

Genera and Subgenera of the A. O. U. Check-List.—In the case of such purely conventional groups as genera and subgenera, utility is clearly their chief *raison d'être*, and this may be judged largely by the consensus of usage. In 1884, when the A. O. U. Committee prepared its Check-List of North American Birds, the feeling was more or less general among American ornithologists that there were too many genera current, and that the proper relationships of certain groups treated as genera were better expressed by reducing such groups to subgenera. This was evidently the feeling of the Committee, and on the conclusion of its work this feature of it was doubtless viewed with considerable satisfaction by all its members. As time passed on, however, the increasing tendency to differentiate subspecies on slight provocation naturally increased the relative value of the subgeneric groups. At the same time it became evident that the opinion of the Committee on genera and subgenera did not meet with the approval of ornithologists at large, and certain members of the Committee began to feel that the reduction of many 'genera' to the rank of 'subgenera' was illadvised. In 1892, this feeling was strong enough to lead to action, when all of the subgenera of *Trochilus* were given full generic rank, as was also *Ardetta* among the Herons. In 1896, a few other subgenera were similarly treated, while in 1898, no less than twelve subgenera were raised to the rank of full genera! Probably others would have received similar treatment had their status been formally challenged in such a way as to bring them up for action.

The matter has been recently considered by Dr. Coues, in 'The Osprey' for May, 1899,¹ where he claims that, in his judgment, "a large number of the subgenera now standing in the Check-List, require to be restored or advanced to full generic rank, and some additional subgenera need to be recognized." He gives a list of some 21 subgenera he believes should stand as genera, and some dozen subgenera are suggested as additions to the Check-List. Two new subgenera are proposed, namely *Pallasicarbo*, for *Phalacrocorax perspicillatus*, and *Psiloscoops*, type *Scops flammeola* Kaup. Doubtless Dr. Coues's opinion on the subject of genera and subgenera, as here set forth, is shared by other members of the Committee.—J. A. A.

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¹On Certain Generic and Subgeneric Names in the A. O. U. Check-List. The Osprey, III, May, 1899, p. 144.

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quedula crecca (Linn.) colorita anormalmente. (*Ibid.*, XVI.) (16) Il *Turdus fuscatus* Pallas — nel Bergamasco. (*Ibid.* XIII.) (17) Un Ibrido naturale di *Anas boscas* Linn. e *Mareca penelope* (Linn.) preso nel Veneto. (Atti della Soc. Veneto-Trentina di Sci. nat. ser. 2, I, fasc. ii.)

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CORRESPONDENCE.

The Spelling of Names.

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:—In the April number of your excellent journal, our esteemed friend, Mr. William Brewster, has acknowledged—what I am sure no one would ever have dreamed charging him with—that he has experienced a difficulty in spelling correctly even so insignificant a word as a proper name, and in his strait he appeals to me for assistance. Now, although I am indicated, together with Mr. Brewster's fellow-committeeman, Dr. Coues, and the revered president of an ancient University, as one of those who does not know how to spell his own name, which is a very sad state of affairs indeed, yet I will try to explain why "these things are thus." It is possible Mr. Brewster's former intimate knowledge of philology (which he tells us, and he alone would say that, is now reduced to "simple ignorance") has been obliterated by the peculiar atmosphere which has enveloped him at the meetings of a prominent A. O. U. Committee, of which he is one of the most highly respected members. If he will permit me, I would recall to Mr. Brewster's memory the fact that in philological science a word is spelled according to the root or source from which it is derived, and it not infrequently happens that several words, although very differently spelled, have the same meaning. To give an instance of this effect of derivation, BREWSTER is always spelled