

## Popular Names for Australian Birds

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In *The Emu*, Vol. XXXII., pp. 309-311, Mr. H. B. Boss-Walker pleads for a revision of some of the popular names adopted in *The Checklist* of 1926, in order to bring them still further into conformity with common usage in Australia, and an editorial footnote states that "The now-forming Checklist Committee is to consider this matter." As I am, unfortunately, the sole survivor of the sub-committee of three which was finally responsible for the names adopted in the 1926 list, I think it may be useful if I place on record the principles which guided the Committee in its decisions, especially as they are not explicitly stated in Dr. Leach's preface (report of Committee) to that work.

The Committee did its utmost to collect the names in common use in all parts of Australia, but as is the case also with plants, fishes, etc., it was found that the same species was often known by different names in different States. Conversely certain names are used in different parts of Australia to denote different species. I think it may be claimed that whenever a species was found to be known by the same name throughout Australia, and that name was not incorrect and did not conflict with the other principles laid down, it was adopted. By incorrect names I mean those which imply that the bird is a member of a group to which it does not in fact belong. Of these "Blue Crane" for the White-faced Heron, is the outstanding example, and I note that Mr. Boss-Walker agrees that the R.A.O.U. could not adopt this misnomer.

The other principles to which it was considered names of Australian birds should conform, were:—

1. That birds of the same species should as far as possible be called by the same name in Australia as in England or other English-speaking countries where they occur.
2. That well-established names used in England or other English-speaking countries should not be applied to a different species in Australia.
3. That the adjective "common" should not be used in names, since *The Checklist* endeavours to provide names to be used throughout Australia, and hardly any species can be said to be common all over the Continent.

Almost all the names suggested by Mr. Boss-Walker were considered by the Committee and rejected for one or other of the above reasons. Blue Heron was ruled out because there are in America both a Great Blue Heron and a Little Blue Heron, whilst Wood Duck and Black Duck are both used for American species quite distinct from the birds

known by these names in Australia. For the latter the name Grey Duck was adopted, as this was the name by which the species was known in New Zealand.

Common Grass Parrot and Common Rosella are suggested by Mr. Boss-Walker for birds whose ranges do not extend over more than a quarter of the Continent; and other species of Grass Parrot and of Rosella are the *common* representatives of those groups in other portions of the Commonwealth.

Groundlark is a misleading name for a Pipit, though it must be admitted that the name Titlark is commonly used for a Pipit in England, though not adopted in bird books, whilst Meadow Lark is used in America for an even more distinct bird. Summer-bird, the name used for the Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike in Tasmania and Victoria, where it is mainly a summer migrant, was considered inappropriate for general use, since it is resident throughout the greater part of its very wide range on the Continent. It is not improbable that in some parts of the north "Winter-bird" would be a more appropriate name for it. Mopoke was rejected on the ground that it was used for two quite different birds. Mr. Boss-Walker proposes to use it for the Boobook Owl. It is, of course, true, as he says, that the Mopoke is "well known to every country dweller by its nocturnal call", but surely it is equally true that the majority apply the name to the Frogmouth when they meet with it in the daytime. The name is thus applied to one bird by day and another by night. To allocate the name to either would undoubtedly lead to uncertainty as to which was intended.

Mr. Boss-Walker gives no reason for dropping the name Brolga in favour of Australian Crane. It seems to be a change in the opposite direction from that of his other proposals. Surely there are not many bushmen who call the Native Companion by this formal name, whilst Brolga is in use in Queensland, and to my mind is just the sort of distinctive and euphonious name which it is desirable to popularize.

Finally, perhaps, I may mention that I was in favour of dropping the name Australian Raven in favour of Southern Crow for the reasons which Mr. Boss-Walker gives, but the majority of the former Checklist Committee were presumably of the opposite opinion since the name Raven was ultimately adopted. Southern Crow does not conflict with any of the principles mentioned above as far as I am aware. I do not think that Northern Crow is actually in use in any other country, but as there are numerous species of Crow in the northern hemisphere I suggest that North Australian Crow would be a more appropriate designation.