

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## Common Sense and Nomenclature.

In his recent 'Revision of the Wood-Warbler Genus *Basileuterus* and its Allies',<sup>1</sup> Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd shows that when, in 1848, Cabanis established the genus *Basileuterus* he used for his type the *Sylvia vermivora* of Vieillot. For the succeeding thirty-three years the name *Basileuterus vermivorus* was in good standing. Then it was shown by von Berlepsch that *Sylvia vermivora* Vieillot was in truth our Worm-eating Warbler, and *Basileuterus vermivorus* (Vieillot) became *Basileuterus auricapillus* (Swainson). But further application of the rules of nomenclature would synonymize *Basileuterus* with *Helmitheros*, the genus of the Worm-eating Warbler.

The substitution of *auricapillus* for *vermivorus* was made without question. It affects the names of only three birds. But the abandonment of the generic term *Basileuterus* would cause a change in the name of fifty-six birds. It has never been done and Mr. Todd frankly refuses to do it. He admits that by "a literal interpretation of the rules" *Basileuterus* should become a synonym of *Helmitheros*; but invoking "the rule of common sense" he claims that the circumstances that Cabanis inadvertently used for the type of his genus, a name "which had been originally applied to another and non-pertinent species, ought not to be allowed to overthrow his action, and upset such a peculiarly appropriate and long-established name for a large and important group."

With all of which I heartily agree. Possibly the rules governing *nomina conservanda* may permit an exhibition of "common sense." Meanwhile I for one propose to join Mr. Todd and continue to use *Basileuterus*. If his admirable example were followed more frequently that stability of names which the nomenclaturist has so long promised us would be more of a fact and less of a fallacy.

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[In spite of Dr. Chapman's plea, there will always be those who will hold the opposite view and we shall, therefore, have two names in use for the same thing. As we have a tribunal for passing on just such questions, why not submit them to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature and abide by its decision? The Commission seems to exercise "common sense," to some extent at least, as witness the preservation of the time-honored name GRUS!—ED.]

<sup>1</sup> Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., Vol. 74, pp. 1-95.