied to already known biological entities.

Only a few of the other changes proposed relate to birds of the area covered by the A.O.U. Check-List. Rivoli's Hummingbird, of Arizona, is listed as *Eugenes fulgens fulgens* (not *E. f. aureoviridis*, as in the Nineteenth Supplement); Salvin's Hummingbird (*Amazilia salvini*) is dropped, since it is believed to be only a hybrid; the Calliope Hummingbird becomes *Stellula c. calliope*; the Copper-tailed Trogon is represented by one subspecies (*Trogon elegans canescens*) in Arizona and by another (*T. e. ambiguus*) in "extreme southern Texas"; the Belted Kingfisher is again placed in the genus *Ceryle*.

More than half of the volume is devoted to the hummingbirds—a family that has always attracted the special attention of ornithologists and nevertheless still baffles their best attempts at classification. In the introduction, Peters makes it quite clear that he is far from satisfied with his own results, and he even suggests that the next reviser should attempt a classification based on the females, since the present arrangement over-emphasizes the secondary sexual characters of the male.

Although Peters remarks that generic differentiation has been much over-done in the Trochilidae, his own classification does little to remedy that fault. He has indeed reduced to subgeneric status several groups hitherto given full generic rank, but he ends by recognizing five more genera than did Sharpe in 1900, although



only four new hummingbirds requiring generic recognition have been discovered since that time. Almost half of the genera he lists are monotypic.

It is interesting to compare the numbers of genera, species, and subspecies recognized by the last four ornithologists to revise the hummingbirds:

Sharpe (1900): 118 genera, 570 forms;  
Cory (1918): 130 genera, 649 forms;  
Simon (1921): 189 genera, 660 forms;  
Peters (1945): 123 genera, 688 forms.

Hummingbirds exceed most other bird groups in their propensity to hybridize, and many of Peters' notes deal with this remarkable characteristic. It will be a long time before our lagging knowledge of live hummingbirds reaches a point where we understand the nature of this phenomenon and its psychological and physiological causes.

Our extraordinary ignorance of hummingbirds is strikingly demonstrated again and again. For example: two genera and nine additional species have never been seen in life by any ornithologist but are based solely on Bogotá trade skins; many others are represented by only one or two specimens and are therefore almost equally unknown as living animals.

Peters' well-balanced judgment and careful attention to every detail are evident throughout the book. He has again given us a first-class piece of work, and we wish him all speed in his great undertaking, which so immeasurably stimulates and facilitates ornithological research.—J. Van Tyne.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA. By Joseph Grinnell and Alden H. Miller. Cooper Ornithological Club, Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 27, Dec. 30, 1944: 608 pp., 1 col. pl., 57 figs. \$6.00 (cloth, \$7.00).

Almost every year sees one or more additions to the literature on local, state and regional avifaunas. They are all useful to the growing corps of bird students; some are briefly annotated check-lists; others are well-illustrated volumes with keys, descriptions, and much textual matter on habits. Nearly all have one characteristic in common: their object is to tell the reader what birds occur or have occurred in the area in question, in what numbers, and at what times of the year. They are geographic studies, with little or no systematic or taxonomic investigation; the A.O.U. Check-List and its supplements are accepted.

A combination of circumstances makes the present list a much greater enterprise. The very large state of California has great diversity of terrain and climate, caused by numerous mountain systems. The degree of subspecific variation is not exceeded in any other part of the continent. Drs. Grinnell and Miller, as life-long students of these variations, with ample field experience, and the best regional collections in the country, have every right to express their judgment on many knotty and controversial racial problems. They are to be commended for not hesitating to depart from the taxonomy of the A.O.U. Check-List. Indeed, it would have been most unfortunate if their knowledge, opinions, and experience had been "put to sleep," as it were, in slavishly following a check-list printed in 1931. The reader, however, is cautioned against concluding that either the authors or I disbelieve in the general usefulness of a check-list prepared by a committee. The committee has undertaken an arduous and protracted labor in the hope of producing a useful general reference work, without claiming that everything is settled, and further research superfluous or impertinent. Such assumptions are too easily made by the ignorant or ill natured, who are not competent to judge whether, for example, the Black Petrel should be in a special genus, *Loomelania*, or not. But Dr. Miller has every right to believe in the validity of *Loomelania* and publish his reasons, even if to date a majority of the Check-list Committee do not. It gives me particular pleasure to defend this right, because I do not happen to think *Loomelania* necessary myself!



Van Tyne, Josselyn. 1945. "Check-List of Birds of the World, Vol. 5 by James Lee Peters." *The Wilson bulletin* 57(3), 206–207.

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