

The Auk 115(1):254–255, 1998

Keep “*The Auk*” Alive and Flying

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The rationales for changing the name of *The Auk* collapse to about four underlying arguments, each of which we consider flawed. Argument 1 for change is the negative influence the current name is alleged to have on tenure or advancement of junior staff at colleges and universities. Our spot-check of university-based ornithologists revealed no clear consensus on the seriousness of this hypothesized negative influence or whether it even exists. Some of those who favored the proposed name change were quick to admit that: (1) the problem might be ameliorated if department heads more vigorously and knowledgeably defended their junior staff members, and (2) the quality of the journal's content should carry more weight than the name on the cover when evaluating a colleague's publishing performance. If administrators truly are lacking in an understanding of the purpose of *The Auk*, perhaps the existing subtitle (“A Quarterly Journal of Ornithology”) should be called to their attention (tactfully, of course). We suggest that junior staff include this subtitle in their bibliographies. We remain unconvinced that this problem is as serious as has been presented, and we suspect that if and where it does occur, the listing of the “full” title will solve the problem.

Argument 2 for change claims that the name sounds “unprofessional” and “nontechnical” and for this reason has lost in “prestige” as measured by a declining impact rating in *Science Citation Index* (from 1.40 in 1991 to 0.77 in 1995). The name being unprofessional becomes a hollow argument, indeed, when one considers the success of such journals as the *American Naturalist* and *Nature*. Those journals, and others with equally “nonprofessional” names, earned their prestige and status among scientists because of the quality of their content. We must stress that it is the content, not the name on the cover, that determines a journal's perception among scientists. During several early years for which Citation Index data are presented, *The Auk* experienced unprecedented problems, slowing down and then virtually ceasing publication for a couple of years. When the backlog reached print and a timely publication schedule resumed, the impact rating began to climb.

Seemingly relevant to Argument 2 is a recent analysis published in the *Ostrich*. Using a sample of pa-

pers published recently (1995 to 1996) in five ornithological journals (*Auk*, *Condor*, *Emu*, *Ibis*, *Ostrich*), Craig (*Ostrich* 67:99–100, 1996) analyzed frequency of reference to papers published in 10 ornithological journals (the aforementioned five plus *Ardea*, *Journal of Field Ornithology*, *Journal für Ornithologie*, *Journal of Avian Biology*, and *Wilson Bulletin*). For this sample of 103 papers, *The Auk* ranked first in frequency of reference. Incidentally, three ornithological journals with bird names as titles, *Condor*, *Emu*, and *Ibis*, ranked second, third, and fifth.

Argument 3 for change is that other ornithological journals have benefitted from name changes. The first of two prominent examples was the change from *Bird-Banding* to *Journal of Field Ornithology*. The fact that the new name reflected more accurately the journal's broad contents rather than the new appellation possessing some kind of sophistication may well account for any gain in stature. More recently, *Ornis Scandinavica* perhaps gained impact rating by changing to *Journal of Avian Biology*. In this case, however, any increased prestige likely was realized through removing the implied geographic restriction as well as through a major marketing program. At the 1997 meeting of the AOU Council, it was proposed that the name of *The Auk* be changed to *The American Journal of Ornithology*. The connotation of this new name would go in the opposite direction, suggesting a geographic emphasis or restriction, or worse yet a political limitation, whereas *The Auk* connotes none.

Please know that in the analysis by Craig (op. cit.), the overall ranking for the *Journal of Field Ornithology* was ninth and for the *Journal of Avian Biology* sixth. Already mentioned was the ranking of *The Auk* first and the ranking of several other bird-titled ornithological journals above those with generic titles.

Argument 4 is that a change in title would remove implied limitations of the traditional name. The identity of these reputed limitations seems as elusive as what kind of a new title would be broader. Perceptions differ, of course, but many of us view terms such as “avian biology” to be more, not less, restrictive for a journal that reports on all aspects of ornithology. Using a species' name as the title places no restrictions on content, and the subtitle of *The Auk* allows reports on any aspect of ornithology, not just on bird biology.

Finding no cogency in genre of arguments for the proposed change, we now suggest three advantages

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of retaining the current title, one of which was referred to above: any insertion of "American" in the title would imply an undesirable geographic emphasis and to some members an unintended political restriction.

A second advantage of "*The Auk*" is brevity, which in fact is a whole cluster of advantages. Brief journal names take up minimal space in bibliographies, are not abbreviated (and thus are never rendered differently when cited in different journals), are easy to remember, and probably rarely are misspelled. How many of us can remember, pronounce, spell, and correctly abbreviate the title of Denmark's ornithological journal, or the journal of the venerable Deutschen Ornithologen-Gesellschaft?

We introduce the third advantage of the "*The Auk*" with the statement "Surely, stability counts for something." It certainly does to librarians. The librarian at one of this country's outstanding natural history libraries was appalled at the thought of the additional new work and continuing work a change in a journal's name requires, including a whole new record for the journal, cross referencing, and related matters.

We now address the question: What kinds of research do we, as members of the Union, wish to appear in our journal? We wish to be kept up-to-date with respect to the best and latest research in ornithology, whether it is here in the Americas or elsewhere on the planet. We acknowledge that a manuscript of theoretical implications for many different disciplines probably would be submitted to a journal that focuses on process, such as *Evolution*, in prefer-

ence to *The Auk*. We also acknowledge that such a manuscript undoubtedly would generate a larger "impact rating" than would a description of a new avian taxon, a study of the foraging ecology of closely related birds, or the reconstruction of the phylogeny of an avian genus. But changing the name of our journal will not alter these facts. The readership of *Evolution* always will be significantly larger than the readership of *The Auk*. Nor should we, as ornithologists, be concerned in these instances. Our journal is foremost a journal of quality content that is of interest to our members and to ornithologists everywhere. Let us concentrate on improving that quality, in so far as is editorially possible, and leave the concern for "impact ratings" to others.

In conclusion, we think the membership of the American Ornithologists' Union is proud of the 115-year record achieved by its principal publication. *The Auk* arguably is the world's leading ornithological journal, devoted to bringing the best ornithological science to its members. A proposal to change the name of the Union's journal, if not withdrawn summarily, surely should be brought to a vote by the organization's entire membership rather than by any subset of that membership (e.g. Executive Committee, Council, Fellows, or Elective Members). If the proponents of a name change persist with their proposal, and have in mind the best interests of the Union, then they should agree to a mail ballot sent to all of the Union's members. Change sometimes is necessary in any endeavor, but if no compelling reason for change is found, we believe it prudent to stay with what has served us well for so many years.