



Illinois Ornithological Society

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Letter from Editor

In its sixth edition of the North American birds checklist, the American Ornithologists Union removed Burrowing Owl from the genus *Speotyto* and placed it into the genus *Athene*, then put it back into the genus *Speotyto* in 1991, and most recently back into the genus *Athene*.

Cliff and Cave Swallows, once in the genus *Petrochelidon*, then moved to the genus *Hirundo* in 1983 are back into the genus *Petrochelidon*.

What's going on here? Can't AOU make up its mind?

Well, actually, it can't though the checklist committee members are trying. The reason is the latest technology, which allows scientists to examine DNA, chromosomes and other microscopic structures in a bird species. These techniques reveal clues on how birds are related to one another and to what genus and species they belong. But it's a relatively new venture, and so it has the AOU on its toes trying to put things in order.

This is fascinating stuff for birders – first, because it changes their life lists, with all the splits and combinations, and secondly, because it puts us into the realm of science, a place we birders tend to enjoy.

In this issue, Doug Stotz, an IOS board member and newly appointed member of the AOU Checklist committee, takes us into the world of DNA, taxonomy and species separation. It's captivating reading for those cold windy March days before the ducks return and the spring bird counts come. Remember being a good birder doesn't mean just going out in the field, it also involves reading and research. Enjoy!

Sheryl De Vore