

Living *versus* Dead Names for Australian Birds.

(By A. J. Campbell, C.M.B.O.U., Melbourne.)

Much attention has been paid recently to nomenclature in connection with our birds, perhaps more so than to ornithology itself—which study should be the first consideration. Nomenclature is a means to an end only. Nomenclature as the dictionary states means “names appropriated to any science;” not that the science is appropriated to the names.

I, too, have been tempted to put ornithology aside for a space to look into names and the methods of nomenclaturists, if haply I may find enlightenment.

Let me take, at random, an instance illustrative of my title:—“Living *v.* Dead Names.” The fine Tasmanian Brown, or Swamp-Quail has been known by the living and well-supported, name of *Synoicus diemenensis*, with Gould’s most excellent life-coloured plate thereof, for the last seventy years—the ordinary life of man. Now Mr. G. M. Mathews in his laborious work of research has resurrected the dead, (obscure and obsolete) specific name of *ypsilophorus*—a prior name may be, but as dead as Julius Caesar, and the work of reference given, old, foreign and obsolete—“Bosc, Jour. d.Hist. Nat., 1792.”

That is not all, Mr. Mathews in his enthusiasm (which we all admire) has also discovered that some other animal was previously called *Synoicum*; therefore, on the score of the so-called science of “one-letterism” *Synoicus* cannot stand, so says that authority, and he proposes the new genus *Ypsilophorus*, and as there are sub-species of the Swamp-Quail, in trinomial terms the resurrected and glorified name for the Tasmanian Quail would become:—*Ypsilophorus ypsilophorus ypsilophorus*.* as against the present living and appropriate name:—*Synoicus diemenensis*. In the name of reason which term shall stand? Surely the latter. “Let the dead bury their dead,” is divine philosophy. Even, as the proverb goes, a “living dog is better than a dead lion.”

Ah, but I may be informed that the “Rules of National Nomenclature” must be abided by. (By the way, probably there are not three copies in the whole of the Commonwealth, and it would be interesting, in these terrible days of war, to

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know the names and nationalities of the original Committee who compiled them). My reply is, if these rules turn the living into the dead, they were not made for, or by Australians.

We sometimes hear the stereotyped expression, "if we do not conform to the National Codes of Nomenclature, we shall be behind other nations in ornithological science." Nonsense! Australian Soldiers did not lag behind in the great World-War. Neither shall we be behind in ornithology, because we desire certain living names that breathe of Australia, and are an inspiration, instead of names like "dry bones" dug from old and musty literary graves.

However, if the august National Committee can make rules it can also make exception thereto, and may possibly issue "an opinion" in favour of present living names *not ornithologically incorrect, or scientifically wrong* of certain purely endemic Australian birds. Before another "Check-list" takes final shape let us consider an Australian *Nomina conservanda*, or better still, an "Ornithologist's Memorial," in memory of Australia's sons, who have fought, and not a few have fallen for their country in the great war—a list of Time-honoured and historic names of well-known birds, which names that "grave-digger"—the arbitrary "Law of Priority" proposes to bury. We can then approach the National Committee, and say:—"This is a list which the Nation desires you to be good enough to honour, and to let live for all time."

Such a "Memorial Exception List" would not exceed 40 names, or about 5 per cent of the names on existing local lists. If this were happily accomplished, I venture to suppose we would have an *Australian List of Commonwealth Birds*, which all workers would acknowledge to be intelligible, practical, and permanent.
