

A Field Guide to Australian Bird Song: cassette two. Bird Observers Club 1985.

This eagerly awaited second cassette in the series covers species from Rufous Night Heron to the Chestnut Rail and further extends the range of commercial recordings available on Australian birds.

It covers 69 species, including waterbirds, hawks, megapodes, quail and ends with four rails. The localities in which these recordings were made range from Nepal, Lord Howe Island, New Zealand and many widely separated localities throughout Australia with a solitary example from Great Britain. The oldest recording was made in 1958 and the most recent in February 1985.

The recordings are generally of a high standard, given the original field conditions and the great variety of recording equipment used. How Rex Buckingham and Len Jackson are able to 'clean up' recordings like the Mute Swan which has a water pump in the background defies a written description. Congratulations on a job very well done. The spoken identifications are by Len Grice. The folio that comes with this tape tells us the Latin names, the vernacular names of the species, *what the bird(s) are doing and the running time of each recording*, as well as who made the field tape and where it was made. Such data are rarely supplied with recordings these days, and so it is good to see a publication that supplies notes in a model form. At least 25 of the species on this second tape are on the New Zealand list, some like the Little Bittern being rare.

Many of the species on this tape are first releases and should create considerable interest among ornithologists for this reason alone.

Available from The Bird Observers Club, Box 185, P.O. Nunawading, Victoria 3131, Australia. Price \$A10.00. For a review of cassette one, see *Notornis* 31: 335 (1984).

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LETTER

An attempt to restore sex to the Cape Pigeon

For some time, by a quirky ruling of the International Commission for Scientific Nomenclature, this splendid petrel has borne a scientific name the gender of which is neuter.

Pintado, of which *Daption* is an anagram, is naturally pronounced with its final o long. Accordingly, if the anagram is correctly formed, it is daptiōn, not daptiōn. Thus it is allied, not with a big clutch of ancient Greek neuter nouns signifying diminutives, but with a substantial group of masculine and feminine names and nouns which end with long -ōn or -ion, e.g. *chelidon* (swallow), *aëdon* (nightingale or warbler), *halcyon* (kingfisher), *prion* (saw or sawyer). *The word prion is especially interesting and relevant. As a bird name it goes back at least to 1800; yet another proof of the sound classical learning of most 18th century naturalists. Its gender was masculine. Buller's Broad-billed Prion was vittatus; and when later a subspecies of the Antarctic Prion was named desolatus alter it was doubly masculine. But the law of*

priority forced *Prion* to give way to *Pachyptila*, and so currently the gender of the genus is feminine.

Even *Creadion*, a pure Greek neuter diminutive noun denoting 'a little piece of red flesh', doubtless in reference to the bird's wattles, was treated as masculine and so the Saddleback was *Creadion carunculatus* from at least Buller to Moncrieff; and the North Island form was *rufusater*, not *rufumatrum*. Now *Creadion* has been supplanted by the infelicitous *Philesturnus*. This presumably is intended to mean 'starling-like', whereas, if etymology carries any weight, it can only mean 'liking or loving starlings'. The rejected name *Creadion psaroides*, given in 1823 by two French naturalists, is perhaps the most precise and meaningful of all the scientific names our saddlebacks have had. *Psaroides* means just what *Philesturnus* is supposed to mean. This compound specific epithet is derived from a Greek word *psar*, which is so old that it is used by Homer. In the synonymies of Buller's first (1873) and second (1888) editions, it is misspelt *pharoides*.

Let us now examine some other anagrams used in ornithological nomenclature. Since 1854 the House Martin of the Old World has been *Delichon urbica*, *Delichon* being an anagram of *Chelidon* and treated as feminine.

Alcedo is a Latin adaptation of a Greek noun, *alcyon* (no h) which may or may not mean a kingfisher. Both Vergil and Pliny preferred to retain Greek form. Pliny's description of *alcyon* leaves no doubt that he has the European Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) in mind; but Vergil's *alcyones* which make the seashore resound with their cries seem curiously out of character.

Alcedo has spawned two anagrams, *Dacelo* and *Lacedo* for distinctive genera of kingfishers, which occur in Australia, New Guinea and South-east Asia. Neither is neuter. The Australian Kookaburra was named *gigas* by Gould in 1844; and *Lacedo* may be both *pulchella* and *amabilis*, a charming lovable lady.

With regard to *Daption*, a little judicious lumping will cut the Gordian Knot. Is it in truth justifiable to allow three distinct genera for the three robust fulmarine petrels of the deep south, *Fulmarus glacialisoides*, *Thalassoica (Priocella) antarctica*, and *Daption*? If the many prions, whose bills show such diversity in size and shape, are placed in a single genus, *Pachyptila*, would it not make sound biological sense simply to call the Cape Pigeon *Fulmarus capensis*? Is this asking too much?

REFERENCES

- SIBSON, R. B. 1978. The unsexing of the Cape Pigeon. *Notornis* 25: 149.
 WARHAM, John. 1978. *Notornis* 25: 355-356.
 JOHNSTONE, G. W. 1978. *Notornis* 25: 356.

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