On the Specific Name of the Little Shearwater

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The article by Dr. C. A. Fleming and Dr. D. L. Serventy under the above heading in *The Emu*, 52, p. 17, 1952, calls for some comment.

First, on what evidence do the authors base the wording in the last sentence of paragraph one on page 17?

Gregory Mathews was a great personal friend of ours, a very competent systematic ornithologist, an acknowledged expert on nomenclature and particularly on the group of birds under consideration. He was a valued member of the List Committee, but to say that at any time he had "attained almost supreme ascendancy" would be laughable were it not a completely false statement. Equally inopportune are the words "during that strange interlude in its history". As members of the 'late' List Committee since 1946 and 1935 respectively we personally know of no such 'strange interlude', whilst the subsequent history of the List Committee indicates very clearly that it was not at any time, nor in any way, susceptible to coming under the supreme ascendancy of any one of its members. We can state quite definitely that each member of that Committee personally investigated every case brought before it and collectively in Committee thrashed the matter out. They did not, in this particular case of *Procellaria assimilis*, merely accept the views of a single member, as the authors would like to believe. Whilst the authors are entitled to their own opinion, to offer criticism and express disagreement, the words quoted are surely as ill-chosen as they are unnecessary to their argument.

The name *Puffinus assimilis* is indeterminate because it cannot be fixed accurately on any known bird. No scientific name can be fixed by locality alone, for example New South Wales or Norfolk Island, and *any description must agree accurately* with a definite species. On page 18 the authors quote Gould as describing the tarsi and toes as greenish-yellow, webs yellowish-orange, and state on page 22 that the legs of *P. assimilis* are blue.

If the authors accept Gould's name, *P. assimilis*, surely to be consistent they should also accept his description of the colour of the tarsi and toes. It is fair to ask which set of characters in this respect they accept for *P. assimilis*?

On general principles it seems a highly questionable practice to accept or discard, at whim and will, only such fractional elements in an original description as suit or disturb the consideration of problems such as the above

in reaching a final conclusion. While a discrepancy exists there must also remain a doubt. Therefore it is preferable to fix a name upon the next available designation, in strict priority, where no such discrepancy exists and where no subsequent doubt can arise.

Notes on the Desertion of Nests by Fantail-Warblers

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The summer of 1951-52 was notable for the increase of the *Cisticola exilis* population in the Illawarra district of New South Wales. The following observations took place at Thirroul, South Coast.

The area containing the nests referred to in these notes had the beach on its eastern side and consisted of open grass country dotted with low clumps of blackberry up to three feet high, a field containing a growing crop, a small fallow field providing a luxurious growth of thistles, and, in the damper places along the creek, an area of spiny tussocks.

On October 13, 1951, three nests were discovered. One, in the course of construction, was being built in a spiny tussock. The second was completed and situated in a small blackberry clump, the nest being joined to living blackberry leaves which completely concealed it. The third, also under construction, was located in the cultivated crop.

Three more nests were located on October 28, the birds themselves disclosing their positions by flying to them with tell-tale plumes of thistledown which are added to the nesting chamber throughout the period of incubation. Nest number 4 was in blackberry and ready for eggs, number 5 was in a spiny tussock and contained one egg, and number 6 was also in blackberry but not yet complete.

A seventh nest, found on November 4, 1951, was just started, and it is interesting to note the sequence of construction. Located in low blackberry, the nest at this stage consisted of a rough hollow sphere formed by pulling living blackberry leaves together and joining their edges. About eight leaves were used in this case; the greatest number used was twelve. In the bottom of the space thus formed, a platform of grass stems represented the beginning of the ball-type nest. The point mentioned here seems to indicate that, where living leaves are used in nest construction, they are not drawn in and attached after the bulk of the nest is complete, but are indeed the primary step. If that is so, it means that individuals of *Cisticola exilis* build two types of nest, not only very different in