

lifting from the mere renaming of a few handfuls of skin and feathers. . . . We confuse nomenclature and ornithology, forgetful that the names, which should be the tools of the ornithologist, may easily become the playthings of the systematist. . . . There is more serious work on hand than the naming of sub-species if the advance of ornithology is to keep pace with that of kindred sciences."

### Close Season for Native Game in Victoria.

REFERENCE was made in the last issue of *The Emu* (pp. 198-9) to the alteration of close seasons for Ducks and Quails in Victoria, and pointing out that an egregious blunder had been made.

The Government, having the courage of its opinion, be it said to its credit, now admits that a serious mistake was made in opening the shooting season for these birds earlier than usual. It is too late to remedy the evil this season, as far as Ducks are concerned, but in future the close season will extend until the end of January, while it will be illegal to shoot Quails in any part of Victoria before the 1st April.

Dr. T. J. Ryan, Nhill, a keen sportsman and observer of bird-life, states that it has been a most exceptional year for birds of all kinds in the Wimmera district, and, on that account, instead of opening the season earlier, from a national point of view it would have been better to have had no open season this year; thereby native game would have enjoyed a great chance of multiplication. This very excellent suggestion in favour of the birds may commend itself to the Government the next prolific season there is for bird-life in the State.

The Government of the day may always rely on the hearty co-operation of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union, and doubtless of other associations having kindred aims, in the matter of the proper protection of birds.

### Correspondence.

#### ANOMALOUS CLOSE SEASONS.

#### *To the Editors of The Emu.*

SIRS,—Reverting to the close season for Duck in New South Wales, it will be seen in *The Emu*, vol. ii., p. 194, in the comparative table of "close seasons" for game in the different States, that Ducks are protected from 1st August to 31st January, but on my arrival in the Riverina district I was surprised to find that Duck-shooting was in full blast on the 28th December. The local Game Inspector stated that the New South Wales Act permitted shooting on that date. Who is correct? Many Ducklings a few days old were seen, particularly Black Ducklings, and large numbers of "flappers" were in evidence, as is usual at that time of year.—I am, &c.,

A. MATTINGLEY.

Melbourne, 1/2/04.

SOME QUESTIONS *re* NOMENCLATURE.

*The Editors of The Emu.*

SIRS,—The mention of *Calamanthus montanellus* in my paper\* leads me to refer to the President's address read at the last Hobart Congress of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union. Speaking of the new species described by me for the year, he said that *Calamanthus montanellus* appeared to be a sub-species of *C. fuliginosus* "altered by climatic and topographical conditions." As Col. Legge has not had the opportunity of comparing the two forms, nothing further need be said. In the same address the speaker said:—

"Not a few Western Australian Passerines are so closely allied to Eastern forms that they can scarcely rank beyond sub-species. My own impression with regard to these close allies is that, originally, and perhaps prior to the evolution of desert areas, consequent on a change of climate in the southern region of Australia, these forms were one and the same; that the results of complete isolation from their fellows in Eastern Australia has led to the creation of those differences in plumage, and even structure as regards bills and legs, which now elevate them to the position of sub-species."

I must confess that I have not the same masterful grip of such a comprehensive and recondite subject as our retiring President has, but as many of the new species I have lately described and a new one described in this issue are and will be necessarily affected by the President's pregnant remarks, I shall be glad to receive information on the following points:—

(a.) When, approximately, did desert areas evolve consequent on a change in climate in the southern region of Australia; and from what trustworthy data did the President receive the impression that the Eastern and Western forms were at one time identical?

(b.) Since the "identity" period mentioned, have or have not the Eastern forms, or is it probable that they have, undergone any modification? If they have, how is it now possible to make a true comparison between the two forms?

(c.) Why is it that the Western forms alone (as suggested) have undergone modification; and why should not "complete isolation" be just as referable to Eastern Australia as to Western Australia, and just as effective in producing in the Eastern forms a departure from the hypothetical original species?

(d.) What difference exists at present in climate and rainfall between the relative and corresponding parts of the southern parts of Eastern and Western Australia?

(e.) Do not the desert areas impinge as well on Eastern Australia as on Western Australia?

In the same address the President warns members of the Union against creating new species on minor differences. If species are not to be created on minor differences, then I ask upon what

\* See page 217.

differences are they to be created? Nay, I will go further and say that if *trivial* differences are to be suppressed in the consideration and determination of species, one-third, at least, of Australian species will "go down before the scythe of exhaustive comparison." Taking Australian Passerines, I ask what else but trivial differences separate such species as Gould's *Micræca assimilis* from Latham's *M. fascinans*, his *Malurus elegans* from *M. amabilis*, *M. pulcherrimus*, and *M. lamberti*, and any one of them from the other, and his *Artamus melanops* from *A. venustus*; Dr. Sharpe's *Petræca campbelli* from *P. leggii*, his *Cinclosoma castaneothorax* from *C. marginatum*, his *Gerygone cinarens* from *G. albigularis*; Count Salvadori's *Platycercus xanthogenys* from *P. icterotis*; De Vis' *Acanthiza squamata* from *A. reguloides*; Zietz's *Acanthiza tenuirostris* from the same species; North's *Climacteris superciliosa* from *C. erythrops*, and his *Malurus assimilis* from *M. lamberti*, and so on. If the President's view of the subject is right, then all these ornithologists are wrong.

The President's remarks imply that differences in structure of bills and legs are of slight importance. It is difficult to admit this, having regard to the fact that the chief characters which distinguish Passerines from the rest of the class "Aves" are the palate and the "arrangement" of the deep plantar tendons of the foot. The powerful bill and claws (*inter alia*) of the Crow help to place him at the head of the Oscines. I appreciate, of course, that there are degrees of difference. Let me present the case of *Melithreptus brevirostris* and the Western modified form of *M. leucogenys*, in which latter (excluding other minor differences) the bill is much shorter and finer. With such a modification, is it not probable that if the two species exchanged habitats, the Western form would eventually perish or become diminished in number by reason that his shorter bill would not enable him to extract nourishment from food stores which the bird with the longer bill could? Where a modification an important organ such as the bill (and which is to a bird what hands and mouth are to a man) is permanent and not variable, and without intergrades, then such a fact is to my mind of much greater importance in the consideration and determination of species than the presence or absence of an eyebrow, or difference in a shade of blue of the plumage, or the colour of a forehead patch. I am aware that I am trenching on debatable ground, but as the Check-List Committee will begin their labours this year, the discussion of the subject, with the addition of the President's recorded impressions, should prove most helpful in their deliberations.—Yours, &c.,

ALEX. WM. MILLIGAN.

[Whether our ex-President was justified in saying that *Calamanthus montanellus* appeared to be a sub-species of *C. fuliginosus*, "altered by climatic and topographical conditions," must remain an open question until further evidence be forthcoming.

Though (to quote Mr. Milligan) Col. Legge "has not had the opportunity of comparing the two forms," it must be remembered that his extensive ornithological knowledge would prevent his forming a hasty or illogical judgment. As to Mr. Milligan's assertion that "nothing further can be said," the matter is open to question. As in the case of many other newly-named species and sub-species (of which probably too many have already been made in Australasia, as elsewhere), there is a great deal to be said. Isolation and environment must have played their part; climate also—Mr. Milligan's own paper supplies evidence of this.—EDS.]

### About Members.

THE following is an extract from a letter by Mr. H. E. Dresser, 28 Queensborough-terrace, Hyde Park, London W., received by the Honorary Secretary:—"I am busy collecting materials for a work upon European eggs, on the same scale as my 'Birds of Europe,' and probably shall extend it to the eggs of all the Palæarctic birds. Of the Eastern Palæarctic species there are several which breed in your latitude, and of these I want the eggs of the following:—\**Sterna anæstheta*, \**Anous stolidus*, *Oceanites oceanicus*, \**Pelagodroma marina*, *Puffinus griseus*, *Puffinus leucomelas*, *Puffinus carneipes*, *Æstrelata mollis*, *Æstrelata brevipes*, *Diomedea melanophrys*.

"Of those marked with an asterisk I have eggs, but require more, and more especially varieties.

"I have probably one of the largest and most complete collections in Europe, and have many duplicates, and would be glad to give exchange for or purchase any of the above eggs well authenticated. Trusting that you can help me in this matter."

### Obituary Notice.

MR. E. P. SEALY, one of the original members and founders of the Aust. O.U., passed away, at the age of 64, on the 30th October last, at his home, Southerndown, Timaru, N.Z. The deceased gentleman was an enthusiastic naturalist. In addition to a first-class oological collection, including the eggs of the now extinct New Zealand Quail (*Coturnix novæ-zealandiæ*), he possessed moths, butterflies, and birds' skins. Having left England in the early "fifties" for New Zealand, the late Mr. Sealy, as may be expected, saw some stirring times in that colony. He started sheep-farming, which he relinquished for a time to join the Provincial Government as surveyor, and accompanied the late Sir Julius Von Haast on most of his exploring expeditions to the head waters of the Canterbury rivers, Mr. Sealy taking observations, as well as photographs, for Sir Julius. When surveying in the Mackenzie Country Mr. Sealy did some courageous mountaineering. He was the first man to explore to their sources