

MORE ON THE COX'S SANDPIPER CONTROVERSY: AN APOLOGY AND CORRECTION

by David C. Morimoto

The article I wrote for the December 1987 issue of *Bird Observer* (Morimoto 1987) about the confusing story surrounding the naming of Cox's Sandpiper, *Calidris paramelanotos*, was a one-sided account that left the impression that two outstanding Australian ornithologists, Shane Parker, Curator of Birds at the South Australian Museum, and J. B. Cox had failed to credit properly the work of Fred T. H. Smith, a well-known field ornithologist from Victoria, Australia. I hope to clarify the situation here.

I based the information in my article on documentation given to me by Fred T. H. Smith and neglected my obligation to check the other side of the story for the points of view of Shane Parker and J. B. Cox. When beginning my search for information on Cox's Sandpiper, I initially wrote to Parker, and shortly thereafter I wrote to Smith. Although I received a prompt reply from Smith, I did not receive a reply from Parker until after my article had gone to press (in order to be included in the "Cox's Sandpiper" issue of *Bird Observer*). By not providing Parker and Cox with the opportunity to comment on the manuscript prior to its publication, I displayed a lack of personal and professional courtesy, and I sincerely apologize to them, to the South Australian Museum, and to the readers for the misleading nature of what I wrote.

Parker and Cox responded to my article, disputing Smith's claims, relating more of the background for this prolonged and bitter controversy, and pointing out the following errors. The information that Smith conveyed to me suggested that the Smithsonian Institution and the British Museum of Natural History had called the two specimens collected by Cox "aberrant Pectoral Sandpipers" and hybrid "Curlew-Sharp-tails," respectively. Parker (who sent the specimens to the museums) has informed me that the Smithsonian Institution considered the birds either hybrid Curlew-Pectoral Sandpipers or a new species, and the British Museum of Natural History considered them to be Pectoral Sandpipers. As a source for my statement that the South Australian Museum accepted the Smithsonian's identification, I cited Cox (1976). This citation is incorrect. One further clarification concerns the wording of a sentence in Parker's letter to Smith of April 6, 1981, which I had paraphrased as follows: "He [Shane Parker] further stated that Smith (and Cox) would certainly be included in the authorship of the description." Parker's precise words were "Should I decide to take the matter further, I should certainly ask you and John Cox whether you would like to join me in the authorship."

Rather than contribute further to muddying the waters of this unresolved controversy, I have attached to this note a full set of references to assist readers who wish to learn more.

Acknowledgments. I thank Shane Parker and J. B. Cox for their responses to my article, for pointing out the errors, and for the insight they provided. My thanks also to Fred T. H. Smith for the information and additional documentation that he has sent me. I am also grateful, for their helpful advice, to Kenneth Parkes, Senior Curator of Birds at the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh, and Ernst Mayr, Professor of Zoology Emeritus of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University.

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