

The Rockwood Review.

HORNADAY ON THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR BIRDS.

In this report Mr. Hornaday has furnished us with a mass of information relative to the destruction of our wild birds and mammals which should demand the earnest consideration of every ornithologist and sportsman throughout the country, and which cannot fail to prove an important factor in encouraging the sentiment for bird protection which is beginning to make itself apparent.

The bird report is based upon replies from correspondents in all parts of the country relative to the destruction of birds, the most potent agencies in effecting destruction, species which are becoming extinct, and the number of birds to-day as compared with fifteen years ago.

The most serious causes of the decrease of bird life seem to be: (1) the great increase in sportsmen or rather "so-called sportsmen"; (2) pot hunters, (3) plume hunters; (4) egg collectors; (5) English sparrow; (6) clearing away of timber, and (7) Italians, who kill all sorts of birds for food.

The decrease of all kinds of game birds as evinced by all the reports is startling, as is also the growing tendency in the South to regard various song and insectivorous birds as game, when the real game birds become scarce. As Mr. Hornaday truly says, "the protection of migratory birds must be general," we cannot protect our summer birds in the North if they are to be shot in winter in the South.

In regard to the destruction of bird life in general, the figures given by Mr. Hornaday (Connecticut, 75 percent destroyed; New York, 48; Indiana, 60, etc.) will hardly be accepted by those who have had experience in estimating the numbers of individual birds in the field.

It is not possible to compare the birds of fifteen years ago with those of to-day and say with any

degree of accuracy that the decrease is one-half or two-thirds, relying solely on memory. As a matter of fact how many of the persons quoted can state the number of birds breeding in a definite area in their vicinity last year, not to speak of fifteen years ago? It is one thing to guess and quite another to make an accurate census, and without definite figures we are practically stating the ratio between two unknown quantities which we can only compare in memory.

So many things have to be taken into consideration in estimating the abundance of our small birds that it is exceedingly difficult to hazard a comparison even between two successive years unless a person has been constantly afield and is conversant with the vagaries of migration, etc.

It is significant that scarcely any of the more prominent field ornithologists, whose names appear in the report, give the remarkable figures which influence Mr. Hornaday's estimates.

Game and plume birds are unquestionably on the high road to extermination, and certain species of our small birds are decreasing, but the general destruction in the latter class is probably not nearly so great as Mr. Hornaday's figures imply.

This side of the question is of such especial importance to ornithologists that it seems desirable to emphasize the difficulty of reaching accurate results from such data,—especially as sentiment often unconsciously, leads us to make extreme statements.

The estimates to which we take exception do not, however, detract from the importance and beneficial effect of this valuable report, and it is earnestly to be hoped that Mr. Hornaday's closing suggestions, both as to birds and mammals, may be seriously considered by our legislators, especially as to the suppression of promiscuous egg collecting and traffic in eggs, birds and game.—W. S. in the Auk.