

Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

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THE BULLETIN

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

A NEW BUCHEN COLLECTION

The interest and generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Walther Buchen of Chicago are helping the Bird Division of Chicago Natural History Museum toward one of its aims—that of having in its collection a complete representation of the birds of the world. Last year when the Buchens returned from a hunting trip to East Africa they presented to the Museum an extremely interesting collection of birds from Mount Kenya. While in the Museum, looking at our East African material and discussing African field work, Mr. and Mrs. Buchen became interested in filling the gaps in our East African collection. A correspondent of theirs in Nairobi, Kenya Colony, a noted authority on East African birds, might be able, they thought, to help us get some of the species we lacked. They asked us for a list of the birds of East Africa that were not represented in the Museum collection.

The list when made up numbered some 400 species from Kenya and Uganda. Some were known from but a single specimen, some were great rarities, some came from remote corners of the colonies, and the status of some was in doubt. It was a formidable list and one not easily filled. But hopefully we sent it to Mr. Buchen.

On June 2 of this year we received from Nairobi a box of bird skins for which Mr. and Mrs. Buchen had arranged. It contained 203 specimens of 109 species and subspecies. We have as yet done little more than list the material and note that

at least 25 of the kinds are new to our collection, hitherto unrepresented, that there are rarities, and that there are series of topotypes that will be of great value in future taxonomic work. This is indeed a picked collection. Such a way of completing a collection—a way that provides just the specimens we need—is the sort of arrangement that happens only too rarely, but when it does it comes as the fulfillment of a museum curator's dream.

Discoveries will be made as the collection is studied. In an earlier number of the BULLETIN we mentioned a little grassland warbler known as Hunter's cisticola, in the previous Buchen collection, which looked as though it would repay study. We were not mistaken. A scientific paper entitled "Altitudinal Variation in the African Grass Warbler, *Cisticola hunteri*," has been prepared on this and published. Part of the interest in the problem centered on the further evidence of altitudinal variation. It was known that on Mt. Kilimanjaro, in Tanganyika Territory, Hunter's cisticola was pale at lower altitudes and became progressively darker at higher altitudes, until at 12,000 feet the bird was quite different in color. With the aid of the Buchen material it was demonstrated that the same variation happened on Mt. Kenya, more than 200 miles to the north in Kenya Colony.

But of further interest was the fact that high-altitude birds on Mt. Kenya were indistinguishable from high-altitude birds on Mt. Kilimanjaro. There seems little doubt that on each mountain the dark high-altitude birds evolved directly from the pale populations at the base of each mountain, and this is proved by the persistence of birds of intermediate coloration at intermediate levels.

A nice problem in nomenclature, in the applying of names, arose. The paler lower-altitude birds were obviously all one subspecies, despite their range consisting of



MR. AND MRS. WALTHER BUCHEN

On ground is an eland, largest of African antelopes.

many scattered areas. But could these two high-altitude populations, indistinguishable in appearance but separated by 200 miles or more and with another subspecies between them, be included under one subspecific name? Names should indicate relationships and they should also call attention to certain types of phenomena.

From the point of view of history, one high-altitude population did not arise from the other, and each high-altitude population is more closely related to the birds at the bases of the respective mountains than to each other. But from the point of view of how rather than when they arose, these two populations developed from similar ancestral populations, under similar conditions, and in similar manner, to give end products so similar they are indistinguishable. It was decided that despite their being the products of parallel evolution both should be included in one dark-mountain subspecies, with a discontinuous range.

This illustrates what happens to a collection when it is received in the Museum. It is unpacked, accessioned, arranged, and catalogued. Then it is compared with other material in our collection, and the literature is searched to find what has been written about these birds. Perhaps nothing new emerges, and then the specimens are filed away in our cabinets to await some future occasion when they may be needed. But sometimes, as in the present case with the Buchen material, facts and ideas that are new to the scientific world are discovered and the collection thus yields further knowledge about how the forces of nature have acted on the manifestation of life that we call birds.

AUSTIN L. RAND
Curator of Birds

—THIS MONTH'S COVER—

The cover presents an unusual view of the highest mountain in all of Africa, Mt. Kilimanjaro. It is about 19,500 feet high and, although it is less than 4 degrees from the equator, it possesses an icecap and several large glaciers. Mt. Kilimanjaro and the near-by Mt. Kenya dominate the big-game fields of British East Africa. From this area were obtained the birds received by the Museum from Mr. and Mrs. Walther Buchen, of Chicago (the collection is described on this page). The photograph, by Ewing Galloway, of New York, is used through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Buchen.



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1949. "A New Buchen Collection." *Bulletin* 20(9), 2-2.

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