

SHORT NOTES

THE UNSEXING OF THE CAPE PIGEON

On p. 206 of *Notornis* 24 (1977) I observe that the Cape Pigeon of the Snares Islands has been neutered⁽¹⁾. As explained on p. 177 of Helen Oliver's '*Annotated Index of N.Z. Bird Literature*,' *Daption* is an anagram of *Pintado*.

Admittedly *-on* is the neuter ending of hundreds of common Greek adjectives; and also there are numerous neuter nouns ending in *-ion*, denoting diminutiveness or endearment, e.g. *-paidion*, little child; *therion*, small animal; *xiphidion*, little sword, etc. But there is also no shortage of strong masculine nouns ending in *-ion* e.g. *Arion*, the illustrious musician, who escaped villainy at sea by hitching a lift on the back of a friendly dolphin, possibly a progenitor of *Opo*; *Bion*, a poet; *Hyperion*, the sun or the sun's father. *Pandion*, once a king of Athens and now the Osprey, has not been emasculated, for his American and Australian subspecies are known respectively as *carolinensis* and *cristatus*.

Why, then, should such insulting treatment have been meted out to birds as hardy and virile as *Daption*? Candon's *Checklist of the Birds of Australia* (1975) makes confusion⁽²⁾ more confounded (p. 19) by listing *Daption capense australis*.

Surely such tampering with an established and logical nomenclature is unnecessary and muddle-headed. May we please follow Alexander⁽³⁾, Oliver, Serventy, and our own Checklists, the authors of which examined this question of genders very carefully. Incidentally, from the taxonomic standpoint, *Daption capense* would appear to be the only sexless bird on the New Zealand list.

- (1) In an age obsessed with Abortion, Contraception and Sterilisation this perhaps is not surprising. Have *Pintados* been added to the list of threatened species?
- (2) In the modern vernacular, he seems to have got his knickers properly in a twist. Consequently, the Cape Pigeons of the Snares have become in Australia either neutroherms or neutraphrodites.
- (3) *Capense* of first edition *Birds of the Ocean* (1928) becomes *capensis* of second edition (1955).

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