plentiful at "Belltrees," 20 miles away, while it is noted also from the Manning, Bellinger, and Clarence Rivers, all east coast waters. With the exception of an abnormally coloured specimen procured at Foster,* Mr. North does not mention *Platycercus eximius* from the north coast of New South Wales. If my observations be correct (the specimens speak for themselves), the whole of that part of New South Wales lying east of the Brisbane-Sydney railway line, as far south as Scone, is the habitat of *Platycercus splendidus*, while probably the bird does not extend very far west of the line.

Taking it for granted that Gould was correct in placing *Platycercus eximius* as our local bird at Scone, I did not pay much attention to the matter until the late severe winter, during which I fed the native birds in my garden. Gradually enticing the Parrots closer to the windows of my office, I at last induced the birds to feed from the verandah, where I first observed the dark yellow of the back feathers. A few specimens secured about a mile away convinced me that I was amongst *Platycercus splendidus* and not *Platycercus eximius*. I then approached friends in various localities north, west, and south of "Belltrees," with the interesting results stated above.

There is no doubt that the two forms are very closely allied, and many of the less brightly coloured birds are almost identical in shade; but a comparison of fully adult specimens shows differences which probably justify a sub-specific separation. The habits of the two forms are exactly similar, and the eggs are not separable.

I do not claim my deductions to be absolutely correct, but the above remarks may lead to further investigation, and the final clearing up of the mystery which has surrounded this interesting and "long-lost" bird.

[The re-discovery by Mr. H. L. White of the most beautiful Yellow-mantled Parrot is interesting, and demonstrates the value of close bird-observation in one's own district, as well as striving for knowledge in regions beyond.—EDS.]

Remarks on the Proposed Second Edition of the "Official Check-list of the Birds of Australia."

BY GREGORY M. MATHEWS, F.R.S.E.

IN the October *Emu* there appears an account of the proposition to prepare a second edition, and comments are made with regard to my work on the birds of Australia. I propose to make remarks here illustrative of my conclusions, so that an "intelligent vote" can be taken in connection with them.

Firstly, I wish to thank the writer for the kindly appreciation

* "Nests and Eggs," vol. iii., p. 128.

of my work, but wish to emphasize the fact that the numerous emendations I have made in connection with the nomenclature and classification of Australian birds have all been towards the one end: the accurate and exact nomination of our study *without prejudice* in any manner. Consequently, my views have altered as I have found facts to disagree with accepted theories. It must be acknowledged that the student of ornithology must at first be guided by the work of his predecessor, and it is only by perseverance and thought that he can improve upon that work.

The one big point with regard to unanimity in generic names now outstanding is "one-letterism," and here I wish to explain my position, as it seems to be misunderstood. Reference to my writings will show that I now accept a view entirely opposite to my earliest one, and this is due to the one fact that I wish to accede to the wishes of the majority. A few historical notes may show the necessity of my action.

When the British Association Code for the adjustment of nomenclatural troubles was promulgated some 75 years ago, natural science was in its infancy, and the rules there proposed were not constructed with a view to posterity. The makers were all students of many phases, and could scarcely be called specialists. The Code admitted the correction of "supposed" grammatical erroneous construction of names, and consequently this was taken advantage of. This Code was known as the "Stricklandian" Code, as a clever man called "Strickland" was the secretary and compiler of the code. Strickland himself was far-sighted enough to see the danger in this matter, but, as the majority of workers disliked the idea of "inaccurate" nomination, he commonly indulged in the proposed correction of names. Thus, to cite the case of "*Meliphaga v. Melophagus*," we will suppose the former was constructed from two Greek words — *melos* and *phagos*, meaning honey and sucker. The first combination is either wrongly or rightly formed, according to the grammatical rules governing the transliteration of Greek words into Latin and also the combination of words. The Stricklandian Code admitted, or rather advised, the emendation of such incorrectly formed or wrongly transliterated words. Thus, whichever were the earliest *in date*, it invalidated *any* later combination, as all the combinations were amenable to alteration until they agreed. I have cited an instance of such emendation, and here again give it. A worker proposed a name, *Chroicocephalus*. Working with the Stricklandian Code, various writers indicating errors of transliteration and combination suggested *Kroicocephalus*, *Kroikocephalus*, *Chroiocephalus*, *Chroecocephalus*, and *Chroocephalus*. It was subsequently proved that the first proposer had *correctly* formed the word, and it needed *no* alteration at all. I suggest that it would be impossible to maintain the preceding half a dozen combinations with any accuracy, *considering the students who are interested in ornithology*. I make this statement, as it has been argued that chemists not only utilize such similarly-formed

words, but also make a practice of them, differentiating hypsulphites and hyposulphates and ferro-cyanides and ferri-cyanides. Chemistry is, however, an *exact* science, and I can never imagine a man who can differentiate between $C_{16}H_{16}N O_7$ and $C_{16}H_{15}N O_7$ worrying at all about the *trivial* alterations in bird nomenclature one sees pages written about. Ornithologists have *seriously* argued about the "*confusion*" that would ensue through the alteration of a bird-name, so our science would never be ranked as an *exact* science. Again, it might be observed that all the arguments brought forward with regard to alterations in bird-names have been urged on account of the nature of the bird students.

However, to return to the matter of emendations. The acceptors of the Stricklandian Code were not imbued with foresight, and consequently treated the Code with carelessness, the excellent provisions therein contained being ignored and neglected, and chaotic condition became imminent. This was due to absolute prejudice against the real workers, and it was soon written that "the Stricklandian Code was more honoured in the breach than in the observance." The supporters of the Stricklandian Code were the British ornithologists of the last generation, and unfortunately the older members of the present generation are more or less prejudiced by the same inaccurate method of working. This is seen in the new B.O.U. list, where an attempt has been made to except some few names from the laws presumably accepted. The prejudice is seen in the fact that the committee would not accept the international laws implicitly, but decided to savour them with a little indecision. This result has provided the anticipated complications, as will hereafter be noted.

Reference to the international laws brings us to the last point. The Stricklandian Code was mainly a British proposition, and on the Continent similar codes were prepared, more or less based on that code, and differing in details only. In America an amended code was also prepared, while such action necessitated emendation of the first Stricklandian Code. The existence of these numerous codes provided the reason for an International Code, and this is what I now follow. As might be anticipated, the reconciliation of the various codes was not exactly successful in eliminating all the conflicting factors at the first time.

Therefore, the ruling with regard to "one-letterism" became a tentative one, no law being laid down, only a recommendation reading—"It is well to avoid the introduction of new generic names differing from one already in use only in termination or in a slight variation in spelling, which might lead to confusion. But, when once introduced, such names are not to be rejected on this account." This recommendation was in direct opposition to the usage of a century, and was consequently ignored. Further, the old codes, which were still commonly used wherever they did not exactly contradict the international laws, made exactly the opposite conclusion. In ornithology, Hartert, Hellmayr, and one or two

others accepted the recommendation as a law, and therefore reinstated a few names which had been rejected under the Stricklandian and other codes. I made the same alterations in my "Reference-list," but it has proved impossible to act up to this recommendation, as the number of names to be revived becomes multitudinous, and, furthermore, the numerous emendations would need consideration as separate words.

At the last Congress of Zoology a proposition was tabled to schedule the alterations necessary in the branches. Time did not permit the discussion of the matter, but it was easily seen that the only means of reaching unanimity was by the rejection of similarly-formed words—*i.e.*, workers' usage in every branch of zoological science would cause the absolute rejection of the recommendation quoted. When this was seen to be certain I at once proceeded to make the necessary emendations, and this action is the one which has called into being the note which I here comment upon.

It is noted in the October *Emu* that three changes depend upon this "one-letterism," but it is not stated how many depend upon the acceptance of the opposite course.

I would advise the adoption of the course I am now pursuing, as it is undoubtedly the one which *has* gained acceptance in every branch of zoology, and consequently the names maintained under this usage will be certainly approved by all future students.

1. Under this number is set out a number of generic names from the first R.A.O.U. "Check-list" which do not agree with those I at present use. I cannot here discuss in detail all the reasons for the acceptance or rejection of my choice, but would first point out that, while some names depend upon the generic limits, others are in a case where there is no other course save the acceptance of my choice. Such a one is *Irediparra*. *Parra* was provided by Linné for the Brissonian genus *Jacana*, which is a South American genus to which the Australian bird cannot possibly be referred. As *Parra* is an absolute synonym of *Jacana*, it cannot claim usage in any other connection. *Irediparra* is now commonly in use by writers such as Hellmayr, &c. Another is *Burhinus*. This name was provided for the Australian bird before *Edicnemus* was introduced for a similar European form. Were the two considered congeneric *Burhinus* has priority, but the International Commission on Ornithological Nomenclature has decided they are independent genera. In every manner, therefore, *Burhinus* must be used for the Australian bird.

Another kind of case is *Cirrepidesmus*. The name used in the R.A.O.U. "Check-list," *Ochthodromus*, I have conclusively shown in "The Birds of Australia" to be inapplicable from a careful study of the bird, and, moreover, it is invalid on account of one-letterism in a rather definite manner.

A third case can be exemplified by *Austrotis*. The Australian bird was considered congeneric with the African, though the intervening Bustards were allotted to different genera. It was some-

what obvious that here we had a case of convergence of superficial characters, but comparison showed that these were not so close as might have been anticipated from the classification, and that superficially the birds could be generically separated.

If the Council would consider it acceptable, I would draw up the arguments, quite briefly, for and against the whole of the *thirty-five* names included in (1) for the consideration of the ornithologists of Australia, as it seems convenient to have in view the data dealing with these names before conclusions are arrived at.

2.—Names fixed by B.O.U. list.—Where the B.O.U. list is contrary to the international laws I do *not* counsel its acceptance. It should be remembered that the B.O.U. list is a tentative one, being the first attempt to reconcile the last (and few) supporters of the Stricklandian school with the more (and much more numerous) progressive students of British ornithology. So far my forecasts in connection with British ornithology have proved correct in a much quicker time than I anticipated, and I now provide another when I state that the next B.O.U. list will alter Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6 to the names I use, and which should be used in the new R.A.O.U. "Check-list." In the " 'Check-list' genera (20), for which there is a valid prior name," appears three names which come under the article regarding "one-letterism"—

Oxyura should not be used instead of *Erismatura*.

Coracina should not be used instead of *Graculus*.

Lonchura should not be used instead of *Munia*.

It is afterwards noted that many changes may be necessary on account of "one-letterism," and gives the list of names involved.

Would it not be wise to tackle the matter now *and make the changes necessary*? In usage the converse has proved impracticable, and my own as well as other workers' attempts to revive rejected names on this account have proved futile.

I would only make a comment upon the concluding sentences regarding the "generic" standard by pointing out that no comparison can be made with either the British list or the American list, *if facts be considered*. Both are dealing with a single faunal element, and to be correct the British list would only be comparable with a Tasmanian one. The British Isles are, zoologically, part of the Palearctic region, as Tasmania is part of the Australian region, with this difference: the Tasmanian avifauna is *more* differentiated from that of the mainland than the British is from that of the Continent. How many genera are represented in the Tasmanian avifauna, *on the "Check-list" basis*, in proportion to the species? The proportion would not compare with that of the British list.

I have repeatedly emphasized the fact, displayed by the study of other sciences, that there are *three* distinct faunal elements in Australian ornithology. This fact alone would compel a higher generic percentage in Australia than in North America, as well as Britain. I use names to express facts, not to hide them, and consequently more generic names are necessary in proportion in

the Australian than in the Northern places compared with them. Again, I have considered as "sub-species" very many forms which in the A.O.U. list are ranked as "species," and, further, more "sub-genera" are freely used in that list where I call the divisions "genera." When these facts are carefully taken into consideration my standard will be found little higher than that of the A.O.U. list; and I hope the Councillors who make a study of the B.O.U. list will bear in mind that comparatively-speaking small genera are there utilized, and only in rare instances (and then very often wrongly) are large groups used, *through the prejudice of convenience*, and not from a study of the birds themselves. As instance, *Sterna* and *Larus* may be quoted. If the B.O.U. list had accepted throughout the generic standard put forward by the inclusion of these two genera, all the *Passeriformes* might have been classed in *Fringilla*.

It is necessary, in order to arrive at generic values, to study the birds in monographic groups, and, moreover, the anatomy must be considered. Until this is done it is useless to dogmatize, and at the present time the only safe course is the acceptance of many genera rather than few. Personally, as I have shown in my "Reference-list," I have no prejudice; my only desire is to advance our science, and I will use large or small genera accordingly as they express the facts best. I, however, will not use a name for a bird which I *know* to be wrong, and that is where I differ from the compilers of the B.O.U. list.

I hope in the future to study the anatomy of Australian birds, and thereby settle absolutely the value of some of the genera, but I would draw attention to one of the most interesting facts on record. I made a careful and prolonged study of the Australian *Charadriiformes*, and from the examination of skins alone re-classified this group. My results were published in the "Birds of Australia." Dr. Lowe shortly afterwards reviewed the same group from the Palearctic forms, and arrived at similar conclusions, quite independently, to my own, under the osteological examination of members of the group. His results are now appearing in scraps in *The Ibis*, but so far he has *absolutely* confirmed the conclusions I put forward from my study of the skins alone. This is evidence in favour of the close study of bird skins and the approximate accuracy of the results thereby achievable.

Birds of a Murray Island.

BY CHARLES BARRETT, C.M.Z.S., MELBOURNE (VIC.)

DURING a brief holiday in November, 1915, at Kulkyn station, about 50 miles from Mildura, I spent many pleasant hours among the birds on a small island opposite the homestead. The Station Creek flows along one side, junctioning with an extensive billabong at the eastern end of the long strip of slightly elevated land, and with the Murray River at the other. The islet, which is the shape