

Correspondence.

AN IMPORTANT DATE.

(To the Editor).

Sir,—I notice that the Check-List Committee have retained (p. 53) the specific name of *gigas*, Boddaert, for the Laughing Kookaburra, in preference to *novae-guineae*, given to the same reference by Hermann.

Boddaert's work is dated 1783 and the preface is dated December 1st. Hermann's work was reviewed in "Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen" for November 15th 1783. That is to say, it was published in Strassburg, sent to Göttingen, reviewed, and the review published, at least 15 days before Boddaert signed the M.S. preface to his work, that was about to appear.

So the correct name of the Laughing Kookaburra is *Dacelo novae-guineae* (Hermann) (*Tabula Affinitatum Animalium* p. 192 (note) 1783; before November 15th).

One of the synonyms is *Alceido gigas*, Boddaert (*Tabl. Planch. Enlum.* p. 40, 1783; after December 1st).

Foulis Court,
Fair Oak,
Hants, England,
July 26, 1926.

Yours etc.,
GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

SCIENTIFIC NOMENCLATURE.

(TO THE EDITOR).

Sir,—I would like to draw attention to several anomalies in the *Official Checklist of the Birds of Australia* (Second Edition), just to hand. It is splendidly compiled and must have entailed an enormous amount of work, and our thanks should be justly due to the authors for the care and attention they have bestowed upon it.

Mr. Wolstenholme, in dealing with the derivations, has done a great service to ornithology and I join with him in regretting many misspellings, due to original errors, which are at variance with the derivations yet are allowed to stand.

No. 121 reads *Sterna anaetheta*. The specific name here is undoubtedly misspelt, and should be *anaesthesia*, from the Greek *anaisthetos*, meaning "stupid."

The casual visitor marked with an asterisk between Nos. 138 and 139 reads *Charadrius hiaticula*. There seems to be no doubt that

the later word has been wrongly spelt for *hiaticola*, derived from the Latin *hiatus*, meaning "a cleft," and *colere*, "to inhabit."

No. 326 reads *Halcyon sanctus*. Why should *Halcyon* be masculine when both *Alcyon* and *Alcedo* are feminine nouns, and both the first and second are derivatives from the Greek *Alkuon*, which is feminine?

No. 342, *Chalcites basalis*. Why should this be placed in a different genus to the other Bronze Cuckoos, all of which are hardly distinguishable except on handling, and whose habits are almost identical? There can hardly be any structural difference between this species and the other genus *Lamprococcyx*, sufficient to warrant separation into two genera.

No. 505, *Origma rubricata*. The generic name here is almost certainly an error in spelling and meant for *Orygma*, from the Greek *Orugma*, "a hollow, cave, or tunnel"—a name especially apt for this bird, which selects these situations for nesting.

No. 585 reads *Plectorhyncha*. This is obviously an error of spelling. The derivation is from the Greek *plektron*, "A spear point," and *rhugchos* (pronounced *rhunchos*) meaning "a bill," alluding to the straight, sharp, pointed bill, and should read *Plectrorhyncha*.

No. 593 reads *Gliciphila*. This should be *Glycyphila*, as it is derived from two Greek words *glukus* "sweet," and *philein*, "to love," compare with the name of a botanical species *Glycyphylla*, meaning "sweet leaf or foliage," also derived from the Greek *glukus* and *phullon*.

My reason for bringing this matter of nomenclature under notice is for the sake of accuracy, which in these enlightened days is necessary for scientific work, and also for classical reasons when dealing with the Latin and Greek derivations. Priority of names is said to be of first importance in nomenclature, but this is unprogressive and unscientific, for as our knowledge increases we should be in a position to check a false impression which may have been made in ignorance in the first instance, and alter a name to one more in conformity with our later knowledge. To my mind it is absolutely inexcusable when, because a name is spelt wrongly originally and at variance with its derivation from the Greek or Latin, it is allowed to stand simply because of priority. Accuracy should come first.

In scientific nomenclature it is the rule for the generic name to be derived from the Greek and the specific one from the Latin, but this rule is frequently broken, as, *e.g.*, in the case of the genus *Hirundo*, which is Latin. Scholarship experiences a rude shock in the case of a generic name which is composed of both Greek and Latin roots combined, as in the name *Hirundapus*.

It seems to me that more attention should be paid to these matters in scientific nomenclature, in order to obviate any offence classically or grammatically.

Yours etc.,

Comboyne, N.S.W.

E. C. CRISHOLM, M.B., Ch. M.

September 6, 1926.