

Of these two forms Mr. Bowles simply remarks "All things considered, the northern and the southern bird, when laid side by side, would hardly be taken for the same species." Mr. Bowles's third or intermediate form is accounted for by Bendire, in his handsome work upon "Life Histories of North American Birds," where he says: "In the New England States north of Massachusetts it (*Bonasa umbellus*) intergrades with *B. umbellus togata*, the majority of the specimens found throughout southern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and northern New York being scarcely referable to either form, birds found in the high lands approaching the Canadian ruffed grouse, while those in the valleys are nearer typical *Bonasa umbellus*."

The charge of Mr. Bowles that "comparatively little has been printed concerning the variety of colors worn by the ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*),—which seems surprising, as it is a favorite game bird,"—can hardly be sustained. It would have been better had your contributor consulted the very extensive literature upon this genus before he undertook to print his article in *Science* on the coloration of the bird.

R. W. SHUFELDT.

Takoma, D. C., Jan. 23, 1894.

#### Late-blooming Trees.

THE remarks in a recent issue of *Science* on fruit-trees blooming in autumn are of much interest in that connection, but when it is found that many of our wild-flowers show a tendency to bloom at this season, the causes suggested seem hardly sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Some plants that bloom in spring habitually bloom again in September or October. In this class are the common blue violet (*V. palmata* var. *cucullata*) and the dog violet (*V. canina* var. *mullenbergii*). Specimens of these may be found in bloom every autumn, and often the arrow-leaved and Canada violets as well. It is not uncommon to find the red raspberry producing flowers and ripe fruit as late as the middle of October in this latitude. Among the twenty-two species of spring flowers that I have found blooming in late autumn may be mentioned *Hepatica triloba*, *Epigaea repens*, *Houstonia caerulea*, *Ranunculus fascicularis*, *Rosa blanda*, *Hieracium venosum* and *Potentilla canadensis*. When the whole list is examined it will be found that this trait of blooming twice runs through certain floral orders. The rose family (to which the fruit trees belong) is easily first, followed by violets, crowfoots, etc. The list contains few, if any, representatives of those plants that spring from bulbs, corms, or thickened rootstocks, although their buds are formed in autumn. Having a stock of food to draw upon, it would seem that these should be the first to respond to warmth and moisture. It appears to be quite rare for the trillium, dog-tooth violet, spring beauty, rue anemone or blood-root to bloom in autumn, and I should be pleased to hear from those who have found them in blossom at that season.

Apropos of this subject it may be mentioned that the blooming of plants out of season has long been considered an unlucky omen. An old saw runs, "When roses and violets flourish in autumn it is a sign of plague or pestilence during the coming year." In certain parts of the United States the blooming of fruit trees in autumn is supposed to be the precursor of a death in the owner's family.

WILLARD N. CLUTE.

Binghamton, N. Y., Jan. 19, 1894.

—Mr. A. C. Cowley, of Trinity College, Oxford, and Mr. T. G. Stenning, Magdalen College, Oxford, have just left for St. Catherine's Convent, Mount Sinai, in order to continue the investigations begun by Mrs. Lewis and Prof. Rendel Harris.

#### Postage on Natural History Specimens.

IN *Science* for Nov. 17, 1893, p. 267, appeared a circular issued by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, concerning the transmission of specimens of natural history by mail between different countries. This circular asked scientific bodies in certain countries therein named to request their respective governments to favorably reconsider a proposition, made by the United States Post Office, to admit such specimens to the international mails under the rates for "samples of merchandise," this proposition having been once rejected by those countries.

In *Science* for Dec. 22, 1893, p. 348, a Canadian correspondent, Mr. W. Hague Harrington, criticises this circular as follows: "It is sought to throw the blame upon the countries in question, whereas the trouble arises solely from the fact that the United States have not yet advanced far enough to have a *parcel post*, as is in operation among these other countries. There is no difficulty in transmitting specimens from Canada to the most remote countries, but the United States by their policy make it impossible to receive or to send them. The scientific societies should exert their influence at home, and endeavor to have the United States Congress adopt the more advanced and liberal postal arrangements of the countries which your correspondents blame for their troubles."

As chairman of the committee appointed by the Academy to prepare the circular, I have obtained from Mr. N. M. Brooks, Superintendent of Foreign Mails, U. S. P. O., the following official information, which, it is believed, will sufficiently justify the means adopted by this Academy to secure the end desired. It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge here the unfailing courtesy of Mr. Brooks throughout our correspondence on this subject.

The Superintendent's letter, dated Jan. 12, 1894, reads: "With respect to the criticisms (quoted in your letter under reply) upon this Department's failure to more generally establish the parcels post service, it may be well to say that so far as *small packages* of natural history specimens are concerned, the parcel post would afford but few additional facilities over those offered in the regular mails if the rates were assimilated to those in force in Great Britain and Canada; for instance, the lowest charge in Great Britain on a package weighing 3 pounds or less addressed for delivery in Belgium is 1 shilling 3 pence (=30 cents), and to France 1 shilling 4 pence (=32 cents), while in Canada the charges for a pound or less would be to Belgium 46 cents, and to France 48 cents. While the sums named above may be low for the transmission of three-pound or one-pound packages, it must be remembered that these sums are the minimum charges and must be paid also on smaller packages, even on packages weighing only one or two ounces. If the proposition of this Department, to admit natural history specimens to the mails as 'samples,' had been adopted, small packages of such specimens would have been transmissible throughout the extent of the postal union at the rate of one cent for each two ounces, while the facilities offered by the parcels post for the transmission of larger packages would not have been curtailed. For example, under present conditions a package weighing 4 1/2 ounces may be sent from Canada to Belgium or France as a letter upon the prepayment of 45 cents; as a parcels post package the charge would be 46 and 48 cents, respectively; as a 'sample' the charge would be 3 cents."

It may also be mentioned that the United States have a parcels post to certain American countries at the rate of 12 cents per pound or fraction of a pound.

Mr. Harrington's criticism is inaccurate when he says that this Academy's circular "suggested that the various scientific bodies of the United States should use their influence to induce the governments of certain enumerated