

COMMENTARY

THE FIRST BASIC PROBLEM REVISITED: REPLY TO COMMENTARIES ON HOWELL ET AL. (2003)

STEVE N. G. HOWELL^{1,3}, CHRIS CORBEN¹, PETER PYLE¹ AND DANNY I. ROGERS^{2,4}

¹*Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, CA 94970*

²*Johnstone Centre, Charles Sturt University, P.O. Box 789, Albury, NSW 2640, Australia*

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³E-mail: ppyle@prbo.org

⁴Present address: 340 Nink's Road, St. Andrews, Victoria 3761, Australia.

Abstract. In this issue, Jenni and Winkler, Piersma, Thompson, and Willoughby offer commentaries on our modifications (Howell et al. 2003) to the Humphrey-Parkes system for naming molts and plumages (Humphrey and Parkes 1959; the H-P system). Piersma generally accepts our revision and outlines how its use could improve our ability to understand other cyclic life-history phenomena. Both Jenni and Winkler and Willoughby disagree with the philosophy of the H-P system, particularly its ability to reveal homologies. Thompson accepts the H-P system but argues that our elaboration on the system is faulty. However, we believe that despite a diversity of opinion concerning our proposal there is much common ground, including agreement regarding the homology of juvenal and basic plumages across species and the utility of the new term "formative." The main points we review here are the potential dichotomy between homologies of molt and homologies of plumage coloration; the caution that should be applied when using plumage coloration to identify presumed homologous molts; and a clarification of definitions of plumage, molt, and the first plumage cycle. We remain convinced that our modified version of the H-P system represents a significant improvement in terminology, and will better reflect the homologies of molts.

Key words: homology, molt terminology, plumage.