

## LETTERS

The Editor,  
Sir,

6 October 1978

I have long had a grave disagreement with the 1970 *Annotated checklist of the birds of New Zealand*.

As an osteologist and systematist, I cannot agree with the relegation of Dieffenbach's Rail to a sub-species of the Banded Philippine Rail. The two are as distinct as the Takahe and Pukeko — a distinction which the 1953 *Checklist* maintained.

While I have no doubt that both rails had a common ancestor, Dieffenbach's Rail had diverged so widely in its isolation in the Chatham Island that I consider it not only specifically but generically distinct, and retain *Nesolimnas* for the genus. That, however, is a matter of personal preference and, if others use *Rallus*, it does not matter: what is important is that the two are specifically distinct. Apart from the decurved bill in *Rallus dieffenbachi* compared with the straight one in *Rallus philippensis*; *dieffenbachi* lacks a rostrum on the sternum and instead has a deeply incurved notch. The same distinction is found between *Notornis*, which also has no rostrum but instead has a similar incurved notch, and *Porphyrio* which has a pronounced sternal rostrum.

The pelvis of *dieffenbachi* is also more curved along the ilia in lateral aspect than is *philippensis*, but this and the much greater size of *dieffenbachi* are of less importance.

I admit the plumage similarities between both rails, but then Takahe and Pukeko also share plumages that are much alike. As the immortal Huckleberry Finn replied when Tom Sawyer quoted "Birds of a feather flock together," "No indeed they don't, Tom. There ain't two birds more alike than a crow bird and a jay bird, and them two birds don't flock together not no how."

This seems an appropriate place to correct a serious misprint in the 1970 *Checklist* in Appendix C. *Euryapteryx gravis* (Owen 1870). The locality list should be "N.Is. (rare) S.Is. Stewart Island."

R. J. SCARLETT

*Osteologist, Canterbury Museum.*

The Editor,  
Dear Sir,

5 January 1979

Despite the risks of offending Archie Blackburn, for whom I have the greatest respect, and of defending jargon, for which I plead guilty, I feel a response to Blackburn (*Notornis* 25: 256) is required.

Jargon is, unfortunately, an accepted and often necessary part of the language of science. Its function lies primarily in streamlining