

## Review: "Re-naming Australian Birds—Is it Necessary?"

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Delivered at a *Conversazione*, of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, Melbourne; July 3rd, 1918 (Walker, May and Co., Melbourne).

Reached the Hon. Secretary and has been handed to me for comments. I know my old friend's very conservative views upon "Nomenclature", and I also know the good work he has done in the past on Australian Ornithology, still Mr. Campbell's address cannot be taken seriously, because his aim seems to be, to make an ornithology for Australia to the exclusion of the Old World. If this be the case no scientific ornithologist could work along those lines. In opening, Mr. Campbell says—"Nomenclature is not a science." I do not agree with this, for the naming of birds with scientific names can only be done by scientific ornithologists, therefore it must be science. Then Mr. Campbell goes on with a lot of things which have nothing to do with either ornithology or science; I refer to such statements as "Official circles of Army, Navy, Civil Service: Let the dead bury their dead, etc., etc.," but one sentence is interesting, it is "Again in every walk of life many of us do not receive the reward we fancy we should." This is no reason why we should not give those men before Gould's time the honour which is due to them. Mr. Campbell quotes, "The excellence and correctness of the major works such as John Gould's "The Catalogue of Birds." As to the first John Gould says in his "Hand Book of the Birds of Australia", "Modern research having ascertained that many of the species believed at the time I wrote to be new, had been previously described by Latham and others, the specific names assigned to them by those authors have, in obedience to the *Law of Priority* been restored." As for the catalogue, the B.O.U. is now at work upon a list of the Birds of the World, which looks very much as if a new list is badly wanted. As for the market value of these old works, it is their age and excellence of finish which gives them the values quoted by Mr. Campbell. No progressive ornithologist works by Gould now, for apart from his real types his work is obsolete, and has not Mr. Campbell said so, for he has written in the preface of his fine work "The Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds". "Since Gould's day ornithology, like every other science, has advanced a pace, conse-

quently Gould's classification is somewhat obsolete." In reference to "The National Rules of Zoological Nomenclature" Mr. Campbell asks, "Who has copies of these rules in the Commonwealth?" Should any one break an act of the law, it would be no excuse to say one did not read the act. The same with the ornithologist, if he does not keep abreast of the literature on the subject, ornithology will not wait for him, and he will be left behind. The next question is, "Who made them?" (the rules). These rules were made by the most eminent zoologists of the world, and as for Australia taking part in forming the rules, I would be very much surprised if such savants who composed the Committee, would think of including an Australian ornithologist after the class of ornithology which has been expounded in Australia. That the Law of Priority should suit one branch of zoology and not another is not in the least consistent. If *The Emu*, as Mr. Campbell says, is "to popularize the study of our native birds", and not to contain scientific matter, the union will suffer; for it will become a bird lovers' club. How many of Gould's children who were born in Australia have nothing to do with nomenclature, nor has sentiment anything to do with science. John Gould did good work in Australia, he was a very shrewd business man, and made his work pay. No man gave less credit to some who helped him beyond measure in Australia. Mr. Campbell speaks of assistants who took up the work for payment, but not a word about a great field ornithologist who spent thousands, put up with great hardships, took more than one trip to England to help the author of "The Birds of Australia" in his work, with notes and material which never cost John Gould a penny, and this man was hardly mentioned in the big work. Surely Mr. Campbell must know that the rulings of the International Congress are for the world and that all scientific ornithologists over the face of the globe must work by them. If Mr. Campbell means that the so called Official Check-list when he says "Australian Ornithologists in taking Gould, are precisely on the same footing and adopting the same rule as did the old world ornithologists in regard to the Xth Linnaeus," all I can say is that, I had better give the reviews of the leading ornithological journals upon that list. *The Auk*, vol xxx., p. 447, 1913, says—"These principles we think constitute the most remarkable code of nomenclature that has been framed in recent times. . . . The members seem to have failed utterly in comprehending the problem before them. We regret exceedingly that we cannot endorse this check-list for general use. Aside from all ques-

tions of nomenclature it would serve a valuable purpose as a conservative list of Australian species and sub-species, but here it fails inasmuch as the lack of synonymy makes it difficult or impossible to ascertain with which the many recently described races have been united." Then again *The Ibis*, 1913, pp. 669 to 701 says—"It is impossible to recommend the list to the use of present day workers, as no synonymy is given, and names are apparently used for species with which they have been shown to have no connection. In conclusion it can only be reiterated that the Official Check-list can be regarded merely as an expression of the conservative views of the old school of Australian Ornithologists, and not as a useful index to that of Ornithological Science in Australia."

The International Committee on Zoological Nomenclature is steadily confirming or rejecting names. The Law of Priority has been affirmed both in 1892 and 1901.

All ornithologists in this State are of one mind that "The vexed question of Nomenclature" must be settled now, once and for all. What we have to do is, set to work (the sooner the better), and form a list of Australian birds upon the foundation laid down by the most eminent men in the Ornithological World.

September, 1918. S. A. WHITE, "Wetunga",  
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