

for food and the parent bird after finding a hairy worm would slap it about until it was shorn of its spines when it would thrust it down the yawning maw of the young beggar apparently without appeasing its hunger in the least as it would immediately demand more. The two were wandering about in short second growth saplings and I had ample opportunity to watch them without the aid of my glasses for some little time as they were within easy vision. There was no possible question of their identity. Has any one a later date for the nesting of this well-known bird?—ETTA S. WILSON *Detroit, Mich.*

Local Decrease of Warblers in 1917.— In the spring of 1917 very wet weather with cold spells prevailed through the western peninsula of Ontario and a good deal of the country to the north of it, the result being that many of the small birds failed to raise the usual number of young, and when the time for the autumn migrations arrived the birds usually seen in large numbers did not appear, or were in such small numbers as to be negligible.

Opposite my house in the city of London lies a small park of about three acres planted with the usual variety of shade trees, and in that park it is a usual thing to see in the autumn migrations quite large numbers of warblers and the species that usually associate with them, but in the autumn of 1917, the total number of warblers seen by all the observers who frequent the park, was not half a dozen, while in previous years it was a frequent thing to find half a dozen species in the course of a fifteen minutes' hunt.

So far as I could learn conditions throughout the western peninsula of Ontario were nearly uniform. At Point Pelee warblers were in extremely small numbers and every observer with whom I spoke or corresponded remarked on the great scarcity of these birds in that season. Fortunately, this state of affairs does not seem to have been universal and from many parts of the continent come different reports. The present breeding of 1918 was not altogether favorable and the number of migrating birds up to the time of writing (September 13), is small though there are more than were noted the previous year.—W. E. SAUNDERS, *London, Ont.*

The Name "erythrogaster," and Others.— A nomenclatural, or rather etymological, question has recently been raised which illustrates how great a tempest in a teapot may be stirred up over a point already settled by existing rules of nomenclature, and a brief statement of the case seems desirable.

In a paper on "The Birds of the Anamba Islands" (U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 98, p. 31, 1917) Dr. H. C. Oberholser designates the American Barn Swallow as *Hirundo rustica erythrogastris*, explaining in a foot-note that "the subspecific term *erythrogaster* as here used is a Latin adjective of the third declension and therefore has for its proper feminine nominative *erythrogastris*, not *erythrogastra* as commonly written."

In 'The Condor,' 1918, p. 92, Dr. Joseph Grinnell takes up the matter and among other things says: "In the spelling of the subspecific name of the American form however, I believe Oberholser to be wrong and *erythrogaster* should be the proper spelling, not *erythrogastris*. The term *erythrogaster* cannot be considered an adjective. It is a Greek noun retaining its own gender and case when Latinized."

Dr. W. Stone (Auk, 1918, p. 491) contributes further discussion and says: — "He [i. e. Grinnell] seems to be absolutely right and the action of the original A. O. U. Committee should be upheld."

The only wonder is that Dr. Oberholser should have disregarded the adopted rules of nomenclature and declared the word to be an adjective. Canon VIII of the A. O. U. Code long ago defined the sort of words that may be used as specific or subspecific names and more recently the International Rules of Zoölogical Nomenclature, Article 14, defined them still more explicitly as; (a) adjectives which must agree grammatically with the generic name, (b) substantives in the nominative in apposition with the generic name, and (c) substantives in the genitive.

Section (b) is applicable to this case for not only Boddaert, who in 1783 used *Hirundo erythrogaster*, but many other early writers on zoölogy evidently considered the word *erythrogaster* as a noun Latinized from the Greek after compounding the adjective *ἐρυθρός* (*erythros*, red) with the noun *γαστήρ* (*gaster*, the belly). Therefore its ending should remain unchanged no matter whether the genus be masculine, feminine or neuter, and as long as we have nomenclatural rules designed for the purpose of settling such questions, nothing whatever is gained by breaking away from them, and consequently the endings *-tra* and *-tris* are quite superfluous attempts to convert a noun into an adjective.

Unless existing rules are cancelled or considerably modified we are at the mercy of all etymological atrocities and must accept the burden of inconsistencies that confront us at every turn. If an author has obviously constructed a noun we may not turn it into an adjective, however convenient such procedure might be; and more than this I believe that Latin grammar and the law of priority must necessarily prevail in cases of doubt.

The converse of this is true and we may not turn an obvious adjective into a noun as Dr. Grinnell would do in the case of *Guiraca caerulea salicaria* (Condor, 1918, p. 92). By no wish of the describer can the good Latin, adjectival suffix *-arius*, convert *salicarius* (*salix*, *salicis*, the willow + *-arius* belonging to) into a noun!

The termination *-venter* should, by analogy, be the ending for all compounds of this Latin noun and the endeavors to convert such nouns into non-classical or rather nomenclatural adjectives are responsible for the various endings with which we are troubled. There is now no way of securing uniformity except by a ruling of the International Zoölogical Commission.

A great deal more might be said regarding many other nouns and ad-

jectives that have been sadly distorted through ignorant or careless handling, but for the present let it suffice to call attention to the above cases which are clearly defined and capable of definite settlement.— JONATHAN DWIGHT, *New York City*.

Waterton on Bird Song.— When the October 'Auk' reached me it so happened that I was reading Waterton's 'Essays' (1838-1855). There I found in his essay on "The Wren, The Hedge Sparrow and The Robin" a passage which is peculiarly interesting in connection with Mr. Hawkins' paper on bird song. It is this: "When we are informed that incubation is the main inducement to melody in the feathered tribe, we have only to step out after sunrise into the surrounding evergreens, and there we are sure to hear either the wren, the hedge sparrow, or the robin, in fine song, although not a single twig has been laid, or a piece of moss produced in furtherance of a nest, wherein to raise their future young. Certainly, in this case, neither love nor warmth could have had any hand in tuning the winter lyre of these little sons of Orpheus."— CORNELIUS WEYGANDT, *German-town, Philadelphia*.

Correction.— A regrettable error occurs in the first line of Mr. Arthur T. Wayne's article in the October 'Auk.' While his manuscript read: "Since my 'Birds of South Carolina,' " etc., it appeared in print "Since 'My Birds of South Carolina,' " etc. For this unfortunate misquotation of the title of his well known book Mr. Wayne is of course in no way responsible.— EDITOR.



Dwight, Jonathan. 1919. "The Name "Erythrogaster," and Others." *The Auk* 36, 116–118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4072810>.

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