

**FIELD ORNITHOLOGY. COMPRISING
A MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION FOR
PROCURING, PREPARING AND
PRESERVING BIRDS, AND A CHECK
LIST OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS**

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Field ornithology. Comprising a manual of instruction for procuring, preparing and preserving birds, and a check list of North American birds by Elliott Coues

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ELLIOTT COUES

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COMPRISING A

MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION

FOR

PROCURING, PREPARING AND PRESERVING BIRDS

AND A

Check List of North American Birds.

BY

DR. ELLIOTT COUES, U. S. A.



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MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION,
AND
CHECK LIST OF THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA.

PRELIMINARY AND EXPLANATORY.

Born author and publisher of the "Key to North American Birds" intended that the work should contain instructions for collecting and preparing birds, and that a CHECK LIST, according with the author's views, should appear simultaneously with the volume. This proved impracticable: partly because the work so far overran the original estimates, that the additional expense and risk, which the publisher, an accomplished naturalist, generously offered to assume, seemed to the author unjustifiable; and partly because the writer's unexpected call to another field of official duty suddenly threw such a pressure of other engagements upon his hands that he could not just then find time to write out even so slight a treatise as this. The CHECK LIST and MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION are therefore now presented together, as a Supplement to the Key.

The demand for a new CHECK LIST has become urgent. The last one published, and only one now in use, expresses a former state of American ornithology. That great changes—presumably for the better—have lately been made, is shown by the fact that, in round numbers, fifty species have been

since ascertained to inhabit North America, while one hundred and fifty have been removed from the former list as being extralimital, invalid or otherwise untenable. Of whatever part the author may have taken in remodelling the list, it would be obviously indelicate to speak. But he cannot refrain from alluding to the signal services of reform rendered by Mr. Allen, of Cambridge, whose staunch advocacy, under circumstances that might have excused flinching, did so much to precipitate the changes, long while progressing and inevitable, for which the time was at length at hand. Nor would this allusion be entirely just, did he not in the same connection refer to the thorough revision now making by Prof. Baird himself, with the coöperation of Dr. Brewer and Mr. Ridgway, the results of which are about to appear in what promises to be one of the greatest monuments ever erected to American ornithology. The notable concordance of the several writings in question, an agreement the more gratifying because a short time since it might have been considered impossible, marks an important period in the history of the science. The outlook promises well, when different premises lead up to the same conclusions, and conflicting views are reconciled.

The present CHECK LIST, prepared in strict accordance with the KEY, reflects exactly whatever of truth or error that work represents. The typography and presswork render it susceptible of use in labelling a collection.* It shows mainly three points of disagreement with the current Smithsonian List. The number of genera is reduced though not to the extent that may be desirable. It is perhaps to be regretted, that so many needless and burdensome generic names, for which Bonaparte, Cabanis, Kaup and Reichenbach are largely re-

* For this purpose the LIST will be issued as a pamphlet by itself as well as forming part of this little volume.

sponsible, were adopted in Prof. Baird's great work;* for, sanctioned by the usage of such eminent authority, they have passed current, and are too closely ingrained in our nomenclature to be soon eradicated. The writer feels at liberty to speak plainly, for his own skirts are not clear. Secondly, not a few species, new to North America, or to science, or both, have of late years been ascertained to inhabit this country. The third and principal variance between the present CHECK LIST and its predecessor results from a large reduction of the number of admitted species. Part of them are excluded simply because extralimital: but most because they are considered untenable as species. In the present state of our knowledge, and under a system of nomenclature that is proven inadequate and may before long become obsolete, recognition of numerous "Varieties"—resultant modifications of species by physical conditions of environment—is imperative; and what are these varieties but the rills that flow into and help to swell the mighty stream of descent with modification?

The Instructions for Collecting and Taxidermy, herewith offered, are drawn almost entirely from the writer's experience, acquired during several years he has spent, with little interruption, in the study of our birds. He has collected over a wide area from Labrador to California, in northwestern territories, and in several southern states; enjoying opportunities for field investigations that no one with the least taste or aptitude for the pursuit could fail to profit by. In the matter of collecting, therefore, he may reasonably venture to speak with confidence. Since, furthermore, a taxidermal process that has been repeated several thousand times with fair results is by this simple circumstance proven satisfactory, he feels no diffi-

*"Birds of North America" by Baird, Cassin and Lawrence.