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Abstracts

COMMENTARY

**THE PROBLEM OF MOLT AND PLUMAGE HOMOLOGIES AND THE FIRST PLUMAGE CYCLE**

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*Abstract.* The recent paper by Howell et al. (2003) recognizes that birds have evolved special plumages before entering the adult plumage cycle that should, therefore, be named differently in the terminology introduced by Humphrey and Parkes (1959) for plumages and molts (the H-P system). We agree with the principle of this suggestion, but we nevertheless suggest that birds take different lengths of time and different numbers of molts to enter the adult molt cycle and to acquire the adult plumage. We suggest that this variation should not be concealed by the assumption of an artificial first cycle of the same length as subsequent cycles, but should be reflected in the terminology of plumages and molts. We also suggest a distinction between entering the adult molt cycle and entering the adult plumage cycle. A main problem of the H-P system and Howell et al.'s modification is the claim that it is based on the concept of homology. In our opinion, there are no firm and convincing criteria on which to base a plausible phylogeny of plumages and molts. We would prefer to call Howell et al.'s modified H-P system a "terminology" for molts and plumages without the claim to determine homologies. We suggest that plumages or molts having the same Howell et al. term should be called "comparable," rather than homologous. Moreover, it is debatable whether the phylogeny of molt is always the same as the phylogeny of plumages, as the H-P system claims by linking one molt to one plumage. We believe that the H-P system and Howell et al.'s modification of it remains too rigid to adequately reflect the evolution of molts and plumages.

*Key words:* homology, interrupted molt, molt, phylogeny, plumage, terminology, serial molt.