

Correspondence

To the Editor.

Sir,—Mr. Iredale's criticism (*The Emu*, vol. xxxvi, p. 136) of my revisions of certain Australasian birds are for the most part so far unsubstantiated that I should not have deemed it necessary to comment upon his observations but for the implication that certain of my conclusions are contrary to established facts.

1. *Petrochelidon nigricans*.—If birds are migrating the fact that they traverse distance and climatic conditions over thirty-eight degrees of latitude is quite immaterial. Plenty of Palearctic migrants go as far or farther. Unless Iredale possesses evidence that the species breeds in North Queensland, Kei, Aru, New Guinea, etc., he has, I believe, no ground for questioning my conclusions as to its status there.

His statement that I had seen only fifteen sexed skins of what I regard as *nigricans* is, of course, as a glance at my paper shows, a *suppressio veri* with its inevitable consequences. He does not refer to the series of unsexed birds mentioned, although there is no sexual difference, nor to the series of immatures examined, although he should know that they are quite as important as adults in taxonomic questions.

In any case, scientific knowledge advances from the known to the unknown when new evidence accrues; any conclusion is tentative in the sense that it may need modification, but multiplication of races unsupported by available evidence is not sound practice and only brings systematic work into disrepute.

2. *Petroica chrysoptera*.—The obscure comments on Quoy and Gaimard's *Muscicapa chrysoptera* leave me in the dark as to what Iredale regards the species to be. But his remarks about the type cannot go unquestioned. M. Berlioz at my request made a special search of the records of the Paris Museum. If Iredale thinks it is "well known that it was placed there," perhaps he will be good enough to quote his authority for this statement and inform ornithologists whether he has examined the type and what it really is.

I much regret the necessity of trespassing upon your journal to this extent, but important divergences of view should never be stated without the support of authority. If sound evidence is adduced to show that I am wrong I am prepared to admit my error, but reckless allegations are of no service to ornithology and merit scantier consideration than statements supported by given evidence, even if the latter is not exhaustive.—Yours, etc.,

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Oxford.

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