

CORRESPONDENCE.

Editor of 'The Auk':

May I suggest to your readers as an unusually interesting subject for field-study the inter-relationships of breeding Purple and Bronzed Grackles in any part of that area, from Massachusetts to Louisiana (and probably Texas), where these two species hybridize.

When I began a study of these birds, forty-odd years ago (Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., Vol. IV, 1892, pp. 1-20), transportation facilities were comparatively limited and I had but few specimens and fewer field-notes from the region mentioned. Today, the field-student with a motor car at his command, defies distance. I hope, therefore that he will defy it early during the coming breeding season and visit Grackle colonies anywhere in the region I have referred to, but especially in the lower Mississippi Valley and more especially in southwestern Louisiana and northeastern Texas.

Full series of males should be secured and when the collector has finished his own researches, I should be greatly obliged if he would loan these birds, and any other pertinent material to me for resumption of the studies I began in 1891 and continued at the last A. O. U. meeting.

Yours truly,

FRANK M. CHAPMAN.

American Museum of Natural History,
New York City,
February 14, 1934.

[While heartily endorsing Dr. Chapman's plea we should like to add a request that Louisiana Grackle students also collect a few adult male Boat-tailed Grackles and ascertain definitely the color of their eyes. 'The Auk' has already devoted a considerable space to this subject without any satisfactory conclusion being reached and the end is not yet! (cf. p. 265 *antea*)—Ed.]

Editor of 'The Auk':

At the risk of being regarded a nuisance for reiterating my plea for a revision of the vernacular specific names for birds I make some comments on the correspondence and editorial remarks on page 128 of the January 'Auk.'

Mr. Swarth regrets that an author has used the term "White Herons" instead of a more specific designation in reference to some birds recorded by him on sight evidence. He remarks,—“I do not doubt that the author knew what the birds were. . . .” From the context I should conclude just the contrary and should regard the indefiniteness of the record as commendable scientific caution. The author is quite within his rights

and his clear duty in restricting his evidence within the facts as he ascertained them. The occurrence of some species of white-colored Herons at the time and place seemed to him, and apparently to the Editor, of sufficient interest for mention. Had he identified them farther than circumstances justified the action would have been reprehensible. That this vagueness causes indexing difficulties is too bad but not as bad as if he had jumped at unwarranted conclusions. To a layman in indexing it does not seem more difficult to index an indefinite "Heron,—white" than a definite "Heron,—Great Blue or Green."

Mr. Swarth also calls attention to the use of "Egret" without further specific designation. The Editor points out that the 1910 Check-List restricts this term to *Casmerodius egretta*, and infers that to this species such reference should be applied. To this conclusion, under these circumstances, I take strong exception. Unless the author makes such intention plain, I see no justification, the A. O. U. Committee to the contrary notwithstanding, in assuming this artificially restricted meaning to an obviously proper group name. *Egretta candidissima* and *Dichromanassa rufescens* by the same check-list, and other species by common usage and equal authority, are also properly "egrets." To deny the name to them is absurd and a refusal to recognize the self-evident. There is a perfectly legitimate and often necessary use for the group name "egret" and the attempt to restrict it to one species is not only an incorrect use of words but bad ornithology. There are numbers of similar cases in the 'Check-List.'

This, with other questions as to the application of vernacular names that have been raised lately especially in census and banding operations in which non-systematists are preeminent, is demonstration of the need for a revision of this department of our official nomenclature. The difficulties of constructing an acceptable and consistently correct system of English names for all our species and subspecies are admitted, but the need is great, growing more pressing, and will eventually have to be faced.

It has been found expedient to prepare such a list for use in a popular work on the birds of Canada now going to press in which the interest is primarily specific but for which no specific nomenclature has been officially provided. We have had to use our own best judgment in the matter but how general the approval of the results will be remains to be seen. Under the circumstances, and without the assistance of the combined wisdom of the A. O. U., no other course was open. Until the A. O. U. takes this matter seriously and settles the difficult points, those of us who wish to be as free and as accurate in the popular tongue as we can be in the scientific must follow our own individual judgments with many differences of opinion.

National Museum of Canada.

Ottawa, Canada.

Feb. 22, 1934.

P. A. TAVERNER.

[While it may be foolish to continue a discussion that has proven fruitless in the past, we must point out for Mr. Taverner's benefit that the editor stated that "in *January, 1931*," (i. e. in the 3rd edition of the Check-List) "Egret" was the recognized name for the "American Egret." In preparing the 4th edition the Committee endeavored to correct the very fault now again brought up by Mr. Taverner and added "American" to the English name of *Casmerodius a. egretta* so that all the species that he mentions now enjoy the name Egret while each one has a distinctive qualifying name, just as he would have it!

Apart from other such additions to names in the 3rd edition as "Eastern" for the Robin and other species with two or more races, the Committee refrained from changes as it was recognized that our only hope for uniformity was to stick so far as possible to the names already established in the 'Check-List.' We have yet to see any approach to uniformity on the part of the critics of our present English bird names and until then there is little hope for anything but diversity of opinion among the critics while the rest of us stick to the old names. As to specific group names we must first stop the constantly shifting ideas as to which forms are species and which subspecies which is an apparent impossibility. But why should our system of vernacular names be reduced to a set of arbitrary rules as is our technical nomenclature? If two birds like the Boat-tailed and Great-tailed Grackles, which have long had these distinctive names, are considered to intergrade, why should we have to abandon these names for one applicable to both?—WILMER STONE.]