

(*Leptospermum*). Nests made of tea-tree bark, dead gum leaves, fine twigs, and horsehair, or any string that may be found.

Pipit, or Ground-Lark (*Anthus australis*).—Several pairs seen. The nest which I found was in a tuft of grass, made of dried grass and fibrous roots. Three eggs are laid, of a greyish-white colour, blotched and freckled with light brown and purplish-grey.

Shining Starling (*Aplonis metallica*).—Several specimens have been observed.

Satin Bower-Bird (*Ptilonorhynchus holosericeus*).—This is the only Bower-Bird which frequents the island. A pair comes now and again and stops for a few months.

Australian Crow (*Corvus coronoides*).—Common. The stick nests made by these birds are found in the high branches of gum-trees.

Australian Raven (*Corvus australis*).—Common at times.

American View of the R.A.O.U. "Check-list."

THE "Check-list of North American Birds" is the production of many years of painstaking work by many masters in ornithology. Whether Australians approve or disapprove of this masterpiece little concerns our American cousins. Conversely, the appearance of the Australian "Check-list," as seen through American spectacles, is not necessarily of vital importance to Australian students. Possibly each side may be right from its own point of view.

The Auk (vol. xxx., No. 3, July, 1913) has been good enough to devote two pages (445-6) to a review, which is entitled to respect by Australian ornithologists, on the "Check-list" recently issued by the R.A.O.U.

Adverse criticism on the Australian "List" was partly expected from this quarter, owing to the binomial nomenclature, the limitation of the law of priority, &c., being diametrically opposed to the American system; consequently the learned reviewer expresses the opinion that the principles governing the list "constitute the most remarkable code of nomenclature that has been framed in recent times." We agree that the list is a "remarkable" production. It is unique: it retains binomialism and rejects trinomialism; it fixes the law of priority at Gould, thus approaching the "statute of limitations," which the Americans rejected; and, although rules and explanations have been cited, it is an "authoritative" list based on Gould. There is not another list of the kind extant, and is not likely to be, for the same conditions do not obtain in any other country. Further, the reviewer has not had the same experience and knowledge as Australians of the practical application of trinomial methods—in fact, he evades that important issue, the practical application of trinomials, which, according to Mathews, increases the number of Australian species and sub-species from 800 to 1,500 at a jump—otherwise he might more readily comprehend the vigorous objections of Australians.

The reviewer is fearful that with the adoption of the R.A.O.U. "Check-list" the "progress of ornithology in Australia has been to some extent hindered," and gratuitously commends instead Mr. G. M. Mathews' "Reference-list" as an "admirable check-list of Australian birds on advanced lines." The fear is rather that Mr. Mathews' "advanced lines" will lead students into ornithological chaos, which the adoption of the R.A.O.U. "Check-list" happily avoids. Take two examples among many:—
 1. The White-bellied Robin of south-western Australia. In his "Hand-list" (*Emu*, vol. vii., p. 86, 1908) Mr. Mathews classes it as *Eopsaltria*; in his "Reference-list" (*Nov. Zool.*, xviii., p. 317, January, 1912) as *Pachycephala*; and not twelve months after, in this American-recommended "Reference-list," he consigns the species to a new genus, *Quoyornis* (*Austral Avian Record*, vol. i., p. 111, December, 1912).
 2. The Yellow-plumed Honey-eater (*Ptilotis ornata*). Gould regarded the bird collected by him in the "belts of the Murray" as identical with the species Gilbert obtained in Western Australia, yet Mr. Mathews subdivides the species into five, and in some instances from localities not 100 miles apart. There are *Ptilotis ornata ornata* (W.A.), *P. o. wesleydalei* (W.A., inland), *P. o. muna* (Stirlings), *P. o. tailemi* (Tailem Bend, S.A.), and *P. o. underbooli* (Mallee, Vic.)—*Vide* "Reference-list," p. 410, and *Austral Avian Record*, vol., ii., p. 10. If we had adopted Mr. Mathews' conclusions, what guarantee would we have had that they were final?

There is a complaint that the "Check-list" Committee "fails to comprehend the true nature of a sub-species," and the instance is cited of the Tasmanian Swamp-Quail (*Synoicus*, not *Synornis*). No doubt, generally, on the question of sub-species and geographical races and varieties, there seems to be much confusion (even amongst Australians) caused by treating sub-species, variety, and race as identical. The great Darwin, in his "Origin of Species," states:—"Certainly no clear line of demarcation has yet been drawn between species and sub-species—that is, the forms which in the opinion of some naturalists come very near to, but not quite arriving at the rank of species; or, again, between sub-species and well-marked varieties, or between lesser varieties and individual differences. These differences blend into each other in an insensible series."

It is stated in the R.A.O.U. list that every geographical race is not a sub-species, though many are, and where they are sufficiently distinctive they have been raised to that rank. Mr. Mathews apparently draws no distinction between sub-species and variety. Adverting again to *Synoicus diemenensis*, the "cabinet" ornithologist terms it "a very questionable geographical race."

Mr. A. J. North, C.M.Z.S., &c., professional ornithologist of the Australian Museum, in part 2, vol. iv., p. 181, of his "Nests and Eggs," recently issued, states (regarding *S. diemenensis*) that—

"In six adult specimens now before me the distinguishing characters of this species pointed out by Gould are constant. The

Tasmanian Swamp-Quail is altogether a larger and more handsome species than *Synæcus australis*. Both species are found in Tasmania, sometimes frequenting the same locality, but *S. diemenensis* is not found in Australia.

"Typically the eggs of this species can be distinguished from those of *Synæcus australis*, which in Tasmania may be found breeding in the same district, by their larger size, the prevailing yellowish-olive hue of their ground colour, and their more distinct markings."

Colonel W. V. Legge, C.M.B.O.U., &c., author of "The Birds of Ceylon," and for many years a resident in Tasmania, can confirm Mr. North's statement. It is therefore evident that *S. diemenensis* is more than a "race." This demonstrates the mischief that can be done by a "cabinet" man abroad intermeddling with the home work of Australians, where local field knowledge is so indispensable.

"The Birds of Australia."

As Mr. G. M. Mathews has apparently some invincible objection to sending his work (save two odd parts of vol. ii.) to *The Emu* for review—a journal probably more interested in Australian ornithology than any other—the following notice from *The Field*, 31st May, 1913, may be taken as a fair and unbiased criticism on the progress of Mr. Mathews' important work:—

"Since our last notice of this finely illustrated work (*Field*, 1st February), three more parts have appeared. Part 5 of vol. ii. includes a continuation of the Gulls and Skuas, and contains also the title page of the volume and index. The first part of vol. iii. includes the Plovers, amongst which are some very remarkable forms which are peculiar to Australia. Amongst them is the Red-kneed Dottrel (*Erythronys cinctus*, Gould). The account given of it by Mr. Mathews is very meagre compared with that published by Gould forty-eight years ago in his 'Handbook to the Birds of Australia.' Mr. Mathews describes it from Parry's Creek, North-West Australia, and gives its distribution as 'West Australia, Northern Territory,' mentioning no other localities in which it has been found, not even those recorded by Gould. It has a much wider range than he supposes. We happen to know this little bird very well, and have received specimens from Queensland, North-East Australia, and seen others which were sent from the Gomm Station on the Murray River, South Australia. The name which he gives it in his text, *Erythronys cinctus mixtus*—which does not correspond with the lettering of his plate, a fault frequently noticed in this work—suggests that he considers the north-western example which he describes to differ in some way from the type. But as he does not indicate in what respect it differs, and the plate gives a good representation of the bird described by Gould, we fail to see why any change of name is necessary. Similarly, the so-called Eastern Turnstone is separated from the well-known species which is commonly to be met with on our own coasts, and its geographical distribution—stated to be 'Eastern Siberia to Alaska, wandering to Australia in the non-breeding season'—is very much wider than this. The Turnstone, in fact, is well-nigh cosmopolitan, as may be seen by looking at the list of localities given by Sharpe in his 'Catalogue' of the *Limicola* in the British Museum (pp. 99-103), the only other species of Turnstone recognized by him and other authorities being the Black-headed Turnstone (*S.*