

SHORT NOTE

Kokako presence on Stewart Island

A Kokako feather was found this summer during a search for South Island Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea cinerea*) on Stewart Island. The small bluish-grey body feather was found by Dave Crouchley (NZ Wildlife Service) and subsequently identified by John Darby of Otago Museum.

The search area was a remote branch of the Rakeahua River, where other signs of the rare bird had been found recently. In addition to a feather being found, two brief sightings of Kokako were made and calls were heard and tape-recorded.

These results mark an important stage in the search for South Island Kokako, which began in 1980. Accumulated evidence of South Island Kokako indicates that the birds are present in low numbers, in habitat similar to that preferred by North Island Kokako (*C. c. wilsoni*), in isolated areas on Stewart Island and the South Island. They are rarely seen because they are more secretive and have lower vocal output than North Island Kokako.

RHYS BUCKINGHAM



LETTER

More on the name *Rallus hodgenorum*

One must admire the determination with which Prof Mayr (*Notornis* 33: 268) exercises his penchant for misrepresenting issues relating to nomenclature. Because Scarlett named his rail simply "after Messrs J. and R. Hodgen, owners of Pyramid Valley swamp," all that can be inferred in any consideration of grammar is that two (J. and R.) masculine (Messrs) individuals with the surname Hodgen were to be honoured. There is no indication here that these gentlemen were brothers, were married, or that their presumed wives shared title to the swamp, none of which circumstances would alter the ending of the specific name of the bird in any event. The gratuitous interjection of such irrelevancies only lends an unbecoming air of frivolity to the discussion. Furthermore, because neither simplicity nor brevity is a criterion for determining nomenclatural usage, and no matter of priority is involved, these factors are likewise irrelevant. All that remains of Prof Mayr's argument then is his view that Article 31c of the Code of Nomenclature is "anachronistic." Nevertheless, *Rallus hodgenorum* is the correct form of the name *if* one intends to abide by the existing Code. Because compliance with the Code is strictly voluntary, those who wish to depart indefinitely from it need follow no rules and may use such names as please them.

As for *Brachygalba lugubris naumburgi*, a knowledgeable person encountering this name in the absence of the original description would

probably assume it to commemorate some male relative of Elsie's, or perhaps some other Naumburg family altogether. The correct spelling *naumburgae* not only helps to avoid this misapprehension, sets the historical record straight, and more properly honours the person to whom the bird was dedicated, but also is consistent in conforming with Latin grammar and thus with the Code as well. Considering these substantial benefits and the fact that there could be no possible confusion as to the taxon in question, I can see no harm whatever in making the correction. I wonder if Prof Mayr would be as indifferent towards grammatical carelessness if he were to be honoured with a new subspecies spelled *mayrae*.

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[The matter of gender is irrelevant to the original issue of whether the fossil rail is *Rallus hodgeni* or *R. hodgenorum*. Thus, we have two opposing views:

1. Whether stability in nomenclature prevails over the original author's stated intention.
2. Whether the original author's stated intention prevails over stability in nomenclature.

Either view is possible under the Code. We therefore leave the matter open for checklist committees and others to decide for themselves. Ed.]



CORRECTION

HARPER, P. C. & FOWLER, J. A. 1987. "Plastic pellets in New Zealand storm-killed prions (*Pachyptila* spp.) 1958-1977". *Notornis* 34: 65.

The second-last word in the first paragraph reads "specimens". It should read "species".