

RETORTS, REFLECTIONS, AND THOUGHTFUL REFUTATIONS

Regarding J.P. Myers' article on Dowitcher DNA (Facts, Inferences, and Shameless Speculations, 42: 1207-1209), I found this to be most intriguing. A few direct quotes (admittedly taken out of context and sequence) will serve to illustrate my profound respect for such erudition:

"Mitochondrial DNA ... differ from most congeners ... reveal pockets of independent evolutionary units ... according to phylogenetic species concept advocates ... searching for truth in fast and slow electromorphs ... with relentless fervor at their electrophoretic gels ... revealing unperceived evolutionary heterogeneity ... splitting and lumping ... morphometric differences ... as inaccessible to the nonprofessional as the quark."

I must have the wrong dictionary—I can't even find "quark," let alone the rest of these gorgeous words.

Hurray for Dowitcher DNA!

**Joe Fisher,
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I have enjoyed both of J.P. Myers' "Facts, Inferences, and Shameless Speculations" columns and lust for more; readers should be admonished to read between the lines before getting their dander up. Sarcasm and wit (often dim in many writings but not here) are becoming the domain of the writer and not just the cartoonist as a vehicle for

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getting one's point across in the morass of the mass media.

But surely J.P. (destined to become the "J.R." of Audubon with this column) does not mean to say (*American Birds* 42:1207-1209) that future species will only be conceptual entities of the lab. The birdies will still have to get together to practice horizontal gene exchanges each spring as they have been doing since the days of Archaeopteryx. The biological species concept hypothesizes other mechanisms of isolation besides geography alone e.g. behavior. Surely there will always be a geographical basis for whatever species concept is evolved, perhaps some sort of hybrid of the Mayr-Phylogenetic ideas (depending of course on the isolating mechanisms effective over time of both). The

amateur will be able to work with this "real life" application of the new and improved species designations at worst on a superspecies level during the breeding season, and who's to say that the amateur will only want to appreciate and contribute to the avifauna on that level. While only an Ernst Mayr groupie would say that the future is not for splitting, the lister will still be alive and well living with the system that science will make for them; this commitment has already been accepted (and will be) no matter how many gel-runners our universities produce.

As for the increasing split between the amateur and professional, I feel that it has been here for a long time and that gap has been well filled by the likes of Paul DeBenedictis in Birding and J.P. Myers, presently. We need more "popularizers" throughout science. The professionals too have their rifts. Try getting a group of field-oriented behavioral ecologists into a room to discuss some of Cracraft's theoretical papers on the phylogenetic species concept.

Whatever the amount of splitting that occurs in the next fifty years and however similar some of the newly unraveled sibs appear, those of us who yearn for hours afield will always have Kenn Kaufman and the school he represents to help us tell them apart on characters and jizz alone.

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