

## Reviews

**Revision of the Grassbirds.**—There must necessarily be some doubt on the validity of described races of wide-ranging Australian species which appear to have been mass-named. For instance G. M. Mathews described no fewer than five subspecies of the Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*) in 1912, and two additional names have been added since (one by Mathews because a name given in 1903 was preoccupied). Little indication has been given in such earlier work of the number of skins involved, or the localities from which specimens have been examined—both necessities in present-day taxonomic revisions. The genus has been the subject of a recent review by Allen Keast ('Variation in the Genus *Megalurus*', *Proc. Roy. Zoo. Soc. N.S.W.*, for 1954-1955, pp. 25-28, April 10, 1956).

The author upholds only three geographical races (*goulburni* in eastern and south-eastern Australia, *thomasi* in south-western Australia, and *gramineus* in Tasmania), which are 'morphologically differentiated', with the last-mentioned two 'complete (or near) isolates'. It is interesting that there is also a recently-described, apparently distinct, New Guinea race—*papuensis* Junge.

No significant colour variation has been detected in the Tawny Grassbird (*M. timoriensis*) in specimens from anywhere in Australia, and *M. t. alisteri*, racially distinct from the Timor bird, is adopted for the Australian form.

It is noteworthy that the two Australian species placed in *Megalurus* are to a large extent allopatric in range, one being typically northern and the other chiefly southern in distribution. Only in parts of eastern Australia is there indication of range overlap and even then "there is evidence that the two species tend to occupy different habitats". Nevertheless, in deference to those who consider geographic representation a major factor for conspecificity, it must be stressed that *timoriensis* and *gramineus* are clearly good species, and there are sound reasons to believe that they may not even be congeneric.—A.R.M.

**Nomenclature of the Ducks.**—Australian ornithologists will be more than ordinarily interested in an application to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature for the proposed use of its plenary powers to validate the specific name *punctata* as the name for the Hottentot Teal of Africa. The arguments are discussed by a panel of authors, W. D. L. Ride, A. J. Cain, R. Meinertzhagen, F. Hemming and D. N. Noakes, in *Bull. Zool. Nomenclature*, vol. 12, June 1956, pp. 35-48. This action resulted from a recent discovery that the name really applied to a member of the *Erismatura* and to avoid the serious consequences which would follow the transfer of names. In former years the International Commission was very loath to interfere with the strict application of the Law of Priority, which had become a veritable Frankenstein monster to zoologists who regarded Latin names as stable labels rather than as playthings of nomenclaturists. Nowadays it is very different, and to attain stability the Commission is more liberal in placing names on lists of *nomina conservanda* and *nomina rejecta*. Some applications of Australian interest are now pending and one wishes that in earlier days similar action had been taken to avoid the confusion resulting from name transfers in the case of the crows, warblers (the *Gerygone fusca* case), cuckoos (the transfer of the name *pyrrhophanus* from the Brush to the Fan-tailed species) and others.

To attain the desired objective may be a much more complicated business than is apparent at first sight, as the item under review demonstrates. To save the name *punctata* for the Hottentot Teal the authors have had to take steps to place many other names on the index of rejected names and others again on the list of *nomina conservanda*.

Some of these concern Australian ornithology. Thus it is sought to place the name *gibberifrons* on the Official List of valid names for our Grey Teal and *castanea* for the Chestnut Teal. The authors deserve congratulation for their scholarship and the clarity of presentation of their arguments.—D.L.S.

**Breeding of the Great-winged Petrel.**—Under this title John Warham contributes one of the best accounts to date of this species (*Pterodroma macroptera*) (*Ibis*, vol. 98, April 1956, pp. 171-185). The observations were made on two visits to the nesting colony at Eclipse Island, near Albany, W.A. Warham finds that this winter-breeding, non-migratory petrel has an incubation period of about 53 days (one record) and the young remains in the burrow for 128-134 days (two records). The parents cease to brood the newly-hatched chicks after two or three days and there is no starvation period at the close of the fledging period. The author supports the suggestion of Dr. L. E. Richdale "that the presence or absence of a migratory urge affects the attentiveness of the parent petrels at the end of the breeding season and that a starvation period exists only with the migratory species." There was no evidence found that the birds spit oil at intruders, as do the surface-nesting fulmars. It is yet undetermined whether the Great-winged Petrels share the same burrows with the summer-breeding migratory Fleshy-footed Shearwaters (*Puffinus carneipes*), which also nest on the island. Four striking flashlight photographs add to the interest of the paper.—D.L.S.

## News and Notes

### CHANGE OF TITLE

Dr. C. C. N. Vass, honorary editor of the *British Abstracts of Medical Science* has announced that in future this publication will appear under the title of 'International Abstracts of Biological Science', the address of which is 4 and 5 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1, England.

### BIRDS OF NEW GUINEA

The publishers of Tom Iredale's projected 'Birds of New Guinea' have announced that this work will be published in a limited edition of 1,500 sets in December this year. It will appear in two volumes, quarter morocco bound, of 250 pages each, and will describe 650 species, with thirty-five colour plates, figuring 347 birds, by Lilian Medland. A special pre-publication price is offered of £16/16/- the set, by payment in advance before publication. If any sets remain unsold on publication, the price will be raised to £25/4/-. Orders to be placed direct with the publishers, Georgian House Pty. Ltd., 296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, S.C.6, Melbourne.

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