

There is considerable difference of opinion among the systematists as to which of the races lately described are worthy of recognition, and which are invalid. This difference of opinion partially explains the apparent discrepancy between the numbers given by Dr. COUES in the third edition of the *Key to North American Birds*, and by Mr. RIDGWAY in the *Manual of North American Birds*, both published during the autumn of 1887. There are other points of difference between these works, and also between the *Key* and the *A. O. U. Check-List*, which it is not necessary to explain here.

There is little doubt but that the majority of Canadian ornithologists will endorse the conservatism of Dr. COUES; indeed, many would go further in that direction, and restrict the number of the subspecies to a very few, while some would go even still further, and give no distinctive title to these races, and, with a strictly binomial nomenclature, retain the former system of sequence—placing the *Oscines* first instead of last. This will not be wondered at when it is remembered that these innovations are largely due to the influence of the evolution theory of the origin of species, which the major portion of the scientific men of the United States seem to have accepted as an established fact, rather than a mere hypothesis, but which Canadian students, as a rule, consider “not proven.”

It has been suggested that an association of Canadian ornithologists be organized, and that this society undertake the formulation of a system of classification and nomenclature which shall more truly reflect the ideas on the subject which are current in the Dominion. The formation of such an association would be a good move—nothing, perhaps, would tend more surely to the advancement of the science within our borders; but would the framing of a new code be either wise or practicable? In the first place, where is the Canadian, or body of Canadians, who have the equipment of technical knowledge and experience necessary for such an undertaking—who could give an intelligent vote on all the points involved? And supposing that they had the skill, where would they find a sufficiently large collection of the birds of the country to enable them to settle many of the questions in dispute? Most certainly no such collection can be found in Canada at present. If all the bird skins in the Dominion were combined, they would not make a good working collection. In not one Museum in the country are the birds of even a small locality well represented. There are a few creditable private collections, but none of these contain a sufficient series of skins to show the variations in plumage of all the species—the variations of sex and age and seasons, to say nothing of individual and geographical variations. I have heard several Curators of our public Museums boast that their cases contained almost a “full representation” of the birds of Canada, but these gentlemen will probably think differently of the matter when they know more about birds.

The State has done little, thus far, to aid or encourage the formation of a collection of either the mammals or birds of the country. At the National Museum in Ottawa these branches have received but slight attention. The specimens of mammals there are too few to be worthy of mention, and while the cases of mounted birds make a fair display for general exhibition, the working naturalist finds little there to assist him.

If a Canadian systematist required material to enable him to determine some puzzling question, he would be obliged to go to the United States for it, and even there he would not find a good series of all species of our birds, especially those of our northwestern interior.

But apart from these considerations,—the lack of technical skill and material,—will it not be wiser for Canadian ornithologists to accept the determinations of the A. O. U. COMMITTEE, and avoid the confusion likely to result if two systems should be brought into use? Those who are opposed to the new methods can wait at least until these shall have had a fair trial; and even if further innovations are attempted, or abuses arise, these will bring their own cure. Already a warning note has been sounded. In the third edition of the *Key*, Dr. COUES enters an earnest protest against the abuse of “variety making,” which, as he points out, the pliability and elasticity of the trinomial system renders liable. He considers that some of the late rulings will not “survive the official etiquette of the present flutter in American Ornithology,” and states his fears that the “trinomial tool . . . will cut the throat of the whole system of naming which we have reared with such care.”

We can afford to wait. Whatever is strong in the present system will outlive all opposition and any prejudice there may be against it; and that which is too weak to bear the strain of adverse criticism and the logic of facts, must yield. The inexorable law of the survival of the fittest applies as surely to the works of science as to the works of nature.