

The Blue Jay Bookshelf

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

By MARGARET BELCHER, Regina

If you are trying to build up a modest library on some natural history topic, you should investigate the lists of government publications available in Canada and the United States. The most recent list of *Publications of the National Museum of Canada* is available from the National Museum of Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, and that of the United States National Museum from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

I want to mention two publications on birds from the two National Museums that suggest the broad scope of this service within a given branch of study. One is an unpretentious little bulletin of only 23 pages of text, *Some Aspects of Canadian Birds and Some Familiar Species*, by A. L. Rand of the National Museum of Canada, published in 1950 (Special Contributions 43-3 and 43-4). Mr. Rand has engaged in numerous intensive faunal studies, but his purpose in this paper is not that of the research scientist. He sets out simply to write a "handy descriptive account of familiar Canadian birds" for the many people who apparently desire just that when they write to the National Museum asking for "information on birds". What he has to say on such topics as numbers and distribution, habitat, feeding and nesting habits, how birds spend the night and why they act as they do, represents a kind of crystallization of Mr. Rand's own reading and experience. There follows a descriptive list of 25 familiar species illustrated by black and white reproductions by Allan Brooks and F. C. Hennessey, and a short list of bird books especially recommended to the beginner. This bulletin is recommended for teachers and students in the elementary grades, as the brief and simple presentation makes it ideally suited to

classroom work. It is definitely for beginners, and is free.

On the other hand, a publication like Bulletin No. 203 of the U.S. National Museum, A. C. Bent's *Life Histories of North American Wood Warblers* has plenty of meat for the experienced ornithologist. Published at the price of \$4.50, this bulletin of 734 pages is the nineteenth and most recent of a series on the life histories of North American birds. This monumental work is to be carried on in spite of Mr. Bent's death last year. Since Bent's life histories are much in demand by serious students of bird life, some of the previous numbers are already out of print. Current numbers should be bought when they are published, as they soon become collector's items available only at greatly increased prices.

This series of bulletins may sound rather forbidding to the average person. However, the very fact that they are *life histories* rather than technical manuals designed primarily for identification of species guarantees their appeal to a more general public. In this last bulletin of Bent's any number of fascinating facts come to light about the warblers in migration and in their summer homes. In the brief space of one book, we share the fruits of the exhaustive research of the various ornithologists who have contributed papers, writing often with much descriptive skill. In short, the book is amazingly complete and Mr. Bent suggests that "if the reader fails to find in these pages anything that he knows about the birds, he can only blame himself for failing to send the information to — *The Author*. In view of this inclusiveness, a local record that we might have, such as that of the early arrival date of the Blackpoll Warbler noted by members of the Bird Group of the Regina Natural History Society May 4, 1955, becomes significant by comparison with the early arrival date recorded by Bent for Regina, May 8.