

EDITORIAL — BIRD NOMENCLATURE

There are probably few more pressing needs in Australian ornithology than a stabilised nomenclature. The last R.A.O.U. Checklist was published in 1926, and even with several subsequent amendments it is now generally considered to be very much "out of date," particularly in the arrangement of orders and families but also in the names of many individual species. Up until a decade or so ago most authors used R.A.O.U. nomenclature fairly religiously, but of late there has been a greater tendency to diverge from the official Checklist and, particularly for beginners, bird names are becoming very confusing. The practice of some authors of changing long established vernacular names does not improve matters either.

As far as this journal is concerned, the Editor has received some criticism for insisting on the use of the scientific names of H. T. Condon's "A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia with Annotations," (*S.A. Ornith.* 23, 1962, pp. 85-150) rather than of the R.A.O.U. Checklist in non-taxonomic papers. The decision was not made hastily but only after a great deal of thought and discussion with others and the following points were taken into consideration in making the final decision.

Whatever system was used some confusion would occur.

If both systems were allowed much more confusion would occur.

The R.A.O.U. Checklist is out of print and would be possessed by relatively few members of this Association.

Condon's Handlist should be possessed by all members.

Mr. Condon is convener of the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee, and even though there is no doubt some disagreement amongst members of this committee on certain matters, the Handlist is probably a fairly good indication of future changes in the R.A.O.U. Checklist.

The arrangement of orders and families in the Handlist is by no means radical, but is in line with the recommended world standard arrangement. It must be pointed out that

two other works at the State level, A. R. McGill's "*A Hand List of the Birds of New South Wales*" (1960) and Serenty and Whittell's "*Birds of Western Australia*" 3rd. Edn. (1962), both by members of the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee, also use a basically similar arrangement.

However all of Condon's taxonomy may not be accepted by the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee; also Condon has changed his own ideas to some extent, for comparing his Handlist with a previous publication "Notes on the Birds of South Australia: Occurrence, Distribution and Taxonomy" (*S.A. Ornith.* 20, 1951, pp. 26-68) it will be seen that he now accepts as full species certain forms, e.g. *Hylacola cauta*, *Melithreptus laetior*, *Cinlosoma alisteri* and *Glimacteris rufa* that he had previously relegated to subspecies.

Therefore it would be preferable for bird observers in this State to retain the "official" vernacular names for those forms that can readily be separated in the field, whilst still using the Handlist scientific names. Thus the vernaculars of Crimson, Adelaide and Yellow Rosellas should still be used, although all bear the scientific name *Platycercus elegans*—similarly with the White-browed and Spotted Scrub-Wrens, White-backed and Black-backed Magpies, Grey, Brown and Black-winged Currawongs, etc. The use of trinomials for sight records is not recommended.

Even if Condon's changes become official there are sound reasons for using separate vernacular names for those sub-species that are readily recognisable in the field, e.g. why should a yellow parrot of the Murray River be called a Crimson Rosella? Also it is useful to students of bird distribution if distinctive forms are given separate vernaculars in bird lists—especially those whose ranges approach each other and possibly overlap. After all, some of today's sub-species may eventually prove, by breeding experiments and other methods of research to be in fact full species; and the converse is equally likely. On the other hand it is doubtful if giving separate vernaculars to all subspecies serves any really useful function. — B.G.