XXIII.—*Letters, Extracts from Correspondence, Notices, &c.*

We have received the following letters:—

To the Editor of 'The Ibis.'

Hastings, January 8, 1863.

Sir,—My attention has just been called to a paper published in 'The Ibis,' No. XVI. Oct. 1862, by M. Charles Bolle, of Berlin, in which he describes what he imagines to be a new species of *Anthus*, and proposes to give it the name *Anthus berthelotii*.

My excuse for troubling you with some remarks on the claims of the bird described by M. Bolle to be considered as a new species must rest upon the reference M. Bolle has made to my delineation of the *Anthus pratensis*, Bechst., in my 'Sketch of Madeira,' Murray, 1851, and in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' vol. xii. p. 58, and vol. xv. p. 430.

M. Bolle introduces his reasons for establishing a new species, by saying that he has been apt to lay too much stress upon the power of climate to influence the tints of the plumage and the habits of birds. M. Bolle has doubtless observed that, in the climates of which he treats, the tints of the plumage of many of our common European species are considerably modified. I would instance the *Fringilla cannabina*, Linn., which retains its carmine plumage through the year; the *Larus argentatus*, Brünn., which obtains its mature garb at an earlier period than in Europe; the *Strix flammea*, Linn., which is somewhat darker than in Europe; the *Sylvia atricapilla*, Lath., which assumes sometimes so dark a hue as to have led Sir W. Jardine to describe it as a different species; with several other examples familiar to naturalists who have visited these semi-tropical regions. It is well known to travellers in Central Africa that all chemicals are so largely affected by the climate as to make photography impossible there; and, whether we can account for it or not, the fact remains that the chemical secretions which produce colour in the plumage of birds are in a greater or less degree influenced by the mysterious agency of climate. That the habits of birds are modified by climate is proved by the non-migration of the Woodcock, the Blackcap, the Swift, the Quail, the Petrel, and other birds from the regions of which M. Bolle writes.

M. Bolle rests his arguments in favour of establishing a new species, firstly, on some supposed peculiarity of colour. After having given a description of his bird, he adds, "Il reste à remarquer *qu'autant que je me rappelle* [the italics are mine], il n'offre point de grandes variations suivant la saison ou suivant le sexe, et qu'en aucun temps il ne présente la plus légère trace de vert." Now this is rather indefinite language for any one attempting to establish a distinct species—a matter in which the conscience of an ornithologist should be particularly tender, when it is considered what confusion has been induced by a too great readiness in authors to stand sponsors to species which could readily dispense with their well-meant offices.

As an illustration, I might take the *Columba trocaz*, which is described by Dr. Heineken in 'Brewster's Journal' as a new species, though it is doubtless identical with the *Columba laurivora* of Webb and Berthelot. Montagu fell into a like error in the case of his *Alauda trivialis*, which is no more than our old friend the *Anthus pratensis* after its autumnal moult.

M. Bolle does not enter into any particular description of the young bird of the year of his assumed species, nor does he tell us whether he has noted at what season of the year his specimens were obtained. All he tells us is that he has made a careful examination of several skins which he brought from the Canary Islands, and instituted a comparison, which he says had hitherto been neglected, between these skins and those of the true Pipit.

Secondly, M. Bolle urges that the size of his bird is smaller than that of the *A. pratensis*, and that the relative length of the claw in his specimen is greater.

I am quite aware of the difficulty of giving accurate descriptions of birds, and of the danger of trusting too implicitly to measurements if you have only prepared skins to rely upon; for, in spite of the greatest care, colours will fade, and skins will shrink, if, indeed, they have not been stretched or displaced in the process of preparing them. This led to my taking very accurate descriptions and measurements of birds *in the flesh*, in Madeira, in the year 1851. I append a description thus taken of the *A. pratensis*. In the summer of the same year I brought

prepared specimens to England, and, with the late Mr. Yarrell, whose friendship I had the happiness to possess, I went through a minute comparison of my skins and the skins in his possession of the *A. pratensis* obtained in England and other parts of the world, and I was fortified by his veteran experience in concluding that the Madeiran specimens were in no degree entitled to be distinguished from specimens of the *A. pratensis* from other parts.

I agree with M. Bolle in thinking that "it is more than a probability, it is almost a certainty, that the Pipit of Madeira, which is figured in the catalogues of the birds of that island under the name of *A. pratensis*, is identical with the *A. berthelotii*" of M. Bolle. Indeed the words attributed by M. Bolle to Mr. J. Yate Johnson, and used to corroborate this opinion, are a verbal quotation, whether acknowledged or not, from my paper in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' ser. 2. vol. xv. p. 433.

Description of the Anthus pratensis *of Madeira, taken from specimens in the flesh.*

Anthus pratensis, Bechst.; Meadow Pipit. Portuguese, *Corre de Carninho*.

	inches.	lines.
Entire length	6	3
Length of bill from forehead . . .	0	$6\frac{1}{2}$
„ „ gape	0	$8\frac{1}{2}$
Length of tarsus	0	$10\frac{1}{2}$
„ hind toe, claw included . .	0	9
„ tail	2	$4\frac{1}{2}$
From carpus to the end of the wing .	2	$10\frac{1}{2}$

Upper parts greyish brown, in the centre of the feathers a mark of olive-brown, above the eye a yellowish-white streak; throat, vent, and under tail-coverts brownish white; the rest of the under parts white, marked with streaks of greyish brown; quills and tail rusty brown; the outer tail-feather white on the outer web, with a large conical mark of white on the inner web; the second tail-feather with a smaller conical mark of white on the inner web; bill brown on the upper mandible and tip, yellowish white at the base of the under mandible; feet light

yellowish brown; hind claw slightly curved, about equal in length to the toe. Runs along the ground, never taking a long flight; inhabits the cliffs and fields near the sea, and the terras; utters a low note.

Yours, &c.,

E. V. Harcourt.

To the Editor of 'The Ibis.'

Sir,—On arriving at Mentone about the middle of last December, I set myself to watch the habits of the Rock-Martins (*Hirundo rupestris*), the presence of which during the winter in this sunny spot my brother has already noticed. My father and I often paid early visits to the rock-caves in which they passed the night, and watched their proceedings at their toilet, and I have compiled the following account from our notes taken on the spot.

All travellers along the Cornice Road between Nice and Genoa must remember the Pont St. Louis, the present frontier of France. This bridge is thrown over a magnificent gorge, the great limestone-rocks of which absorb during the daytime a great amount of heat; so that long after the sun has set, and even in the early morning before he has risen, they radiate heat to such an extent as to make their neighbourhood exceptionally warm. Under the shelter of these cliffs the lemon-tree appears to flourish best, and along their steep sides the Martins may generally be seen flitting rapidly to and fro in the daytime, while in some of the caves with which these rocks are honeycombed they pass the night. The places they choose are rather shallow hollows or fissures in the rock, facing southwards. On cold cloudy days they often return to their caves at intervals during the daytime, and in very bad weather some of them will even pass a considerable portion of the day in their roosting-places. During the night they huddle together in the inner recesses of their caves; but as soon as the morning light is tolerably advanced, they move out towards the outer parts of the cave, and sit there on ledges of rock preening their feathers, and occasionally flying out a short way to ascertain the temperature of the morning; often too, and that quite early, some will fly out to visit their com-

panions who have passed the night in a neighbouring cave. Meantime, however, a pillar of light has been shooting up from the horizon, and at last the sun himself rushes from out the sea, tipping all the waves with light. His rays have been gradually spreading down from the mountain-tops over the olive-clad hills and along the faces of the rocks, until at last they begin to enter the cave. Then those of the Martins who have already seated themselves on the outer parts of the cave fly forth together, with a glad cry, into the sunshine, and chase the insects along the cliffs. Still, however, some are left in the cave; and often some of those who first flew out return and nestle again against the warm rock. Sooner or later, however, as the sun gains power, they all abandon their night's abode.

Their proceedings vary a good deal according to the state of the weather, especially depending upon the amount of light. I will now give the result of the notes taken during one morning's watching, which I think will serve as a fair sample of their operations at this time of year. The morning of December 28, 1862, was fine and bright, and consequently the Martins were rather early in moving. At 6.58 A.M., when I arrived, the Martins appeared quiet and huddled together in the interior of their cave. I believe that they then were in the position in which they had passed the night. Soon after 7 they began to move, many of them flying to and fro at the mouth of the cave. This continued more or less for some time, some of the birds flying out of the cave for short excursions, others going out of sight round a corner of rock, partly, I believe, to visit other Martins in other caves, but generally soon returning. By 7.20 they were more quiet, many being seated on the outer ledges near the edges of the cave, some apparently dozing, but most employed in preening their feathers. Soon after this another lot of Martins arrive, apparently from another cave, and nestle in with the rest. About 7.53, the rays of the sun having then penetrated some way into the cave, some fifteen birds leave it. These had been sitting near the outer edges of the cave, where the sunlight first arrives. Soon after 8 I left the cave, up to which time a considerable number of the birds had not yet taken their departure; but, from the

experience of other mornings, I have no doubt that they soon followed the others.

On cloudy mornings they are much more reluctant to leave their roosting-places. In the daytime, if there be much wind, they choose the more sheltered side of the rocks, where they may be seen in flights of from forty to sixty, often poising themselves against the breeze with head and tail depressed, the latter spread fanwise and showing the beautiful white spots. On one windy, stormy day I saw them flying about the streets of Mentone. I was surprised to see them so far from their favourite rocks on such a day. I do not believe that they ever go any distance inland at this time of year. Martins have been frequently seen to the west of the Bay of Mentone, about Cape Martin and Roccabruna, but I believe these to be another lot roosting at or near Cape Martin. On this point, however, I cannot speak at all positively. These birds are, I am told, sometimes seen in the winter at Nice, which fact is mentioned by Dr. Bree in his 'Birds of Europe,' being, as far as I am aware, the only recorded instance of their having been seen in winter in any part of Europe, with the exception of Greece. I do not imagine that the number of the Martins wintering in the neighbourhood of Mentone could be much more than 150; certainly, I think, not under 100; but there may be more than I know of. They retire to roost from 4 to 4.15 P.M., varying according to the state of the weather, and observing much the same course of proceeding as in the morning, except that they seem to settle down into their places more quickly.

Yours, &c.,

M. Weston Moggridge.

To the Editor of 'The Ibis.'

Norwich, December 15, 1862.

Sir,—On the 17th of November I received an adult specimen of Leach's Petrel (*Thalassidroma leachii*), killed on the previous day at Salthouse, near Cromer. On dissection it proved to be a female, measuring in length $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches; wing, from the anterior bend to end of longest quill-feather, 6 inches; leg 1 inch; middle toe and claw 1 inch. The stomach was filled with

some fishy substance, not distinguishable. This species has been killed several times in Norfolk, but not, I believe, since 1849. The present example was shot on some brackish waters, which on Salthouse beach run parallel with the sea-banks, and, to use the expression of the beachman who sent it me, "appeared to be walking on the water."

Yours, &c.,

H. Stevenson.

To the Editor of 'The Ibis.'

Porto S. Giorgio (Italy), November 25, 1862.

Sir,—Reading in 'The Ibis' your repeated invitations to naturalists of all countries to second your endeavours by contributing to the pages of 'The Ibis' articles and information of every sort relating to ornithology, I have determined to send you some observations which I think very singular, and not unworthy of the readers of 'The Ibis.'

Several years ago I went on a shooting expedition on the Apennines, in the province of Ascoli, and precisely on the eastern side of Mount Vetore, or Vittore, which is situated between the Mountain of the Sibilla on the north and Mount Como or Gran Sasso of Italy on the south. In the course of conversation with some sportsmen of the village called Pietrare, I was told that on the summits of Mount Vetore are found birds, called the Birds of Mount Vetore (*Uccelli di Vetore*), which live in flocks, and of which, during the winter (when, on account of the great snow, they descend to the skirts), many are killed at one shot, and are very fat. They were (not very clearly) described to me as being a little larger than the Chaffinch (*Fringilla cœlebs*), white, with the wings and the tail white and black, and with the claw of the hind toe rather long. Thence I inferred that the birds in question were the Snow Buntings (*Plectrophanes nivalis*). At that time I was far from supposing that this bird inhabited permanently that locality.

This year (1862), in the month of August, shooting on the same ground, I resolved to ascend to the summit of Mount Vetore (above the level of the sea 8400 Italian feet, or about

2000 metres). This mountain is quite clear of wood, nor are even single trees to be seen. Towards the east the side of the mountain descends almost perpendicularly; and amongst the rocks are many Red-legged Partridges (*Perdix rubra*), and great numbers of Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), which breed there. On the southern side, which is quite covered with grass, the ascent is easy on mules. In the ascent I only met with a few Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*), single or in couples. The mountain has two summits, one towards the west, the other towards the east, separated by a deep rent, at the bottom of which is a very small lake, named Pilate's Lake. I ascended the eastern summit. On the descent, at about 400 feet from the top, a flight of about thirty birds passed above my head, which I recognized directly to be the Snow Bunting (*Plectrophanes nivalis*), since some were entirely white beneath, while their wings and tail were white and black, and these must have been old males; whilst others, probably young birds or females, were whitish beneath, and those parts of the wings and tail which were black in the former in these were brownish. Their flight was undulating, and their note, though louder, resembled that of the Siskin (*Fringilla spinus*).

Much to my regret, I was not able to procure any specimen. The guides told me that these were the Birds of Mount Vetore (*Uccelli di Vetore*), and that shepherds frequently found their nests on the ground.

Next year I propose to make a careful search in order to procure the nest and eggs; and during the coming winter I hope to have from that locality some specimens of the species, of which I have in my collection of Italian birds a young specimen killed near Pisa, on the 18th of November, 1857.

I take this opportunity to acquaint you with a singular case of hybridism. In November 1861 I purchased in Florence a living bird which had the appearance of a Thrush, and in size, colour of the bill, legs, feet, and upper parts was quite like a Song-Thrush (*Turdus musicus*). The lower parts were almost entirely black, except the edge of each feather, which was of a light colour; round the neck it had a narrow ring of feathers of a yellowish white; on the belly were two or three

white feathers, spotted with black, like those of the Song-Thrush; the feathers under the tail were quite white. After a short time the yellowish circle of the neck disappeared. In July of the present year it began to change the feathers of the lower parts, and in September it already resembled very nearly the Song-Thrush, retaining only a few black feathers on the breast, which shortly disappeared. I was in expectation of future changes, when early in October it escaped. It ate chopped meat and the flour of maize. In spring it did not sing; its *zit* was like that of the Song-Thrush.

I believe it to be a cross of the Song-Thrush and the Blackbird (*Turdus merula*).

Yours, &c.,

Dr. Thomas Salvadori.

The following extract is from a letter of Professor Baird, dated Washington, December 26:—

"Mr. Kennicott has returned from his nearly four years' absence in Arctic America. His last collections have not yet reached us, but will be here in a few weeks. They embrace many valuable things, especially in the line of eggs. On their arrival, I will write you further on the subject.

"Another item of intelligence is that Mr. Xantus, so well known by his labours at Fort Tejon and Cape St. Lucas, has just left Washington for Manzanilla, on the west coast of Mexico, in the capacity of U. S. Consul, to reside a year or two. He has taken out an enormous outfit, and is prepared to capture everything the country affords. He will undoubtedly collect thousands of skins of birds, and his collection will be the means of identifying the geographical distribution of Mexican birds with great precision. He will probably get many new and rare species; and if he extends his travels to the islands of Tres Marias, Locorro, &c., as is probable, the results will be still more important. We really know almost nothing of the west part of Mexico, north of Acapulco, no large collection having ever been made there. Mr. Xantus visited Mazatlan in the summer of 1861, and in a week's time got twelve new species of

birds, including a *Saltator, Planesticus, Cyphorhinus, Polioptila, Buarremon, Thalassidroma, Spermophila,* &c."

Mr. Salvin writes from San José, in Guatemala (December 7, 1862), as follows:—

"I have all the collections of the wet season to send off this month; there are several additions amongst them. I have got the nest of the Swift I described to you in a former letter. Fancy a nest made of seeds of a grass, *glued* to the under horizontal surface of an overhanging rock, two feet long, with entrance at the end! I do not feel sure of the genus; it is not a *Chætura*, but more like a *Panyptila*. Perhaps, if new, *sancti jeromæ* might be an appropriate name for it. Since I last wrote, I have had a collection of three hundred birds from the Pacific coast: it contains a few additions, but no novelties, unless it be a Humming-bird; but this, I expect, is the *Amazilia cyanura* of Gould, whose specimens are from Realejo. It is a green *Amazilia*, with a steel-blue tail. During the last month I have done nothing in natural history, having been much occupied photographing the ruins at Copan. In this respect I have been more successful than formerly, and have brought away four dozen pictures of the various carvings found there. The ruins are most curious."

It would appear that the Tooth-billed Pigeon of the Samoan Islands (*Didunculus strigirostris*), which is of so great interest to naturalists, as being believed to be the nearest living ally of the Dodo, is not quite extinct, as has been said to be the case. It will be recollected that examples of this bird have hitherto only reached scientific observers on two occasions. The first of these was the specimen originally described by Sir William Jardine in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' and afterwards figured by Mr. Gould in his 'Birds of Australia' (vol. v. pl. 76). The second was upon the occasion of the visit of the United States Exploring Expedition to the island of Upolu, when two examples of this Pigeon were procured, as described by Mr. Cassin in his volume on the Zoology of that expedition (p. 281). It has been repeatedly stated that this curious bird has of late

years become quite extinct, having been destroyed by the cats which had gone wild and infested the island. But, from a letter addressed by Mr. John C. Williams, H.B.M. Consul for the Navigator Islands, to Mr. G. Sprigg, Secretary of the Acclimatization Society of Melbourne, we learn that Mr. Williams had, after several years of unsuccessful efforts, managed to procure a single living example of this bird, and was intending to convey it to Sydney when he next visited the antipodean metropolis. Recent letters from Dr. George Bennett, of Sydney, who has greatly interested himself in the *re*discovery of this bird, also mention that a correspondent of his, who visited the Navigator Islands in November last, had ascertained that, although the bird was now totally extinct in Upolu, a few were still to be found in the island of Sawaii, the largest and most mountainous of the group, and that he (Dr. Bennett) had great hopes of being able to procure living specimens for the Zoological Society of London.

Mr. E. L. Layard has left New Zealand some months since, and returned to his old quarters at Cape Town, where he has received an appointment as one of the British Commissioners for the suppression of the Slave-trade. Mr. Layard has recommenced his labours in the South African Museum, and just issued the first portion of a catalogue of the collection, relating to the Mammals. We have received from him some very interesting ornithological notes collected in New Zealand and during his voyage home, which we propose to publish in our next Number.

Another of our Honorary Members, Mr. Edward Blyth, Curator of the Museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, has just returned to England after more than twenty-one years' residence in Calcutta. We trust that his health, which has suffered much of late years, will be quickly re-established by the change of climate.