

trremely few adult 'transients' are recorded as observed in July and August. Are there not some members of the A. O. U. who can throw light upon the subject?

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES WICKLIFFE BECKHAM.

Bardstown, Ky., Nov. 23, 1886.

Classification of the Macrochires.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

Sirs:—Once more I must ask your indulgence in the matter of a little space, as I have a word or two to say in regard to Mr. Lucas's paper on 'The Affinities of Chætura' which appeared in the last number of this journal (Oct., 1886), and from the reading of which I find that I have on my hands another ornithologist who takes exception to the further separation of the Cypseli and Trochili, more than is now generally agreed to by the majority, perhaps, of systematists in their schemes of classification.

It is not my intention on the present occasion either to add or subtract anything to what I have already contributed to the morphology of the Macrochires, for by so doing I would forestall the conclusions of my further researches in this matter that I now have in hand.

Mr. Lucas says, "Nevertheless, until still more evidence to the contrary is adduced, I will hold fast to Huxley's union of Hummingbirds and Swifts" (p. 444).

Now at the present writing I have been over two years in a position where I have not been able to avail myself of either the libraries or the museums, and have at my command but a limited working field library; so that it is quite possible that Professor Huxley may have recently changed his views in regard to the taxonomy of the Macrochires, and I not have known of it. But, I do know that in 1867 he wrote the following sentences, to wit: "In their cranial characters, the Swifts are far more closely allied with the Swallows than with any of the Desmognathous birds, the Swift presenting but a very slight modification of the true Passerine type exhibited by the Swallow. No distinction can be based upon the proportions of the regions of the fore limb; since in all the Swallows which I have examined [*H. pacifica*, *H. riparia*, *H. rustica*, and *H. urbica*], the manus and antibrachium respectively, greatly exceed the humerus in length, though the excess is not so great as in *Cypselus*" (P. Z. S., Apr. 1867, p. 456). And again in the same paper he says "The *Cypselidæ* are very closely related to the Swallows among the Coracomorphæ" (p. 469). Mark you, Professor Huxley here says "very closely related." In other words, at the time that this eminent biologist formulated his 'Classification of Birds' in the memoir in question, he evidently believed that Swifts were but profoundly modified Swallows. Believing this as he did, I am the more

surprised that he, in the same paper, said, "This group [Cypselomorphæ] contains three very distinct families—the *Trochilidæ*, the *Cypselidæ*, and the *Caprimulgidæ*" (p. 469). It is hard to say what Professor Huxley's views in the premises would be now, as I am inclined to think he has in no way modified them in print since 1867, and that is quite a long time ago.

For one, I do not place the reliance upon the structure of the bony palate in birds as a taxonomic character that Huxley did then, and a number of classifiers have done since. It rather dilutes its importance to find such a bird as *Caprimulgus europæus* with its maxillo-palatines well separated in the median line, while another Caprimulagine bird, as *Chordeiles acutipennis texensis*, for example, has these processes meet each other for a considerable distance in this locality, where they may even in old individuals fuse together (compare Huxley's figure of the former type and mine of the latter).

Some of the most interesting parts of Mr. Lucas's article are to be found in the foot-notes. For instance, in one of these (p. 446) he says, "In Dr. Shufeldt's figures of *Panyptila* and *Tachycineta* the maxillo-palatines are imperfect." From a reading of the article, I am rather inclined to think that Mr. Lucas, at the time he penned this opinion, had skeletons of neither of these birds before him; indeed, I do not think there was a single alcoholic of either of these forms in the Collection of the Smithsonian Institution at the time, and there are just a few of these birds about me here in New Mexico! At any rate, these two figures are exactly double the size of life; are based upon careful comparisons of abundant material of the kind in question; and are absolutely correct in every particular.

Still keeping clear of some dubious anatomical deductions in my critic's paper we find another foot-note at the bottom of page 447, wherein he says: "Among birds the characters afforded by the sternum are so important that I must confess myself a little surprised that Dr. Shufeldt should so readily reject them." Let me say here, in explanation of this, that my studies of the skeletons of the Auks shook my faith a little in the value of the character of the xiphoidal extremity of the sternum, and the 'notching' it may assume.

The Smithsonian Institution has had in its hands for two years now, for publication, an extensive work of mine, treating largely of the osteology of American birds, and illustrated by over 400 figures. When this work appears Mr. Lucas will find that I describe two sterna there, from two individuals of the *same species* of Auk, wherein one is extensively notched on either side of its posterior end, while the other is absolutely entire, and no evidence of a notch there at all. In the same place I have endeavored to show how this may come about, but no more of it here, for I hope the volume I have just referred to will be published, and then my views on this question will be better understood. As it stands now the work has proved too extensive for the slender means of the National Museum to handle at one effort.

Of course, in recording what I have just done in the preceding para-

graph, I by no means wish it to be understood that I in any way under-rate the significance of the 'notching' of the xiphoidal end of the sternum, in the *vast majority* of the class Aves.

One is both surprised and refreshed at the information conveyed in the last foot-note of Mr. Lucas's paper (p. 451);—surprised from the fact that the osteologist-in-chief of our great Government Museum at Washington should be, up to the time of his writing the article he contributed to 'The Auk,' ignorant of the opinions Dr. Parker has so ably presented us with in his matchless "treatise on the Skull of Ægithognathous Birds"; and refreshed to think that that institution can lay claim to a mind among its admirable staff of workers, in which it is evidently possible for opinions to evolve, *de novo*, which compare so favorably with those held by living masters in morphology.

Very respectfully,

R. W. SHUFELDT.

Fort Wingate, N. Mex., 16th November, 1886.

NOTES AND NEWS.

At the recent meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in Washington, during the discussion of the subject of bird protection, Mr. F. S. Webster spoke of the attitude of the members of the Union toward taxidermists, which seemed, he thought, one of enmity rather than of friendship. Mr. Brewster, in replying, said he was glad the matter had been brought up, as it was evident that there was a serious misapprehension of this subject on the part of taxidermists. He stated that honest taxidermists as a class were respected by ornithologists, who looked upon them as efficient and indispensable allies, and that the prevalent impression to the contrary was the outgrowth of malicious remarks by certain enemies of the Union. Mr. Brewster believed in encouraging true taxidermy, and in granting collecting permits to all honest taxidermists. What ornithologists wished to prevent was the wholesale traffic in birds for commercial purposes by men who had no claim to be ranked as taxidermists, though they so styled themselves. It was only the abuse of the privilege of collecting that ornithologists were striving to prevent.

Mr. Webster replied that the reason taxidermists felt aggrieved was the wording of the law proposed by the A. O. U. Committee on Bird Protection, which was such as to practically prohibit even legitimate taxidermy. He would be glad to see the Union take a stand in the matter that would remove the existing feeling of antagonism between ornithologists and taxidermists.

The President being then called upon to express his views on the matter in question, stated that the proposed law was not intended to cripple



Shufeldt, Robert Wilson. 1887. "Classification of the Macrochires." *The Auk* 4, 80–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4067506>.

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