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U. S. NATIONAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D. C.
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Fabio Leoni Werneck,
Caixa Postal 926,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Dear Doctor Werneck:

Just a few lines to let you know that I am finally settled, and am again able to continue my work on the Mallophaga. I have retired from active field work and will devote most of my time to my bird lice.

I have just finished checking over very carefully Hopkins & Clay's new List of the Mallophaga of the World. It is, I am sure, a very fine piece of work, and something very badly needed, and the authors are to be congratulated on it. However, I must say that I think that they have been much too conservative in their treatment of the genera, relegating to synonymy a good many perfectly good genera, not only of my own, but of other authors.

I certainly agree with them in their treatment of most of Kehler's genera, and most of Kehler's, but I think that they are serving no good purpose in lumping a heterogeneous lot of species together and calling it a genus. It is absolutely impossible to characterize some of the genera as they have now left them. Neither have they been consistent, retaining some genera which are closer to others than some of those which they have synonymized.

It seems to me, after all is said, that systematic classification is merely a means to an end, and an aid in separating the many ecological forms so that they may be recognized. A genus is a purely artificial group in most cases, while their phylogenetical relationships are not always clear, and in many cases never can be clear, since so many previously existing forms have become extinct, so why bother in trying to solve so many hypothetical questions. What are, or are not, generic characters, always will be more or less an individual opinion. Everyone's opinion is as good as the other man's, providing he has sufficient knowledge of the subject. There always have been "lumpers" and "splitters", both of species and genera, and there always will be more. Kehler and Kehler, and to a lesser extent Consi, may be classed as "splitters", while now Hopkins and Clay have reversed their former attitude and have become "lumpers". The same thing has been happening with the birds.

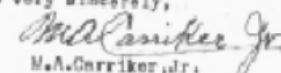
Another unfortunate thing with the new List is that they have listed the forms of lice all as species, ignoring all subspecific rank, so that unless one has the original description it is impossible to tell what are the relationships whether species or subspecies.

Personally, I cannot follow them in some of their decisions, and do not intend to do so, and I am sure that there are other authors that will think as I do. I should very much like to have your opinion on this matter. I do not like to use "subgenera", and I do not think it is necessary. There are always some species which are very difficult to allocate, having a mixture of characters belonging to two well-recognized genera, but that cannot be helped, and they must be recognized as such.

Although I have not been able to do any work on mammal Mallophaga, I am always interested in your very fine work with them, and I trust that you may continue it.

Wishing you every success, and hoping to hear from you, I am,

Yours very sincerely,


M.A.Carricker Jr.

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