

By separating the displays observed between August and December in the decade 1962–71 into periods of seven days I found the following intervals had most displays in different years:

August			September			October		
18-24	25-31	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-5	6-12	13-19
1	2	1	1	1	3	0	1	0

Observations were made on a similar basis each year. However, this arrangement does not show the true times of peaking because in most years there were not big differences in the numbers of displays in each interval. For example, highs that occurred in two years between 25–31 August were almost repeated in September. However, Table II analyses the totals of displays in these intervals. It shows that displays were generally most numerous from 22–28 September but there were almost as many from

15–21 September. From 1962 to 1966 the displays peaked between 8–14 September and from 1967 to 1972 between 22 and 28 September. These findings modify my two earlier accounts (Secker 1958, 1966).

When in Australia in 1974, I noted that displays were taking place commonly in Melbourne and in towns in the south-east of New South Wales near the Murrumbidgee River from 4 to 11 August; this suggests that in Australia too the displays may peak earlier than the equinox.

REFERENCES

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H. L. SECKER, 14 Clyma Street, Upper Hutt, NZ. 9 January 1975.

STRICKLAND ON GOULD

Some years ago I was intrigued by a request for information on Gould made by Drummond's Branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland in London. The bank was celebrating its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary and in searching old ledgers for eminent depositors had come across the name of John Gould of Golden Square. In London the name Gould was associated particularly with the magnificent display of his mounted hummingbirds arranged in numerous small cases at the Natural History Museum, exhibits whose shattered remains I had the sad duty of entering after the war.

The incident was remembered because about the same time a letter to Gould was brought to my attention, which proved to be of special interest. I had been making enquiries for a bird diary believed to have been kept by J. R. Elsey, surgeon and naturalist on A. C. Gregory's overland expedition in northern Australia in 1856. Because Elsey had been a correspondent of Gould, I wrote to the Edelsten family, connected with Gould on his wife's side, which had already provided many historical documents now filed in Australia's Gouldiana. I got no further in the search for the Elsey diary but a letter was brought to me that had been written to Gould by H. E. Strickland, an eminent systematic zoologist. The letter was not recorded in Sir William Jardine's memoirs of Strickland nor in any other connexion, so it seemed that a new item had come to light. I had permission to use the contents of the letter how I wished, made a photostat copy (now deposited in the Mitchell Library) and returned the original. The copy was filed away and forgotten.

Strickland's letter is of particular interest because

it gives a contemporary private opinion of Gould's *Birds of Australia*. It shows how a 'man of science', as no doubt Strickland was regarded, viewed the work of a 'birdman', as Gould was widely known. Part 13 of the folio edition had just been published, on 1 December 1843, to which Strickland was a contributor. On 6 December Gould wrote to Strickland to ask his opinion of the work and Strickland replied: 'I shall have much pleasure in giving it, provided you do not accuse me of being too critical.' The letter was dated 23 December and was written from his home, Cracombe House, Evesham. Gould must have been confident of his product; for, he would have known that Strickland, who was forthright but fair in his remarks, had recently (1840) published a very critical appraisal of G. R. Gray's *List of the Genera of Birds*. At that time Strickland was engaged on behalf of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in assessing factors relating to zoological classification and the formulation of suitable rules, which in due course evolved into the present International Code.

Consequently, as might be expected, much of Strickland's comments centred round the complaint that Gould was 'too much given to making new genera.' He elaborated: 'As long as 2 out of 3 species possess a character which the other wants, it will always be in the power of any person to divide those three species into 2 genera, however closely they may be allied.' The consequence of this action: 'You see plainly that this process would end in making as many genera as there are species . . . the absurdity of which is manifest.' And then advice: 'Genera should not be subdivided further than is

practically convenient.' The consequence if they are: 'The only remedy against the excessive multiplication of genera is for subsequent authors who think such genera trivial, not to adopt them.'

Having stated the general principles Strickland then came to the particular case of Gould: 'Now it is for you to consider whether you have not in some cases reached the limit and even exceeded it. It is very desirable for your own well earned fame that the genera which you propose should be permanently adopted by future naturalists . . . I must say that there is some danger lest future zoologists may be disposed to cancel certain of your new genera.' On this point Strickland was not alone in his criticism. The promising young ornithologist, Dr Elsey, who came to an untimely end, said in a letter to Gould in 1857: 'Were future observations to confirm my present convictions, I might question some of your minor specific and generic differences.' Strickland continued: 'Seeing that there are 1100 genera already providing for the 6000 species of birds, it seems evidently inexpedient to make more, except in the comparatively few cases where new forms are discovered.' And again: 'If all the genera of birds were lowered to your standard I really believe we should have to carry 2200 generic names in our heads instead of the 1100 with which we are at present bewildered.'

The complaint made by Strickland is still valid; for, neither he nor others since have found an acceptable yardstick for determining genera. The situation is illustrated in the example he quoted: 'Take for example your genera *Geophaps*, *Peristera* and *Leucosarcia*, they certainly possess distinctions in the distribution of colours and slightly also in proportion of the beak, wings and tarsi, but after studying specimens of all three birds I consider that they should certainly have been kept in the same genus.' Time and subsequent taxonomists have been on the side of Gould, rightly or wrongly; for, *Geophaps* and *Leucosarcia* are still regarded as valid genera for the species that gave rise to their creation and as regards *Peristera*, a South American genus, the Australian species that Gould put into it he subsequently transferred to the endemic genus *Phaps*.

Far from 'comparatively few cases' in which new genera were required, Australia provided a rich

variety of unusual forms (about 400 endemic species are now recognized) and Gould faced the considerable task of placing many of them in suitable genera. It is interesting to note that in his folio edition (not including the Supplement) Gould used fifty-one of the genera he created and yet remarkably few have been whittled away by taxonomists. There are still about forty accepted in current use although several are under sentence and being 'phased out', especially flycatcher genera like *Melanodryas*, *Amaurodryas* and *Poecilodryas*. Some are well-established polytypic genera peculiar to Australia, like *Psephotus* and *Acanthiza*. Even if many are monotypic and therefore suspect as valid genera there are some that show more than 'minor differences' from near relatives, if any such can be found. For example *Pedionomus*, *Ephthianura*, *Struthidea* and others, seem to be successful in concealing their affinities, even from the penetrating enquiries of modern research. Many Gould genera will survive although a few may yet be found to be superfluous.

Strickland also commented on Gould's uneconomical use of space in his plates and complained about the size to which the publication was growing: 'I wish to suggest to your consideration whether you should not adopt the practice which you followed in your 'Birds of Europe' . . . of figuring more than one species on a plate. When the species are of small size and very closely allied . . . it would be quite easy to introduce two or even three into a plate. . . . There is another important matter connected with this, I occasionally hear rather anxious enquiries from more than one of your subscribers as to whether the work will ever come to an end . . . and therefore unless you can manage in some way to diminish the number of your plates, the work will be a very heavy tax on the pockets of your subscribers, and perhaps even cause some of them to drop off altogether.' Strickland's fear proved to be unfounded. Apart from its present astronomical value, *Birds of Australia* did not do too badly even in Gould's time. In his 'Handbook' of 1865 in two volumes octavo, there is an advertisement showing that the folio edition priced at £115, was 'All sold'.

Strickland's final comment: 'Pray forgive my criticisms which I would not have mentioned if you had not asked for them.'

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