

## Notes and News.

### ENTOMOLOGICAL GLEANINGS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE.

STRICT PRIORITY IN NOMENCLATURE—OR NOT?—It is not without misgivings that I signed the statement favoring *nomina conservanda*. I signed it because it clearly means, not sanction to individual initiative in the adoption or rejection of names, but mutual agreement expressed through properly constituted official action. My misgivings grow out of two considerations: One, in the present unintegrated state of organization of biological science there is no satisfactory means of getting opinion. I take it, this referendum vote, now proceeding at home and abroad, will show how far existing nomenclatural agencies have come from representing the opinion of zoologists at large. Two, the proposal, if successful in allaying the most pressing causes of present confusion, may tend to perpetuate the burden of nomenclature, which would still be too grievous to be permanently borne.

I am moved to sign the statement by these considerations: The confusion is growing ever more confounded with divers and sundry applications and extensions of the law of priority, and I would like to see saved: (1) Names of genera that are types of families, thereby saving the family names. (2) Names of genera that are bound up with important monographs, and that must continue in use in morphology, ecology, or other branches of biology. (3) Names of species well known in popular literature, in dealers' catalogues, etc.

In the second place, I think that the names likely to be thus conserved are those that no rational body would wish to sacrifice under any plan, and in the third place, I shall live in the hope that there may come another lucid interval when further progress by mutual agreement may be made.—JAMES G. NEEDHAM.

I am giving my preference for strict priority. It is a bit unfair to have the question put in such an unqualified way because the nomenclatural commissions of succeeding zoological congresses have not stood by the code as originally devised. Every change and qualification that has been adopted has simply made matters worse by introducing contradictions. If at every congress the rules are going to be changed it will be much better to ignore them and follow the dictates of one's own conscience. I am for a logical and sane application of priority. I cannot accept genera without species, like Meigen's of 1800. These must date from the time they had species included in them and be credited to the person who first did so.

A word regarding your list of names to be conserved in the last number of the NEWS. As I have understood it, these lists are solicited from "specialists" in their respective groups. Some of us who are working in these groups and are confronted by some of these names



almost daily have a right to know who these "specialists" are. The aim, I believe, is to preserve generic names that have been in constant use regardless of priority. But, to take an example from your list what is done in the case of *Corethra*? The name as it stands in that list is not in the sense in which it has been generally used. There is a large classic literature on "*Corethra*" in the opposite sense (that is, with *plumicornis* as type) which is very familiar and very important to those who are something more than systematists. Moreover, I am not aware that anyone has checked up Mr. Coquillett's results regarding the status of this genus. Again, take the genus *Stegomyia*. The concept of this genus is an absurdity. It was made to include species which are unrelated and which are united on mere colorational similarities. But the name gained great popularity because it was applied to the species of mosquito proved to be the transmitter of yellow fever. Medical literature, entomological literature, and above all popular pseudoscientific literature, immediately became flooded with mentions of "*Stegomyia fasciata*" and "the *Stegomyia*." Evidently the standing of the genus from the scientific standpoint means nothing to these conservators, the fact that it has been much used makes its retention imperative! Incidentally, the type of the genus is *Culex fasciatus* Fabricius. We shall soon arrive at the point where there will be zoologists and nomenclaturists; it will then be better to let these latter go their way.—FREDERICK KNAB.

[The statement of the alternatives on which we have been asking votes was adopted verbatim from that on which the Scandinavian and German naturalists voted, for the sake of a uniform international vote. The responsibility for the generic names of Diptera published in the May NEWS, pp. 229-232, rests entirely with Dr. Stiles and his coadjutors. The list was referred to in our May editorial in illustration of a method by which an international selection of *nomina conservanda* might be made, but we do not presume to say whether the types have or have not been correctly determined. That is for the Dipterists to decide.—Ed.]

It occurs to me that the method applicable to one group might not be advantageous when applied to others. Would it be practical to assign some future date as a date from which well established names (I refer to generic names) should not be changed on grounds of priority from obscure and remote sources? For example, in ornithology, say in five or ten years, names of general and unquestioned use up to that time, should not be changed. In sciences dealing with more obscure groups which have received a more limited study, possibly the time should be longer, e. g., the time for fixing names of stone flies might be postponed for twenty-five years. I realize, of course, that the groups to which little study has been given have a limited litera-



ture, and relative exactness might be attained in a shorter time, but I have suggested this longer period because the limited literature of these obscurer groups may be the work of a very few individuals, and others should have a chance to pass on the names. If there is any hope of digging up all the names in the next twenty-five or fifty years, I am in favor of strict priority, but if this unearthing is to go on indefinitely I am in favor of making exceptions to the strict application of the law. As a matter of fact I don't believe these changes in nomenclature bother anybody much but those making them. The long-suffering morphologist, who, we are given to understand, is at a loss to name the one species he is working on, can usually settle his trouble by writing one letter.—E. B. WILLIAMSON.

At one time I was greatly in favor of the retention of certain generic names which were of primary importance in economic entomology, that is to say, such names as had been adopted by non-entomologists as common names of insects. However, since the movement along this line has reached the point where it seems to be merely a movement for the preservation of all names now in common (systematic) use, I have changed my mind, and am strictly for the law of priority. In cases such as I have mentioned the economic entomologists could well use the preoccupied name in their literature and it would make no difference at all to the systematist, as he would know the synonymy and could record the records in the proper place. This would allow the use of such names as *Stegomyia* in economic and popular literature and still allow the systematist to use the correct name.—J. C. CRAWFORD.

The above expresses my sentiments so well that I wish to subscribe.—H. L. VIERECK.

As ONE WHO has given a great deal of attention to this matter, I wish to say that there is no rule which is not open at times to exceptions, and that in the interest of a stable nomenclature there should be power vested in the Commission on Zoological Nomenclature created by the action of past Zoological Congresses and in the Commission on Nomenclature of the International Entomological Congress, by a unanimous vote, in a certain limited number of cases, to adopt a name which has been current, say for a century, as the generic designation of a well-known form, even though antiquarian research may show that some obscure writer in some obscure journal may have applied to that form another name. The number of such cases is in my judgment extremely limited. There are, however, a few of this sort. I am thoroughly in sympathy with the thought of those who clamor for a fixed and stable nomenclature. I think, however, that the difficulties which they foresee as likely to arise by the enforcement of the law of strict priority are



exaggerated. It is, in my judgment, of fundamental importance as soon as possible to have these disputed questions settled authoritatively for all time, and the creation of the Commissions already alluded to, in my opinion, is a step in advance, which has been taken none too soon. We are providing in these Commissions a court of last appeal, and their decisions should be accepted and adopted universally. No class of biological students is confronted with a huger and more entangled nomenclature than are students of entomology. As we all know, there are more living forms belonging to the class *Insecta* than belong to all the other classes in the animal kingdom combined. Thousands of new generic names have been created within the last decade for *Insecta*. The nomenclature is increasing so rapidly and so large a number of students are engaged in investigating the nomenclature of the past that it is no wonder that men who have not access to large libraries and all the existing apparatus for determining disputed questions are at times somewhat bewildered. I trust that a conscientious resolve will be formed by all working entomologists to refer questions in doubt to the nomenclatorial Commission of the Entomological Congress, that having been passed upon by this body their decisions may be submitted to the decision of the Commission of the Zoological Congress, and that thus ultimately there may emerge, as the result of their combined efforts, an entomological nomenclature which will be accepted universally as final and therefore stable. In this work the law of strict priority will have to dominate, though as I have already intimated, there may be some possible exceptions in the application of this rule to be left for final adjudication upon well-established principles by the members of this Commission.

In this connection it may be said that it is eminently desirable that there should be some concerted effort made to establish a recognized series of rules or principles governing the matter of founding genera. Our camps are divided into two groups, as we all know, the "Splitters" and the "Lumpers." Both have their faults and their virtues. For my part, I have the feeling, which has been growing, that the "Splitters" have been entirely too active of late, and the results of their diacritical investigations have had entirely too much respect accorded them. The establishment of a new genus upon the basis of a slight modification in the neururation of a wing, the presence or absence of a tubercle on the epidermis of a larva at a given place, is something with which I confess I have no sympathy. This is, however, aside from the main question.

Let us by all means have a stable nomenclature. In my judgment, however, the only way to rightfully attain this end is by respecting the law of strict priority save in a very small and limited number of cases, which should be very carefully considered and acted upon.—  
W. J. HOLLAND.



I AM AGAINST the strict application of the rule of priority, because there seems to be no end to the changes arising under it.

Take the birds of North America, some 700 species, if I remember rightly. The American Ornithologists' Union has had a committee working on them for over thirty years, and every supplement to the original check list has an increasingly large number of changes of names, owing to the application of this law. In fact, the common names of the birds have been stable, and the scientific ones unstable. Now, if a committee of experts working for thirty years on the birds of one country only cannot reach stability, by the application of this rule, how can we ever reach it in larger groups for the whole world?

I heartily agree with Mr. J. Chester Bradley's letter in the May NEWS.

Furthermore, I think that where anyone proposes a change of name of any species, that change ought not to go into effect, until a year after the proposer of the change has published his reasons for thinking the change ought to be made. I have seen names changed in one publication and changed back again in the next issue. I have seen a name changed by the discovery of a new name for the species in an obscure publication, and the change upset by further research in the very same book.

Lastly, I think a great many name changes, new species, sub-species and varieties are due at the bottom, simply to the unconscious vanity of the author who desires to see his name in print as much as possible. Let us all guard against too much subconscious cerebration of this sort.—C. S. BRIMLEY.

IT MAY NOT be amiss to call attention to the fact that much confusion in the nomenclature of insects is not due to the law of priority, but to entomologists who do not follow that law, to entomologists who follow *nomina conservanda*, conserving and using names that they know to be synonyms when the majority of their colleagues are following priority.

There is no way of enforcing any law in nomenclature. No principle of nomenclature ever had more support and authority back of it than the law of priority. Ever since 1842, every congress and code have stood by it; will *nomina conservanda* receive more support?

No one more than the specialist dislikes to change names; the change of *Conocephalus* to *Xiphidium* will be of more annoyance to Mr. Caudell and a few other systematists in Orthoptera than to all the professors of Zoology in the country. But in recent years many systematists have realized the truth of the statement made seventy years ago by a committee of conservative English Zoologists, "The



name originally given by the founder of a group, or the describer of a species, should be permanently retained to the exclusion of all subsequent synonyms." (Rule 1, Brit. Assoc. Code, 1842. Westwood, Waterhouse and Shuckard were the entomologists on that committee, later (1860) Stainton and Wallace concurred; Darwin was a member.) Therefore many are willing to do what systematists over and over again have neglected to do, to follow a principle rather than personal desire. Ten years ago I knew as well as I know to-day that *Parasitus* should replace *Gamasus* but in my Treatise on Acarina (1904) I did not change; now with practically all European acarologists using *Parasitus* I shall adopt it, though the change is much more annoying to me than to all the anatomists in the world.

The refusal of many Dipterists to use certain names is not because of priority but for an entirely different reason; generic names without species. In Lepidoptera dozens of genera and hundreds of species have been changed because of priority by all leading Lepidopterists. In Odonata both the Kirby and the Muttkowski catalogues (all we have) accept priority. That list of names of Diptera to be preserved is based on strict priority, while in the list to be excluded are many names which have been continuously in use for fifty years and more, and which almost all Dipterists would like to have conserved.

*Nomina conservanda* is an utopian dream, the substitution of personal convenience for a definite principle. What will be conserved? One wants this, another does not. No committee meeting now has any more authority than committees meeting ten, twenty or fifty years hence. They will be controlled by other zoologists with other desires, and conserve other names.

I learned to know a common dragon-fly by the name of *Plathemis trimaculata*. Can I have it conserved? I learned to know a scale insect by the name of *Mytilaspis pomorum*. Can I have it conserved? Yet all the changes possible in Apidae which Prof. Cockerell fears will not be of one half the annoyance to entomologists in general as was that change of *Mytilaspis pomorum* to *Lepidosaphes ulmi*. Hundreds of the worst changes in many groups are already in all degrees of acceptance. Will these be nullified? No! priority will hold and will always hold simply because it is a principle while *nomina conservanda* is simply personal desire. Much of the confusion in nomenclature arises from an entirely different source. One entomologist writes *Papilio ajax*, another *Iphiclides ajax*. This is the recognition by one of groups as genera, which another entomologist will not recognize as of even subgeneric rank. Neither priority nor *nomina conservanda* will help this.—  
NATHAN BANKS.



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