

Nesting of the Weebill (*Smicrornis brevirostris*)—In *The Emu*, vol. xxxiv, pp. 114 *et seq.*, Mr. J. J. Bryant describes the method in which a pair of these little birds built their nest, the cup being constructed before the dome. According to my experience that is not the usual practice. When living on the Eastern Goldfields I saw a good deal of the Weebill, where it is a common bird. I never found it far from eucalypts, and the favourite haunts were those peculiar growths of slender saplings which occur in long, narrow strips, with a width of only a few feet. Here the shrill call of the Weebills—"Winny-wieldt"—was sure to be heard, and amidst such surroundings it builds its pretty nest. I have watched its construction several times, and found that the commencement was made at the rear part of the dome, the birds proceeding forwards and downwards until the outline of the nest was completed; the same material being used as mentioned by Mr. Bryant. No doubt the construction of a nest is always influenced by its immediate surroundings. In the case of the Weebill I have found the lanceolate leaves and their slender stems were always woven into the fabric of the nest.

Birds often vary a little in their notes and habits in widely-separated districts. Locally we have a little clan of Emu-Wrens, strictly confined to the coastal sandhills. Instead of building the typical domed nest with a side entrance, the entrances of their nests are almost at the top and so loosely constructed that in several cases I could see the eggs simply by looking down from above. One would think that these apparently feeble little flyers would select nesting sites in the sheltered valleys, but with us, fairly open bushes on top of the ridges, and exposed to the strong ocean winds, are chosen.—F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A.

Reviews

[*The South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. xiii, pt. 1.]

The January number of the above contains interesting papers on birds noted on Kangaroo Island, and at Myrtle Springs Station; Notes on the Pied Cormorant, Dusky Moorhen and Starling; Notes on the Eastern Swamp-hen and Banded Landrail; Some Additions to the South Australian Museum Collection; and General Notes. The last contain references to Fork-tailed Swifts flying as low as 10 feet above the ground. The Museum Additions refer (*inter alia*) to a Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*) killed by a centipede, death ensuing within five minutes of the centipede's biting the bird; and to a Duck, possibly *Anas superciliosa*, with a mussel attached to the inner toe. The mussel weighed $3\frac{1}{4}$ ounces, and caused the bird to trail the foot when in flight.

A note on the Pink Cockatoo (*Kakatoë leadbeateri*) deals with the nomenclature of the form and refers to the *Australian Race*, by Edward Curr (1887), where the origin of the vernacular name, "Wee Juggler," is referred to the Wiiratheri or Wiradwin natives on the Lachlan River, New South Wales, the species being known to them as "Wi-jug-a-la."—C.E.B.

[*Check-list of Birds of the World*. By James Lee Peters, Curator of Birds, Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College; vol. II, pp. xvii + 401, 1934. Published by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London (vol. I reviewed in *The Emu*, vol. xxi, 1932, pp. 319-320.)]

This, the second volume of Peters's *Check-list of Birds of the World*, includes the following orders—Galliformes (Megapodes, Guans, Grouse, Quails, Pheasants, Turkeys, Hoatzins, etc.); Gruiformes (Mesties, Bustard-Quails, Cranes, Rails, Sun Grebes, Bustards, etc.); Charadriiformes (Jacanas, Plovers, Snipe, Woodcock, Sandpipers, Thick-knees, Coursers, Seed-Snipe, Skuas, Gulls, Terns, and Auks). More than three hundred genera are treated, together with species and their geographical forms. The classification followed is largely that of Sharpe's *Handlist*, which work is also the basis of Gregory M. Mathews's list of Australasian birds, the *Systema Avium Australasianarum*. On comparing the two Check-lists as regards Australian material there is apparent a considerable divergence of opinion, especially as to the status of sub-species or geographical races. This is very confusing to aspiring systematists, for when the conclusions of experts are so much at variance what shall the tyro do? Custom, and too frequently a parochial outlook, decree that he be at least loyal to his own country. Thus most English workers in Australian ornithology follow the *Systema Avium Australasianarum*; American ornithologists, should they become interested in Australian ornithology, would no doubt base their classification on Peter's *Check-list*; while the enthusiastic amateurs of Australia are exhorted to follow the *R.A.O.U Check-list* (1926), an obsolete work which does not even consider sub-species.

It is obvious from a study of recent lists, whether regional or more comprehensive, that before any degree of uniformity can be attained the co-operation of specialists in various parts of the world is essential, with the proviso that these specialists should be under the control of an adjudicating body, really an ornithological "league of nations," with access to the most comprehensive collections in the world.

As experts become more expert their distinctions become finer, until it is sometimes apparent that the naming of races, or for that matter, the breaking up and re-naming of genera, has become an end in itself instead of being the

basis for the study of field ornithology which, as I understand it, is the prime purpose of any system of classification in nature. In modern classification individual effort, with the slight help of others, may be very satisfying—to the individual—but, lacking a consensus of opinion as it frequently does, it often succeeds in confusing the general ornithologist who has placed his faith elsewhere.

These random reflections, whilst actuated by a perusal of Peters's *Check-list*, are in no way aimed at that comprehensive and tremendous work, which, when eventually completed, will be a most valuable addition to ornithological literature.

There are many points in the volume under discussion which may well call for comment, but space permits the mention of only a few. *Catharacta lönnbergi* Mathews, and *C. maccormicki* Saunders (*Syst. Av. Austr.*), become subspecies of *C. skua* Brünnich. The Sooty Oyster-catcher, *Hæmatopus unicolor* Forster, is listed by Peters as a race of the Pied Oyster-catcher, *H. ostralegus* Linne. When a hitherto generally-accepted species is given sub-specific rank only, without any reason being stated, the change in nomenclature is difficult to understand. Surely it cannot be because of the recorded inter-breeding of these two species (I am assuming that they are still species). The absence of vernacular names to the species makes it difficult for the general ornithologist to trace any bird whose scientific name is unknown to him.

We accord Mr. Peters our well wishes for the eventual completion of a really stupendous task.—K.A.H.

Correspondence

IS OUR UNION ARTICULATE?

To the Editor.

Sir—Is our Union articulate? Does the very full knowledge which is possessed by individual members on many important questions ever become known to others? These are questions which anyone who has been associated with the Union for a decade or more must surely have asked himself. The cover of *The Emu* bears a caption to the effect that the journal is a quarterly magazine to popularize the study and protection of native birds and to record results of scientific research in ornithology, but the writer contends (a) that, valuable though *The Emu* is, it is not in enough hands to popularize anything and that other media must be sought by the R.A.O.U. in the matter more particularly of protection, and (b) that definite pronouncements by the Union to Union members upon current matters is essential.