

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THE STATUS OF THE SUBGENUS SIEBEROCITTA
COUES.

BY HARRY C. OBERHOLSER.

The subgenus *Sieberocitta* is an interesting case. Originally proposed by Dr. Elliott Coues¹ with *Cyanocitta ultramarina* var. *arizonae* Ridgway as its monotypic type, it has been until very lately rejected as based solely on color characters. Mr. H. S. Swarth in a recent publication² has properly called attention to the fact that this subgeneric distinction was originally made on structural as well as color differences. On this basis Mr. Swarth has revived *Sieberocitta* as a subgeneric group to include *Aphelocoma sieberii* (Wagler) and its subspecies, leaving all the subspecies of *Aphelocoma californica* in the typical subgenus. Mr. Swarth did not examine the two Mexican species *Aphelocoma unicolor* (Du Bus) and *Aphelocoma guerrerensis* Nelson, which, as it happens, are the key to the whole problem. An investigation of these two species shows at once that color is here of little or no value as a group distinction, and that we must make our division, if at all, on structural characters alone. The type of *Sieberocitta* differs from *Aphelocoma californica*, the type of true *Aphelocoma*, in having the tail rounded and shorter than the wing instead of graduated and longer than the wing. So far as the other species of these two groups are concerned, the shape of the tail is of little or no importance as a subgeneric character, for it is at most but relative, and does not hold in all the species under consideration.

By the above criterion, *Aphelocoma unicolor*, which in pattern of coloration is decidedly different from that of the species of either group, is clearly referable to *Sieberocitta*. On the other

¹Key North Amer. Birds, ed. 5, I, 1903, p. 497.

²Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., XVII, No. 13, February 23, 1918, pp. 406-407.

hand, *Aphelocoma guerrerensis*, a bird closely resembling *Aphelocoma unicolor* in coloration, although, by the way, a perfectly distinct species, has the tail usually slightly longer than the wing, in some cases about equal, and occasionally even shorter, thus occupying an intermediate position, though certainly more inclining toward the subgenus *Aphelocoma*. Were it not for *Aphelocoma guerrerensis*, the case would be relatively simple, as all the other species fall well within the limits of one group or the other, and, indeed, *Sieberocitta* could then well be a distinct genus.

This case of *Sieberocitta* is another good example of what we consider the real difference between a genus and a subgenus, for here two groups, which are well characterized by structural differences, are connected by a species which is perfectly intermediate. Did this species not exist, we would have two trenchantly different groups which would naturally stand as distinct genera. Many authors do not recognize subgenera, but such divisions are often of considerable use in more clearly showing the relative affinities of more or less closely allied species which can not be separated generically.

Although under existing circumstances we can not consider *Sieberocitta* a distinct genus, the recognition of two subgenera, as Mr. Swarth proposes, seems desirable. The forms of each are as follows:

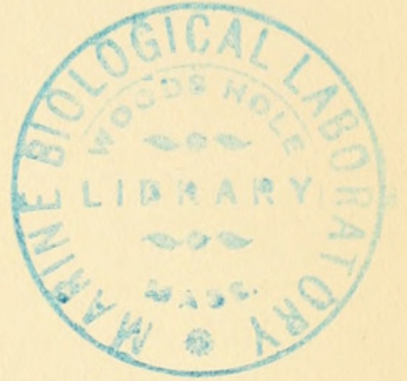
SIEBEROCITTA.

- Aphelocoma sieberii sieberii* (Wagler).
- Aphelocoma sieberii colimae* Nelson.
- Aphelocoma sieberii potosina* Nelson.
- Aphelocoma sieberii arizonae* (Ridgway).
- Aphelocoma sieberii wollweberi* (Kaup).
- Aphelocoma sieberii couchii* (Baird).
- Aphelocoma unicolor unicolor* (Du Bus).
- Aphelocoma unicolor coelestis* Ridgway.

APHELOCOMA.

- Aphelocoma guerrerensis* Nelson.
- Aphelocoma cyanea* (Vieillot).
- Aphelocoma californica californica* (Vigors).
- Aphelocoma californica immanis* Grinnell.

- Aphelocoma californica obscura* Anthony.
Aphelocoma californica hypoleuca Ridgway.
Aphelocoma californica grisea Nelson.
Aphelocoma californica cyanotis Ridgway.
Aphelocoma californica sumichrasti Ridgway.
Aphelocoma californica texana Ridgway.
Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii (Baird).
Aphelocoma insularis Henshaw.





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