The Supposed Types in the Lafresnaye Collection.

To the Editors of 'The Auk':—

Dear Sirs: — The last number of 'The Auk,' Vol. XXIII, pp. 351–353, contains a review of our paper on the Passeres Tracheophones in the Paris Museum. Some criticisms referring to our statement about the supposed types in the Lafresnaye collection (now in Boston) necessitate a few remarks of ours.

First of all, we should like to say that we never thought of denying the existence of types in the Lafresnaye collection, for we are — as every ornithologist ought to be — well aware of the fact that Lafresnaye described a good many species "without any association with D'Orbigny" the undoubted types of which are certainly preserved in the Museum of the Boston Society of Natural History. Moreover, it is evident from what we said in the introduction to our study, that the remarks to which Dr. Allen (*l. c.* p. 352, note) took exception, relate only to those species which were described by Lafresnaye and D'Orbigny in their joint papers in the 'Magasin de Zoologie' for 1837 and 1838. With regard to these, there is no doubt that the examples in the Paris Museum are to be considered as the actual types, as will be shown in the following lines.

Dr. Allen's supposition that not many of them were indicated as such by the authors of the species they are alleged to represent is altogether erroneous. On the contrary, nearly every specimen of D'Orbigny's collection — as far as the mounted birds are concerned — bears, on the bottom of the stand, the note "type de la description l. c." in D'Orbigny's own handwriting, and in every particular instance, the exact locality, date of capture, number of the collector and the Latin name under which it was mentioned in D'Orbigny's writing, are carefully indicated.

On the other hand, it appears that the so-called "types" of Lafresnaye and D'Orbigny in the Boston Museum have been labelled as such *not* by Lafresnaye himself, but by Verreaux,[1] and that many of them are without any indication of locality [2] and collector. Dr. Allen informs us that it was Jules Verreaux who catalogued the Lafresnaye collection, and adds that he was "an excellent ornithologist, capable of doing the work with proper discrimination through previous familiarity with its contents." We are sorry to say that the work does not give him much credit as it must have been executed in a rather cursory way. This will be illustrated by the following instances.

In the 'Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History,' Vol. II, 1889, p. 243, Dr. Allen declares *Synallaxis frontalis* Pelz. to be synonymous with *S. azaræ* D'Orb., basing his conclusions upon *three* specimens in

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[1] Cfr. Salvin, Ibis, 1874, p. 321.

[2] This is suggested by Dr. Allen's remark on two specimens of *Cinclodes* (Bull. Amer. Mus. N. H., II, 1889, p. 89).

the Lafresnaye collection, marked "*Synallaxis azaræ Lafr. et D'Orb. type.*" First of all, this species has never been described by Lafresnaye, but by D'Orbigny (Voyage, Oiseaux, p. 246) who expressly says that he collected only a single specimen of the bird for which the name *S. azaræ* was suggested if it should turn out to represent a distinct species. This very example being still in the Paris Museum (cfr. Mém. Soc. Hist. nat. Autun, XIX, p. 70), how can there be *three* types in the Boston Museum? Furthermore, it must be understood that *S. frontalis* is not known to occur anywhere in Bolivia — the specimens from that country, mentioned by Dr. Sclater, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus., XV, p. 41, belong to *S. griseiventris* Allen — though the species might yet be discovered in the plains of the East, as it is found in the adjoining Brasilian State of Mattogrosso. The Paris Museum does not possess any specimens from Moxos (one of D'Orbigny's localities for his '*S. ruficapilla*'), but there are two collected in the Argentine province of Corrientes which are, indeed, referable to *S. frontalis*. It is, therefore, more than probable that the supposed types in the Boston Society's Museum, if at all collected by D.Orbigny, came also from this locality. Unfortunately, Dr. Allen does not inform us where and by whom they were obtained.

In the same periodical, p. 206, Dr. Allen asserts that *Muscicapa olivacea* Lafr. et D.Orb. (= *Muscicapara boliviana* D'Orb.),[1] according to the type (no. 4686 Lafr. coll.), "is certainly the same as the bird commonly recognized as *Elainea obscura*." In the Paris Museum, there are two well-preserved skins with D'Orbigny's original labels which, in his own handwriting bear the inscription: "No. 158, D'Orbigny, 1834. Yungas. Muscicapa boliviana D'Orb.— D. 219." These birds have nothing whatever to do with *Elainea obscura*, being about half as big, but represent a species of *Tyranniscus* which, in 1873, was redescribed by Mr. Sclater under the name of *T. viridissimus*. One of us confronted the types of the two species and found them perfectly alike. The dimensions given by D'Orbigny (Voyage, Ois., p. 328: wing 55; tail 44; total length 128 mm.) alone, are sufficient to prove that his account can only refer to the *Tyranniscus*. It follows that the specimen of *Elainea obscura* in the Boston Museum is quite incorrectly labelled as the type of *M. boliviana*.

As a third example may be cited the following. According to Mr. Ridgway (Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., X, pp. 494, 495) there are two so-called "types" of *Dendrocincla merula* "Lafr." in the Lafresnaye collection. One of them proved to belong to the species in question while the other was found to represent a widely different form, viz. *Dendrocincla olivacea lafresnayei* Ridgw. As a matter of fact, however, neither of them can be the type of *D. merula* which was described, as long ago as 1820, by Lichten-

[1] As a curiosity it may be mentioned here that these two references occur three times in Vol. XIV of the Cat. Birds Brit. Museum. First in the synonymy of *Phyllomyias brevirostris* (p. 121), secondly as the original descriptions of *Tyranniscus bolivianus* (p. 134), and thirdly as doubtful synonyms of *Elainea obscura* (p. 152)!!!

stein from a Cayenne specimen in the Berlin Museum where it has been examined by one of us. Our remark [1]: "quelques-uns de ces types, perdus au milieu d'une masse de spécimens, ne portaient que les indications du voyageur, sans nom scientifique" refers to some of D'Orbigny's *skins* on the labels of which *no* Latin name was to be found.[2] Among the Tracheophonæ there were but four such specimens which, however, we had no difficulty in ascertaining to be the types of *Anabates ruficaudatus*, *A. gutturalis*, *A. certhioides* and *Upucerthia nigrofumosa*. Our reasons for these identifications are fully explained *l. c.*

It remains to say a few words about the birds described by Lafresnaye alone, and by O. des Murs, which are dealt with in our paper. First, it must be remembered that the whole collection of Count Castelnau's expedition to South America was deposited in the Paris Museum where, consequently, all the types of the 'Voyage dans l'Amérique du Sud' remained. It is, therefore, rather strange that those of *Dendrornis weddellii* Des Murs (*not* Lafresnaye) should be in the Boston Museum, yet Mr. Elliot (Auk, 1890, p. 169) goes even so far as to say: "I do not mean to argue that *D. weddellii* is not represented in the Paris Museum, but I doubt very much if any specimen there is rightly labelled as the type of the species." This statement is made on account of there being two mounted birds in the Lafresnaye collection labelled as types! Against this, we have to say that the Paris Museum possesses two adult birds of *D. weddellii* which are marked by Des Murs himself — the actual describer of the species — as "les types de la description dans l'ouvrage de M. Castelnau, p. 46." There can, therefore, be no question whatever as to which specimens are the *real types*. It does not seem to be at all certain that the examples in the Lafresnaye collection were obtained by Castelnau's expedition, and unfortunately Mr. Elliot does not inform us about this all-important point.

Of the species described by Lafresnaye alone three, namely: *Dendrexetastes devillei*, *Dendrornis dorbignyana* and *Xiphocolaptes simpliciceps* need no further comment, being accredited in the original descriptions to the Paris Museum. *Sittasomus amazonus* is said to have been discovered by Count Castelnau. Moreover, on the stand of both specimens in the French National Collection, there is a note from Des Murs' hand: "cet exemplaire portait de la main de M. de Lafresnaye *Sittasomus amazonus* Lafr. *Type*." The same applies to *Dendrornis obsoleta multiguttata* (Lafr.).

With regard to *Nasica guttatoides*, we refer the reader to the account in the Mémoires Soc. Hist. Nat. Autun, XIX, p. 99, where our reasons for considering the specimen from the Castelnau expedition as the type, are explicitly stated, and we cannot admit that it has only been incidentally mentioned by Lafresnaye, as the locality Lorette is given in the first

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[1] Bull. Mus. Hist. Nat. Paris, 1905, p. 373.

[2] D'Orbigny's original labels are, with a very few exceptions, still attached to the skins.

place. It is, however, of very little importance whether the real type is in Paris or in Boston, for we have, we think, conclusively shown that the specimens with a short, blackish bill are but the young of the long-billed *D. rostripallens*. That Mr. Elliot did not recognize the example in the Lafresnaye collection as a young bird, is not at all surprising as his material, when writing the review of the genus *Dendrornis*, was evidently altogether unsatisfactory.

It is, we believe, sufficiently demonstrated in the foregoing lines that the labelling of the Lafresnaye collection has *not* been done with proper discrimination [1]), and from the fact that specimens are marked "types," it does not always follow that they are really entitled to be considered as such. We may conclude these remarks by saying that we have not been led by the intention "of disparaging the good name of another institution," but we deemed it a duty to call attention to obvious errors, in order to prevent in future similar mistakes as those which have resulted from wrongly labelled specimens in the case of *Synallaxis azaræ* and *Muscicapara boliviana*. We express the hope that our American fellow-workers will take up the matter and that they may enlighten us about the way in which the supposed types in the Lafresnaye collection are labelled, by whom they are marked as types, and about the exact data on the original labels of the collectors if such are extant, as we propose to do shortly in a paper on the specimens in the Paris Museum.

Very truly yours,

Dr. A. Ménégaux,
C. E. Hellmayr.

[The foregoing communication from the authors of the 'Passeres Tracheophones' of the Paris Museum of Natural History is a most welcome contribution to the pages of 'The Auk.' Had the explicit information now conveyed been given in the introduction to the series of papers reviewed in the preceding issue of this Journal (*antea*, p. 351) there would have been no basis for the strictures referred to above. As a result of them we have now information all ornithologists interested in the South American ornis will be grateful for, presented as it is in such a commendable spirit.

It is to be hoped that some one fully equipped for the task will soon go over the types in the Lafresnaye Collection in the Boston Society of Natural History and make known their real status and history, so far as may be possible.— J. A. A.]

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[1] Cfr. also Salvin's remarks in 'The Ibis,' 1874, p. 321.