

December 4, 1950

Dr. George G. Simpson
Curator of Fossil Mammals and Birds
The American Museum of Natural History
Central Park West at 79th Street
New York 24, N. Y.

Dear Doctor Simpson:

Thank you very much for your kind letter of October 30 and the enclosed manuscript. I feel considerably flattered by all this.

My analysis of your manuscript is about as follows: You discuss two points: (1) Uniform endings of higher categories and (2) use of the leading generic name to construct the names of higher categories above superfamily rank. These two points are related but nonetheless separate to the extent that one can deal with (1) without ever touching on (2). My little note in Science concerns only point (1), I did neither advocate nor reject point (2). Your article is in-so-far misleading as your beginning paragraph mentions my article. The reader might get the idea that I advocate proposition (2) and prefer Hominida over Primates, for instance. If the endings which I proposed be applied rigidly Primates might become Primatida or Primida, or Hominida, etc. Then again the endings might not be applied rigidly. At any rate far be it from me to tell others what they should call the material they work with. I believe your manuscript might be made clearer if it shows clearly that my article was restricted to point (1). Perhaps a better introductory paragraph would do it.

I want to assure you that I do not feel offended or criticised unfairly. Discussions such as yours are needed right now so that the public may obtain several viewpoints before any decision is made. I would like to see your discussion printed.

In these discussions I find there are commonly differences of opinion between two groups of scientists, those that come in contact with many undergraduates or beginners and those that do not. I have found that taxonomy, nomenclature, and systematics bristle with so many extraneous difficulties that it is quite difficult to interest students in these subjects. These difficulties in turn affect the teaching of paleontology and tend to discourage bright students from taking up the study of this subject. A thorough simplification of nomenclature would help in this matter. To the expert, who has worked with his material for many years, such terms as Primate are time-hallowed and clear but to the beginner they are largely a burden on his memory. Is it worth the effort to make a change and would such a change result in simplification?

With thanks for kindness in sending me your manuscript and best personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

H. B. STENZEL
Geologist

HBS:ejd
2 enclosures