

and perpetuated.\* In short, the interests of ornithology demand that a case so flagrant be made an example of warning to all who may be tempted to commit similar crimes (the word is a strong one, but let it stand). Accordingly I hold up for the contempt of all honest men the name of Emery C. Greenwood of Ipswich, Massachusetts. It is to be hoped that there are no more such deceivers in our midst. If any are known or suspected let them be promptly dealt with.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM BREWSTER.

Cambridge, Mass., June, 1884.

### Can we not have a Simpler System of Nomenclature?

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

*Sirs*: The present seems a fitting time to test the views of ornithologists as regards a new nomenclature. So much has to be crowded into one's life, that in general the simpler the basis of our knowledge is, the more will interest be awakened; and so it is with ornithology also. If we would have a nomenclature that will endure, we must make it as simple as possible, so that it serves our purpose. And ornithology can be made easy, without at all retarding its advancement, and at the same time, not be continually in an unsettled state as regards nomenclature. For ordinary purposes, of what use is the generic name? Is there a case where the family name will not serve as well? If there are two specific names alike in one family, then one should be changed immediately. The family name will answer every purpose and much better than the generic; and if the present generation does not adopt it, some future one will, for complication will not stand the wear of time where simplicity will do as well.

If the family name is used, the ordinary well-read people will master the rudiments; while now none but specialists know anything of ornithology by its scientific appellations. This change will in no way be detrimental to the student either, for he will know just as well what *Turdus mustelinus*, *Turdus migratorius*, *Turdus polyglottus*, and *Turdus rufus* are as though *Hylocichla*, *Merula*, *Mimus*, and *Harporhynchus* were used, and the general reader will know he is reading about a Thrush.

Many of the family names carry with them their own meaning, while very few of the generic do. The family names of the bird-world would not be very difficult to master; but who can say the same of the generic? Those of this country are known perfectly by very few.

But doubtless the question will be asked, What shall become of the generic names? My reply is, leave them in the scientific books, where

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\*As it was the escape was a narrow one, for at various times during the past two years he has been kind (!) enough to write to Mr. Allen and myself concerning some of his more interesting captures, in more than one instance actually giving a detailed account of the shooting of a specimen in Massachusetts which we now know came to him in the skin from *Norway*. Fortunately these notes were not fully trusted, and only one of them — that of the Wood Ibis, announced by Mr. Allen in the 'Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club' (Vol. VIII, p. 185)—was actually published.

they belong, and from which they should never have been taken for common use. The following schedule will better show the working of the change I propose, taking Ridgway's 'Nomenclature of North American Birds' in illustration.

Family TURDIDÆ.

Genus *Hylocichla*.

1. *Turdus mustelinus*.
2. *Turdus fuscescens*, etc.

Genus *Turdus*.

6. *Turdus iliacus*.

Genus *Merula*.

7. *Turdus migratorius*.

Genus *Hesperocichla*.

9. *Turdus nævius*.

Eight genera in Turdidæ where one would answer equally well for all articles upon birds, and which would be better understood by all who read them. *Picus* will answer as well for every Woodpecker as the eight names used in its stead, and *Anas* for every Duck, as well as the twenty-two now used, etc.

It will be seen that all the changes of genera that may be instituted would not in the least affect the general student or the public.

Very respectfully,

Providence, R. I., May 19, 1884.

FRED. T. JENCKS.

The above was sent to the editor of 'The Auk,' and his reply to it [given below] was so conclusive that at my request he publishes both for the benefit of the many ornithologists who, like myself, may not understand the details imposed upon ornithology in respect to matters of nomenclature.—F. T. J.

Cambridge, Mass.,

May 20, 1884.

MR. F. T. JENCKS,

Providence, R. I. :—

Dear Sir: Yours of 19th, with enclosure for the July 'Auk,' is just received. The subject of which you write is certainly an important one, and the difficulties to which you allude I to some degree appreciate. Yet I must say I see no remedy. The scheme you present is certainly impracticable, as I could easily show you could I meet you and talk the matter over with you. It is rather too large a subject to handle readily in a letter. Yet I will try to call your attention to a few points, and will take the family you instance — the Turdidæ — in illustration.

The latest monographer of this group refers to it nearly 250 species, for which he recognizes 18 genera. Have you any idea how difficult it would be to find 250 different and distinct specific names for these birds, and how many new names would have to be imposed to take the place of names used more than once within even the typical Thrushes (subfamily Turdinæ)

alone? A reference to the synonymy of the Thrushes, as here presented, shows that in some instances the same specific name is used by different writers, in the current literature of the subject, for as many as *nine* different species; while many names are used *five* times, a much larger number *three* and *four* times, and a great many more are used *twice*. The instances are not few where the same specific name is used for two or three different species *by the same writer*. To displace these names would be simply impossible, from the fact that the *rule of priority* is universally accepted by all biologists — botanists as well as zoölogists — as the fundamental principle of nomenclature, strict adherence to which is the only safeguard of stability in names. To ignore it gives every one the right, or at least opens the way to any one, to give a new name in place of any which for any reason he does not like. So long as tastes differ — as they always will in matters of nomenclature, as in other things — you may readily see what confusion would speedily result. But *nothing* will ever induce naturalists to revoke this rule, which was formally adopted 50 years ago as a relief from the chaos of names resulting from any one who chose displacing names he did not like. A fatal objection to your scheme is this substitution of new names for old ones on a large scale, in order that the same specific name may not be used twice in the same *family*. Naturalists already find difficulty enough in selecting names that have not been used before in the same *genus*!

So much for this side of the subject. Now as to a point in classification. The Turdidæ, as now construed by leading authorities, include not only the birds known to us in this country as Thrushes, but also the very large Old World group of Warblers (genera *Sylvia*, *Phylloscopus*, *Cettia*, *Locustella*, etc.), the Redstarts (*Ruticillæ*), Stonechats (*Saxicolæ*), the Nightingales, Robin-Redbreasts, etc., and our own Bluebirds, and the Solitaires. To use *Turdus* as the generic term for all these forms would so expand its significance that it would convey no very clear idea of the kind of bird meant. On the other hand, many birds popularly called Thrushes — as the great group of 'Babbling' Thrushes of the Old World, and the 'Mocking' Thrushes of the New World, including our Brown Thrush, Mockingbird, Catbird, and their allies — are ruled out of the family. The latest and highest authorities on the Passeres *emphatically* exclude our Mockingbirds and Thrashers from the family Turdidæ, on what are considered good structural characters. So you will see that part of the examples you cite as members of *Turdus* are not admissible into even the Thrush *family*. I fear, to meet your views, we should have to have not only a new *system of nomenclature*, but a *new classification* as regards the *families* of birds.

But these are only a few specimen examples of the great number of objections your scheme would encounter. The impracticabilities are numerous and appear on every hand.

I do not doubt that you represent a widespread and deep feeling, but at the same time it is perfectly evident that it results from limited knowledge of the subject. You have in mind mainly the birds of a limited area — not those of the world at large. But this dissatisfaction you voice is not

altogether without cause, and is a natural reaction against a refinement of classification, as regards genera, which in this country has been carried quite too far, and against which there is also a reaction among experts themselves. What you hope to see, I may venture to say, will be to a large degree realized in the next Check List of North American birds — the A. O. U. List. It will necessarily be some time — perhaps a year or more — before it will be in the hands of the public; but it is an open secret that it will present, for one thing, a very great reduction in the number of generic names — a return in this respect to almost the Audubonian basis.

But there is perhaps another thing which you overlook, and that is that while many of the genera in our North American list have but one or two species referred to them, they may be genera which have elsewhere many species, and that in a list of the birds of the world, instead of having one or two species, as is the case with *Merula*, *Saxicola*, *Mimus*, *Thryothorus*, *Myiadestes*, *Euphonia*, *Spermophila*, etc., they really include a dozen, or twenty, or even more.

Now, in regard to your paper sent for publication in 'The Auk.' From the standpoint of the scientist the scheme unfolded is in many ways so antagonistic to settled canons of nomenclature as to be thoroughly impracticable. This is a frank statement of the case, dictated by the most friendly motives. While I do not decline your article, as a friend I would advise its withdrawal, for reasons above stated. If you prefer to see it published, its proper place would be in the department of 'Correspondence,' and its character would call for editorial comment. About what that would be you can infer from the tenor of this letter.... I leave the matter in this way, and hope to hear from you soon in reply.

Very truly yours,

J. A. ALLEN.

#### A Lay View of 'Ornithophilologicalities.'

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

*Sirs*: While reading the various articles which relate to the nomenclature of birds, by Professor Merriam and Drs. Stejneger and Coues, which have appeared in 'The Auk' and its predecessor, the lay mind is filled with dismay. The predominant feeling is that if these literary amenities are essential to the science, we must forego the science. One cannot help thinking that a fitting caption for such papers as the dreary 'Ornithophilologicalities' would have been that which Dante found above the entrance to a less desolate region: "All hope abandon ye who enter here." Where opinions are so radically opposed what gains can be expected? Has all the controversy hitherto been able to accomplish anything? Do we not find even in so small a matter as the broad distinction between birds hatched naked and those hatched with a covering that Dr. Coues says 'psilopædic' and 'ptilopædic' in place of the 'gymnopædic' and 'dasypædic' of other authors? And is it not certain that each author is prepared to maintain that his particular word is the more pre-