HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ORNITHOLOGY OF SURINAM

BY

THOMAS E. PENARD

The literature of the avifauna of Surinam is scattered through the pages of numerous scientific periodicals, the published proceedings and transactions of learned societies, general works on zoology, narratives of travelers, and the miscellaneous publications of writers on the Colony.

The oldest records of birds of the New World are to be found in the manuscripts and sculptural remains of the pre-Columbian civilizations of Central America. In the Maya Codices we find many representations of birds, or parts of birds, drawn in conventional forms and attitudes, and among these we recognize several species whose ranges extend southward and eastward to Surinam, such as, for example, the Harpy Eagle, Harpia harpyia (Linn.), and the King Vulture, Sarcorhamphus papa (Linn.) 1).

Even the earliest accounts of America contain allusions to birds which attracted the attention of the navigators. Apparently the first writer to mention the birds of the New World, was the Spanish historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, official chronicler of the Indies. His extremely interesting book, Oviedo de la natural historia de las Indias, published in Toledo in 1526, contains descriptions of many American birds. Some of these as, for example, the Flamingo and the Pelican, are also inhabitants of the coast of Guiana; hence Oviedo may be considered the first European writer to deal with birds belonging to the avifauna of Surinam. In a later, wholly differ-