

several common characters which bind these two groups together as distinguished from other groups. Here again there are good grounds for protest. No objection can be made to taking a species out of a genus to which it has little or no affinity, but we gain nothing by dividing a genus into two genera which we still admit are closer to each other than to any third genus.

Moreover no two experts will agree on what characters or how many are necessary to separate a genus. We have evidence on all sides of this diversity of opinion, and it is not due to ignorance but to the weight that different authorities give to characters.

How our names may be maintained, with any value *as names*, and still reflect evolutionary relationship, expressing both resemblances and differences, is the problem, and subgenera have been suggested as the only expedient that seemed possible. The only other method would seem to be to abandon the use of scientific names entirely except for technical systematic work, a course which is already being forced upon us more and more as our Latin names become meaningless, to all but a comparatively few experts.—W. S.

A Plea for Caution in Use of Trinomials.

Editor of 'THE AUK:

Prior to the year 1872, the catalogue of North American birds consisted practically of binomials only; but during the early "seventies" there was great activity in the systematic study of our birds, resulting in two important publications, Dr. Coues' 'Key to North American Birds (1872),' his 'Check List' (1873), and Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway's 'History of North American Birds' (1874), and in these the nomenclature presented a very different aspect, a very large proportion of the forms being designated by trinomials.¹ The reduction of what had previously been considered species to the rank of subspecies, or "varieties" as they were then called, was carried to an extent unwarranted by the evidence; close resemblance to another form being considered, in many cases, as indicating specific identity of the two. The idea was a comparatively new one, quite fascinating at the time, and there was somewhat of a rivalry between Dr. Coues and the other authors as to who should spring the first surprise in that line.² Afterward, however, when much additional material, from more numerous geographic areas, had accumulated and been carefully studied it was found that many forms must be reinstated as species, and so a healthy reaction took place.

Unfortunately there has been a somewhat recent recrudescence of the fad of reducing forms on what seems to be purely theoretical grounds, the

¹ Not however, the simple trinomial of present-day usage, but with the term "var." interposed between the specific and subspecific names.

² It should be explained that while there was a difference of two years in the publications of the 'Key to North American Birds' and the 'History of North American Birds,' the authors were actually working contemporaneously.

modern professors of the cult being even worse offenders than the original culprits, for with them assumed evidence of the common origin of two or more forms is considered as proof of specific identity even in the absence of present day intergradation. If this practice were applied to our North American check list the number of trinomials would be vastly increased.

I am very sorry indeed for this backward step in ornithological science, for I feel sure that instead of being an advance, it is a distinct retrogression. Trinomials are admittedly a *necessary* evil, but why impose them on an already sufficiently troublesome nomenclature when they are not only *not* necessary but doubtfully justified by the facts? We are dealing with forms as they are *today*, not as they may have been ages ago; and for one I can never agree to the naming of any of the Palearctic forms of *Penthestes* as subspecies of *P. atricapillus*; *Regulus satrapa* as a subspecies of *R. regulus*; *Falco regulus* as a subspecies of *F. columbarius*; *Astur atricapillus* as a subspecies of *A. gentilis*, or *Circus hudsonius* as a subspecies of *C. cyaneus*. Although I may have once held that view of their relationships that was many years ago. Now, I believe that trinomials should be used with caution, in short only when present day intergradation is clearly proven.

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NOTES AND NEWS

WALTER BRADFORD BARROWS, a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union elected at its first meeting in 1883, died in East Lansing, Mich., February 26, 1923. He had recently passed his 68th birthday having been born January 10, 1855, at Wellesley Hills, Mass. Professor Barrows graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1876, and from 1879 to 1881 was instructor in chemistry and physics in the Colegio Nacional at Concepcion del Uruguay, in Argentina. After his return to the United States he served as instructor in science in 1881 and 1882, at the State Normal School at Westfield, Mass., and during the next four years as instructor in biology, at Wesleyan University. On July 1, 1886, he was appointed first assistant ornithologist in the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, in the Biological Survey, then known as the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy. He resigned on March 15, 1894, to accept the professorship of zoology and physiology in the Michigan Agricultural College at East Lansing, a position which he held until his death.

Professor Barrows was well known as an ornithologist. The results of his work in Argentina appeared in a series of papers on the 'Birds of the Lower Uruguay' in the 'Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club' for 1883, and in 'The Auk' for 1884. He also contributed a chapter on the 'Accipitres' to the volume on 'Birds' in the 'Standard Natural History, 1885. While connected with the Department of Agriculture his most notable publications were his bulletins on the 'English Sparrow' and the