

## Nomenclature.

By Gregory M. Mathews, F.R.S.E.

In the past this subject was not governed by rules, so that we had men changing the name of a bird for no other reason than that they did not like it. In "The Analyst" we have this sort of thing, and in the next volume the name so changed was again changed.

It was to prevent this that Strickland brought in his famous "Reform Bill" over eighty years ago. He drafted rules and sent them out to over two hundred men and Societies asking for comments and help. Prince Bonaparte, amongst others, sent most valuable constructive criticism. He says "Priority our only guide," "Not to extend to authors older than Linnaeus," "Brisson not to be used." Also that those wishing to introduce new names should study the new code, just as lawyers and doctors have to study their books. This last sentence is important to-day.

We get the "freak-man" who says that he will not do this or that, and because a name has been in use so many years that therefore it must go on being used; and many other similar statements. But these men are not interested in the science for its own sake, but are very keen to have their own views followed. Ornithology is not an exact science, but those men by their action make it more inexact.

The rules, as laid down now, prevent any man from putting forward his personal views unless backed up by chapter and verse. All those who are interested in making our science as exact as possible should follow the "International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature," as published in 1905, and the amended set in "Science" (N.S.), Vol. XXVI, No. 668, October 18th, 1907. Then and then only can finality be reached. Most of the stumbling-blocks are there removed. If one finds men wilfully wrong in their nomenclature it is only fair to suppose them to be careless in their work, and for careless work there is no excuse.

If a man is not governed by rules his work does not carry the stamp of efficiency and such work is more or less wasted. Of course by standing out against the rest of the world a certain amount of cheap notoriety is attained. But this soon passes.

The rules are now followed by most, if not all, of the workers in different parts of the world, so by eliminating those who do

not we arrive at what we all want—Uniformity of Nomenclature. So to all my countrymen and workers in Australia I appeal for help in carrying out the Rules so that our next Check List will be such that to it no scientist can take exception on any of the main principles.

There are a few points about which uniformity of thought is not yet reached, such as the use of genera, one-letterism, and what boundary there is between species and subspecies. Under the last heading comes *Aphelocephala leucopsis* (Gould). Take a bird from New South Wales and compare it with *A. castaneiventris* from Day Dawn, and they are quite distinct. But take a long series from all the intermediate country and we find it difficult to draw the line, as each seems to blend into its neighbour. And when one finds it hard to draw the line at any one point, one is forced to call them all one species.

Another case is *Pardalotus punctatus*. With a long series one cannot admit *xanthopygius* without admitting, say, *militaris*. Some of the species of *Malurus*, again, are not easy to separate.

But these are points which can be left for the present, as it is impossible for anyone living in Australia to see the long series of birds that are in Europe. And without this it is impossible to be uniform, as many so-called subspecies differ more from their species than do any of the above cases.

I described one extra-limital bird as a subspecies, and the next worker made it the genotype of a new genus! So the last word is not yet written.

But two of the most important rules can be followed absolutely—"Priority" and "Rejection of homonyms." For the first, most of the books dealing with Australian ornithology have been gone through (at least by myself), and many, if not all, of the homonyms pointed out.

For the sake of those who are interested in making ornithology as exact as possible I would say that a homonym is the second use of a combination of names, and cannot possibly be adopted. A nude name may be given life, but a homonym is stillborn, and can never live.

There used to be men who said, "This List is for Australians only," but the absurdity of such a statement was evident to all, and now our new List will be for the ornithologist, amateur or professional, a List in which the correct name will be given.