The Editor,
Sir,

The apparent confusion which concerns Mr Moore is entirely the result of incorrect usage by authors, and does not reflect inconsistencies in the 1970 *Checklist*. Everyone knows that *Sula bassana* is widely distributed outside Australasia. Thus the correct scientific name for the Australasian Gannet is, in fact, *Sula bassana serrator*. Authors contributing to *Notornis* are required to follow the 1970 *Checklist* except where taxonomic questions are being discussed. A list of amendments to the 1970 *Checklist* has already been prepared and will shortly be published in *Notornis*. Readers will be pleased to learn that, except in a very few cases, vernacular names (i.e. names in local usage) are not being changed to conform with international (? English) usage. Conformity is already attained by the use of scientific names.

In 1953 and again in 1970 the Checklist Committee of the Ornithological Society decided it would be best to provide vernacular names for subspecies, many of which, like the Pied Tit *Petroica macrocephala toitoi,* are easily recognised in the field. Mr Moore does not, in fact, advance any argument in support of his proposed change in policy.

F. C. KINSKY; J. A. BARTLE

The Editor, 19 March 1979
Sir,

In 1955 Berger proposed that the small glossy cuckoos of both the African and Indo-Australian regions should be united in one genus *Chrysococcyx*. The submerging of *Chalcites* was advocated also by Friedman in 1968. Now Brian Gill has recently suggested (*Notornis* 25: 194) that the New Zealand Checklist Committee erred in retaining the generic name *Chalcites*. Admittedly, in the *Checklist of the birds of Australia* (1975) *Chalcites* is displaced by *Chrysococcyx;* but with reservations and the comment " This lumping of the Australian species in one genus is probably too severe." Perhaps the Australian authors acted over hastily. Berger's proposal has not been universally accepted and the opposition favouring the retention of *Chalcites* is fairly formidable. Among the champions of *Chalcites* are: B. E. Smythies *Birds of Borneo* (1960); A. Landsborough Thomson, *Dictionary of Birds* (1964); C. Vaurie, *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna* (1965); A. L. Rand and E. T. Gilliard, *Handbook of New Guinea Birds* (1967); Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley, *Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan* (1969).

The small glossy cuckoos fall into two widely separated groups. The four African species *Chrysococcyx (sensu stricto),* well illustrated in Bannerman's *Birds of West and Equatorial Africa,* Vol. 1, plate 34, belong to equatorial and southern Africa. They do not seem to have crossed the Sahara and none qualified for mention either in Nicoll's *Birds of Egypt,* edited by Meinertzhagen (1930) or in the much more recent *Birds of North Africa,* R. D. Etchecopar and F. Hue (1967).

However two species have braved the narrows of the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden to earn a tenuous inclusion in Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia,* pp. 309. 310 (1954).

Between India and New Zealand there are about ten species of small glossy cuckoos *(Chalcites)* and several sub-species. Their point of origin, the heartland from which they have spread and diversified,

BASIC DISTRIBUTION OF CHALCITES

Species of Chalcites	India and Burma	Thailand	Malaya	Indonesia and Borneo	Papua New Guinea	Australia	New Zealand
maculatus	X	X	X				
xanthorhynchos	X	X	X	X			
malayanus		X	X	X	X	X	
basalis			X	X	X	X	
crassirostris				X	X		
ruficollis					X		
meyerii					X		
osculans					X	X	
russatus					X	X	
L. lucidus					X	X	X
L. plagosus					X	X	

must surely lie in the region of eastern Indonesia, New Guinea and northern Australia as shown by the accompanying table. Some species of *Chalcites* are strongly migratory and do not hesitate to cross wide spaces of open sea. Is it significant that when Indian Emerald *maculatus* and Violet *xanthorhynchos* Cuckoos drift on their autumn migrations they tend to go south-east rather than south-west ?

The great deserts that lie between Pakistan and north Africa have long acted as an effective barrier between *Chrysococcyx* and *Chalcites.* Yet this vast area is crossed every year by tens of thousands of small passerines on their spring and autumn migrations. If *Chrysococcyx* and *Chalcites* are one and the same genus, why does e.g. *Chalcites*

maculatus migrate yearly to the high Himalayas and *lucidus* to ocean-girt New Zealand, whereas no species of *Chrysococcyx* bursts out of central Africa to reach Europe or the benign and fertile Mediterranean basin ?

Is it not therefore reasonable to suppose that the morphological similarity of *Chrysococcyx* and *Chalcites* is the result of convergence ? May not these two groups of small glossy cuckoos have evolved independently in what were far-separated but virtually unlimited areas of tropical rain forest, the one across equatorial Africa, the other around Indonesia ? These richly diversified forests, both lowland and montane, encouraged a veritable explosion of genera and species not only among the passerines but also among the cuckoos which depend largely upon them. Mere morphology is not enough; yet even in this respect, *Chalcites* as a general rule, is more heavily barred on the underparts. The pattern of behaviour also seems to differ, *Chrysococcyx* being land-tied and comparatively sedentary, *Chalcites* much more boldly dispersive.

In the light of present knowledge — one is tempted to say ignorance — of the relations between the small glossy cuckoos and the host species which they victimise, it is surely wiser to retain *Chalcites* and *Chrysococcyx* as separate genera.

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REVIEWS

Seminar on the Takahe and its habitat. Proceedings, Te Anau, 5-6 May 1978. Prepared and published by the Fiordland National Park Board.

The proceedings contains a mass of information in its 273 pages. The papers presented at the seminar included such aspects as the history of the Takahe, population and feeding studies, and the Takahe at Mount Bruce. The vegetation of the Murchison Mountains in relation to the habitat of the Takahe, the significance of deer and stoats in the area, the impact of helicopter hunting, and the use of poisons all came in for review and discussion.

The seminar emphasised the complexities of establishing an effective means of protecting the Takahe, which is declining in numbers, and the necessity of much more research. However, it appears that the greatest predatory pressure comes from deer, which compete with the Takahe for food, and from stoats, especially in periods of peak numbers.

A paper on the effect of 1080 poisoning for opossums revealed that many birds are killed in the process and most unfortunately, such important insectivorous birds as the native Whitehead, Tomtit, Robin and Rifleman are among the victims. In view of the early assurances given by the State Forest Service and repeated by Pest Destruction