

THE WILSON BULLETIN.

A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Study of Living Birds.

Official Organ of the Wilson Ornithological Chapter of the Agassiz Association.

Edited by **LYNDS JONES.**

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EDITORIAL.

A decade has passed since the organization of the corresponding Wilson Ornithological Chapter of the Agassiz Association on a basis of co-operative study of the life histories of our birds. The results attained have proved that the scheme of co-operative study is practicable and profitable, and the publication of the results have proved an incentive to many outside the Chapter to enter the field for active service. We have reason to be proud of our record.

From the first we have stood boldly for the study of life histories as a legitimate part of scientific ornithology as opposed to the purely popular. Because we have chosen, usually, to use the vernacular rather than the scientific names of the birds, and have aspired to some degree of literary form in expression, it does not therefore follow that we have been unscientific in method. The results have proved the contrary. Technical language has its legitimate place, but we hold that it is not an essential to scientific results. We must not be understood as opposed to systematic and structural ornithology. On the contrary, we are heartily in sympathy with the effort to fashion a stable system of classification. But that is not our field. Systematic ornithology must

necessarily very largely deal with the dead bird. Our chief concern is with the living bird.

The systematist of today cannot do his work accurately without a great amount of material at his disposal, which involves large collections of skins and bodies. Such collections are coming more and more to be brought into certain centers which are readily available to the comparatively few who are best trained to do that sort of work. This is as it should be. Let me reiterate, then, that this is not our field. We have neither the material nor the training to pursue this line of investigation. But the ten years of work which we have done has raised up those who are well fitted to conduct investigations in the line of life histories, and to search out general ecological problems. Here lies our strength. Here we have proved ourselves. We must push the work already so well begun if we hope to reap its certain fruitage.

The calendar winter is now past, and with it the season of stagnation in bird study for many of us. As the spring draws on interest awakens, calling for special effort in bird study. It seems too bad that this awakened interest and study should fail to count for much year after year, simply because it stands for individual study only. By combining our efforts upon the March migrations we should be able to make the work tell something. The migrations are generally so scattering, and the birds therefore so prominent when they do come, that comparatively little difficulty is met in recording each species when it arrives. Can we not give unusual heed to the migrations for this present March, noting the first arrivals and their numbers, and the increase in numbers of each of the several species as the days pass? Note, also, when the females come, if that is possible, and any movements northward of those species which have come down from the north to spend the winter with us. Can we not make this a month when the number of individuals of each species shall be counted and recorded upon each trip into the fields and woods? There is no better way to learn the birds than to make a count of the individuals seen every time that is possible. If you will send your notes to the editor, early in April, they will be worked into a report for the June number.

There are several lines of work which have been begun but never completed, for one reason or another. Two of these, at least, were too large subjects for the equipment which we had. The members engaged in the direction of these studies have been lost track of, so that work cannot be carried to completion. There

is one line of study, however, which was worked into a final report, which needs further attention. That is the report upon the Warbler Songs. Much has been learned about some of the species not then known, and no doubt the interest which that report awakened has led to a more general study of warbler songs than ever before. We propose to pursue that study further, and solicit notes from any person who has given the songs of the warblers any attention. Select your own method of representation, and give your own interpretation. The only caution which needs to be given is to be certain that you know your bird before you record its song as certainly belonging to a certain species. Such notes placed in the hands of the editor will be thankfully received and given careful attention at once, and finally will be worked into a revised edition of Warbler Songs.

The present number of THE WILSON BULLETIN marks the beginning of its ninth volume. Its pathway has not been strewn with roses. Its beginning was small and worthy of little notice. With the passing years it has grown into its own place as a magazine of Ornithology with an individuality not shared by any other bird magazine ever published. It has been the means by which the Wilson Chapter has made known its steady policy of co-operation in the study of living birds, a policy which finds expression in the many state organizations for the express purpose of carefully studying the birds of the state. We believe it is true that these state organizations have grown out of the Wilson Chapter. In entering upon the present year with the improvements which this number shows, we believe that the influence of the Chapter's work will find larger expression in a larger circulation, and will so commend itself to those who have not thus far become acquainted with our methods and results, that many will desire to unite with us in this plan of study. Certainly it is worthy of the careful consideration of every student of birds. The little each one can do will count in the final result.

Members and readers may begin to tire of the iteration and reiteration which the editor has indulged in about the necessity of counting the birds in your region. A little thought will give some idea of the great importance which a study, such as Mr. Burns' "A Sectional Bird Census," is to the cause of Ornithology. It forms the only true basis for an estimate of the birds inhabiting any similar region. The possibilities which lie in the future for determining the influence of changed environment, of the adaptability of the bird to changes which are sure to come, and all the problems which grow out of the whole question of the in-

fluences of civilization, larger civilization, upon the birds, are immeasurable. If we could scatter such sectional bird censuses over the country at large, their contribution to the economic questions involved in the relation of birds to all human interests would be immense. Perhaps not many of us feel capable of making such a census. It is a great undertaking, and fraught with many difficulties which do not appear at first sight. But there is one thing which every person can do, wherever he may study the living birds, and that is to keep a record of the numbers of individuals of each species seen every time the birds are studied. Even this will not be possible with some species at some times of year, but with many species it is entirely possible at any time. Those which are so numerous that an accurate count is impossible, do not need such careful attention.

This is the field which we can occupy, and for which we are organized. Not only will your own note-books be far richer, but they will make possible comparisons with the work of others in other regions, and form a basis for estimates of your actual bird population. Before you refuse to accept the force of this argument, sit down and think just what you mean when you say that a certain species is common, or abundant, or rare. If you are satisfied with that sort of information, this request is not directed at you, but if you feel that these terms can be given some definite meaning by work such as we have suggested, we shall be glad to welcome you to the ranks of those who will do this sort of work. Surely we can agree that the work is of great importance, and so do what we can to make our note-books mean something definite.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

Eighteen (18) ballots were cast for officers of the Chapter, for 1902, resulting in the following selections, viz.:

President—Lynds Jones, Oberlin, Ohio.

Vice President—N. Hollister, Delavan, Wis.

Secretary—John W. Daniel, Jr., 3146 Q street., N. W. Washington, D. C.

Treasurer—F. L. Burns, Berwyn, Pa.

Executive Committee—John H. Sage, R. M. Strong, H. C. Ober-

BENJ. T. GAULT, *Judge of Election.*

I find the above statement correct. R. M. STRONG, *President.*



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