BOOK REVIEW

A REVISION OF THE NEW WORLD SPECIES OF RICINUS (MALLOPHAGA)
OCcurring ON PASSERIFORMES (AVES)

By Bernard C. Nelson. 1972. University of California Publications in Entomology,
Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. $6.50.

As would be anticipated, the major portion of this publication is devoted to the morphology and systematics of Ricinus and is primarily intended for the specialist in mallophagan taxonomy. However, of broader interest is a most worthwhile introductory coverage of biology, history, and methods, along with a treatment of phylogeny, host-parasite evolution, and the species concept as it applies to lice. I found of special interest this discussion of the species concept, in which a series of reasons is presented for rejecting the philosophy of some workers on Mallophaga who hold that lice from different host species are automatically different themselves, even in the absence of supporting morphological evidence. In fact, an examination of this book and the approach of the author will offer many useful features both to the individual undertaking a taxonomic study of Mallophaga for the first time and to those already experienced in the field.

The systematics section is well presented; it includes a diagnosis of Ricinus and a key to the New World species, followed by a discussion of each species group and then the contained species. There are 43 plates of figures printed on glossy paper at the end of the book, all but one of these dealing with Ricinus morphology; these furnish an invaluable aid for working the key as well as comparing specimens with descriptions. These illustrations are meticulously drawn and well labeled, giving further evidence of the great amount of careful and conscientious work invested by the author. The key is excellent and workable, the couplets having the praiseworthy quality of conciseness and clarity, thereby requiring a minimum of morphological orientation. By utilizing a combination of the key, the detailed host lists, and the descriptions, it should now be possible for most workers interested in bird ectoparasites to place the New World Ricinus correctly to species.

Furthermore, this publication is an excellent example of what may be accomplished by a cooperative effort between 2 geographically distant taxonomists; Dr Nelson's work, together with that dealing with the Old World Ricinus by Dr Goetz Rheinwald (1968, Mitt. Hamburg. Zool. Mus. Inst. 65: 181–326), completes the first revisional study of this widely distributed genus of passerine lice. These workers are to be commended for using this approach and avoiding the antagonistic duplication of studies that would most likely have otherwise resulted.

As with almost any publication of this size, one can find an occasional minor shortcoming. There are a few typographical errors (e.g., spelling of "Ricinus" in 3rd line of Introduction). In the Methods section, I would question the unqualified endorsement of Hoyer's mountant over a resin medium. One must be careful in interpreting the split figures, as dorsal is left on the head and abdomen, dorsal is right on the thorax, and dorsal setae are shown on both sides of the prothorax. However, none of these should detract from the overall value of the work, and I am certain that any who have occasion to refer to this book will share my enthusiasm for its high quality and its contribution to mallophagan taxonomy.

—Roger D. Price, Department of Entomology, Fisheries, and Wildlife, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101, U.S.A.