

reviewed at the Spring meetings of the Foundation's Advisory Panels and disposition will be made approximately four months following the closing date. Proposals received after the January 15, 1959, closing date will be reviewed following the Spring closing date of May 15, 1959.

Inquiries should be addressed to the National Science Foundation, Washington 25, D. C.

#### Letter to the Editor

##### NAME-CHANGING BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

The note by Mayr (1958, *Auk*, **75**: 225) in regard to the recent action of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature which calls for changing certain names rouses my grave concern. This is the Commission's *second* action involving the same names. The former was in 1955. Then, the Copenhagen Decisions on Zoological Nomenclature were unanimously adopted by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature! These "Copenhagen Decisions" contained (a) the article that dealt with changing the gender of certain generic names and made necessary further changes, (b) the recommendation that the International Commission consider this report binding until it got around to changing the articles, and that taxonomists guide themselves by these decisions until they were revised.

It has been pointed out to me that the changing of the gender of a generic name can be considered as not name-changing because it only necessitates a change in spelling of some specific and subspecific names. It has also been stressed that the Commission did not make the 1953 "Copenhagen Decisions," but only unanimously adopted them. Be that as it may, the A.O.U. Check-list Committee guided itself by the 1953 ruling while it was in effect! These changes by the Commission were based not on fact but on opinions of how to adapt dead languages to zoological nomenclature. What was right in 1953, was wrong in 1958 . . . and in 1968?

Another case in point is *Numida*, the generic name of the Guinea-fowls of Africa. *Numida* has been treated as feminine since the time of Linnaeus. However, in 1958, in Opinions and Declarations rendered by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, Vol. 1, Sect. F., part F. 3, pp. 29-38, nearly 200 years of usage is upset by ruling that it is masculine. It was argued that only subspecies names are thus changed, but *N. mitrata* is commonly considered a species separate from *N. meleagris* and if this ruling be accepted it must be changed to *N. mitratus*. It seems that the tinkering being attempted in the name of stability may be worse than the disease.

In cases like these, making the species name agree in gender with the generic may be so complicated and unsatisfactory that papers are being written on this aspect of single genera. Scholars disagree. Usage is sometimes hopelessly confused. Fortunately, a simple remedy is at hand. It is to use the original spelling of the species and subspecies names. This proposal is not new. Hartert, perhaps the greatest modern avifaunalist, wrote, ". . . the way toward a stable nomenclature is that of preserving the original spelling entirely, and to regard all names merely as names, not as adjectives in connection with the genera as substantives. This will go far toward uniformity." (Ibis, 1904, p. 548). Vincent, in his "A Check List of the Birds of South Africa" (1952), has a similar view (see p. iv), and puts it into practice.

The only argument against it is that it would offend the cultivated ear. This might have carried more weight a generation or two ago, but today, with the decline of Greek and Latin teaching in our schools, it is an anachronism. The simplest way out of the morass is to settle on the original spelling.

In Mayr's note and the Editor's comment, there is the implication that the new A.O.U. "Check-list" should be "corrected" to conform to the recent, rather than the 1953 action. This I strongly urge not to be done! Individuals may act as they see fit. But we have a well done, usable list of North American birds. For biological reasons it may be necessary to alter names. But I am very much of the opinion that any nomenclatural tinkering with the names should be considered as the acts of individuals and not receive any appearance of legality or of sanction by the A.O.U.

We need a standard list of names, and spellings. We have it for North America in the 1957 A.O.U. Check-list. I urge that this volume be continued to be so considered until it is revised and reprinted. Only thus, by accepting a standard, can we hope for even a limited stability. A. L. RAND, *Chicago Natural History Museum, Chicago 5, Illinois.*

**Ed. Note:** In his comments on Dr. Mayr's earlier note on the gender of genera ending in *-rhyinchus*, *-rhamphus* and *-gnathus*, the Editor merely called attention to the fact that A.O.U. Check-list genera were involved. Some will doubtless agree with Dr. Rand that, regardless of previous usage or classical purism, the interest of North American uniformity favors following the A.O.U. Check-list (1957) and treating the genera as neuter—at least until there is revision of the Check-list. Others, advocating international uniformity, will favor accepting the subsequently published decision of the International Commission (Ops. Decs. Internatl. Comm. Zool. Nomencl., 19, pt. 4, pp. i-xii, 1958), treating these genera as masculine, especially as this confirms almost universal usage in zoology (including American ornithology) from the time of Linnaeus, and was authorized by the terms of the admittedly tentative Copenhagen Decision on which the A.O.U. Committee had relied. As neither the decision of the International Commission nor the report of its classical adviser (Bull. Zool. Nomencl., 15, pt. 11, pp. 334-335, 1958) was available when the Check-list Committee acted, the question may be considered open from the viewpoint of the A.O.U. The Editor cannot fairly insist that authors follow the current Check-list on this point, when most of the genera involved are not limited to our area and there are numerous other extralimital genera having the same endings, which have invariably been treated as masculine. The choice of gender in this situation will be left to the individual author.

Dr. Rand's more drastic suggestion—that questions of gender be avoided by preserving the original endings of specific and subspecific names, regardless of the gender of the genus to which they may be transferred—would seem to require a change in our nomenclatural rules. Such change would make for simplicity in the future, but it would involve many alterations of current names to conform with the ending used by the original author.