

The Abuse of Nomenclature.

PRIORITY AND THE SO-CALLED "PREOCCUPIED NAME."

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With the best of laudable intentions, Mr. Gregory M. Mathews has endeavoured to enlighten his ornithological brethren in Australia on the principles of "Type Descriptions" and "Nomenclature" (*vide* "The S.A. Ornithologist," VII, pp. 211-14).

Mr. Mathews commences well, with the International Code (not "Rules"). However, the Code only came into force when first adopted, and became "International" in 1904.* Therefore, the nation adopting the articles cannot make them retrospective. It would be the height of folly to make laws or rules to apply to what a Gould or a Gray did, or did not do, years previously.

Mr. Mathews cites concrete examples of what he considers homonyms. (1) "*Casuarinus australis*, Gould, 1857, is a rejected homonym," he states, "because of its previous use by Shaw and Nodder, 1792."

*The International Code was adopted by the R.A.O.U. at its Adelaide Session, 1922. But the Session was careful to define "The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, Berne, 1904" ("The Emu," XXII, p. 192).

- (a) Are homonyms prior to 1904 to be adjudicated upon?
 (b) Who authoritatively rejects homonyms?
 (c) Is the above-mentioned case, in point of fact, a homonym according to the article (35)*, which distinctly states that the species must be of the same genus?

The absurdity of retrospective alteration should be so evident that the question might easily be dismissed. It cannot be maintained in law, in ethics, or in common sense. The full, free, and logical interpretation of the International Code should be accepted, seeing that its articles are the results of the deliberation of the best men upon the subject of nomenclature. Misinterpretation of the Code has indeed led to "confusion worse confounded," proof positive that the real object of the Code is not what others claim for it.

Obviously in regard to the third point (c) the species are not of the same genus. *Casuarus australis* of Gould rightly refers to the Cassowary, while Shaw and Nodder's name was wrongly applied to the Emu. Consequently this is where the "Abuse of Priority" comes in. If Mr. Mathews stands down Gould's name for the Cassowary because of a similar name given to another bird of different genus, he must, according to the reading of the article, first prove that the Emu is a Cassowary, which, of course, is absurd.

(2) The case of *Acanthiza pyrrhopygia*, Gould, is especially entertaining, because Gould's type, which was procured in South Australia, is in the Academy of Sciences, Philadelphia. Mr. Edwin Ashby recently obtained another specimen at, or near, the type locality. It was forwarded to America and compared with the original type, with which it agrees. If the type be named *Acanthiza pyrrhopygia*, Gould, that name, *ipso facto*, must be the name of the species. And no one, not even the august Commission itself, possesses any power legally or morally to alter that name. Far from being "stillborn," as Mr. Mathews states, the name *Acanthiza pyrrhopygia*, Gould, has lived a vigorous life for sixty years or more, in spite of a certain cult who attempted to strangle it with a homonym.

But what of *Acanthiza pyrrhopygia* of Vigors and Horsfield? That specimen became the type of *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*—another genus—and is in the British Museum. (See "Catalogue of Birds," VII, p. 346). It was declared to be a *Hylacola* by Gould six years before he described his *Acanthiza*

*Full text reads:—"A specific name is to be rejected as a homonym when it has previously been used for some other species of the same genus."

pyrrhopyia. To be a homonym under the article, both species must be of *the same genus*. The intention of the rule is sound. There would be much confusion were two species extant of the same genus, but we must not mistake the shadow for the substance. Apparently, misinterpretation of the primary object of the Code has been the plague of freak names with which scientific ornithology has been infested. Mr. Mathews is welcome to point out all the homonyms he can discover, thus adding to our knowledge of the past, but he has no authority whatever to do away with these homonyms.

Finally, what becomes of Mr. Gregory M. Mathews's new name, *A. hamiltoni*, with which he (unwittingly, no doubt) proposes to abase and abuse Gould's prior name, *A. pyrrhopygia*? There can only be one place for it and for many so-called new names—the limbo of the long, long list of synonymy which has been most aptly termed the "Science of Blunders."

*"The Emu," XXI, 1922, p. 163. †*Ibid.*, pp. 188-97.