

Mr. Mathews is to be congratulated on the time, energy, money, ability, and persistency with which he has followed his great and worthy purpose—to produce a fully-illustrated, up-to-date, reliable, and complete reference work which will assist future scientific investigators of Australian ornithology to conduct their research with the “fewest complications.” So thoroughly has he done his work, and so persistently has he followed every doubtful point, that finality appears to be approaching rapidly. With the hundreds of changes made by Mr. Mathews, little in this direction will be possible for the ornithologist of the future. Mr. White has been heartily thanked for making available to our members this mass of up-to-date information concerning the birds themselves and the full, clear statement and criticism of the literature concerning each species.

Correspondence.

(Continued from p. 217.)

“THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA” (MATHEWS).

To the Editors of “*The Emu*.”

SIRS,—As *The Emu* is purely for science matter and not for commercialism, it is with the greatest reluctance I pen these lines.

Mr. Gregory M. Mathews, in the preface of vol. vi. of his great work, “*The Birds of Australia*,” has interfered in a difference I had with his publishers in the columns of *The Australasian*, and accuses me of untruthfulness in a place where I cannot defend myself—to wit, in his own book. Therefore, in self-defence, and as an office-bearer of the R.A.O.U., I crave your indulgence for a brief reply.

Whether I did, or did not, believe that the work would be “completed in eight volumes at a prospective cost of £70,” the fact remains that vols. iii., v., and vi. (the one in which Mr. Mathews takes me to task) have each been increased one part—i.e., each vol. has been increased two guineas over and above the amount given in the prospectus. What, then, does Mr. Mathews mean when he states that “my subscribers do not pay for this extraneous matter—I do all that”?

The publishers apparently rely on a short line in their prospectus to save the situation as regards *extra* parts:—“Other volumes will be, so far as can be seen, as follows.” But subscribers claim that this innocent sentence of doubtful grammar can also be construed in their favour. A volume, when completed, may contain a part less “so far as could be seen” at first. But “so far” subscribers have paid for three, if not four, extra parts at £2 2s. each, with the promise of more extra parts to follow, seeing that the work is yet far from completion. That, sirs, is my case. In the matter of extra parts and cost I hold two letters from subscribers to Mr. Mathews’s work—one in Tasmania, the other in Queensland—both strongly backing my complaint.

Solely in the interests of Australian ornithology, I claim to be one of Mr. Mathews's best friends; therefore I hope he will take this "rebuttal" in the spirit in which it is given.—Yours, &c.,

A. J. CAMPBELL.

The Dry Season.

Birds and Drought.—The many water-fowl in southern Victoria lately indicate how dry the northern districts of New South Wales and Southern Queensland must be. For instance, take as near to Melbourne as Woodend. I lately saw a paddock literally covered with Straw-necked Ibis feeding on caterpillars, &c.; also, on isolated water-holes, were frequently pairs of Spoon-bills, White-fronted and Pacific Herons—the latter generally seem to drive off any others of their kind that wish to come to their particular pond. Cormorants are much more plentiful than usual, frequently visiting small ornamental ponds in private gardens for the sake of the gold-fish. I shot a large Black Cormorant in the Melbourne Zoo lately that had swallowed a gold-fish that weighed three-quarters of a pound, so these birds are no good in such places. Only a month ago a Darter, which is a rare bird in Victoria, was seen in the National Park at Wilson's Promontory, and a skin of this bird was sent lately from the Western District of Victoria by a well-known resident, asking what bird it was; yet the inquirer had been an observer of bird-life in that district for 40 years! Fish are having a bad time at present. *Tribonyx*, Coots, and Pectoral Rails are just as plentiful in districts where they are rarely seen.

Large flocks of Crows, apparently *Corone australis*, are very much in evidence in southern Victoria this year—probably the old birds with their young. I have seen several distinct flocks lately (December); possibly the dry season up north is bringing them further south than usual. Their loud, raucous call can be heard for a considerable distance, especially when hundreds utter it at the same time. Insect life must be more plentiful than we usually realize when these hundreds, or we may say thousands, of birds can find sufficient food to eat.—S. J. CECIL LE SOUËF.
Melbourne.

Nomenclature.

Now that the war has been happily ended, and the members of the Check-list Committee who are on active service will be returning, the work of preparing the second edition of the "Official Check-list" will be resumed. It will interest members to know that a strong committee of ornithologists has already begun the preparation of an authoritative list of the world's birds.

Meanwhile, the Council has confirmed its previous determination that authors of papers should use the names of the Official "Check-list," but may, if they so desire, add the name used in Mathews's 1913 "List."