LETTERS

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Symbols to Indicate Castration

Symbols and abbreviations are used by most scientists and researchers when recording or describing the result of some observation or experiment.

Symbols denoting the sexes of animals (♂ ♀) have been used for many many years. There is nothing about these symbols, however, to indicate whether the animal is sexually intact and in possession of its gonads or whether it is a castrate. The importance of indicating the difference may be very great at times.

It is proposed that the circle part of the symbol be opened in the case of castrates to form the letter C. The arrow and cross-piece characteristic of the male and female, respectively, would have their regular position on the circle.

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"Weaver Finch"

Mayr, Linsley, and Usinger [*Methods and Principles of Systematic Zoology* (1953), p. 17] state: "Even the experimental biologist has learned to appreciate the necessity for sound, solid identification. There are great numbers of genera with two, three, or more very similar species. Such species very often differ more conspicuously in their physiological traits than in their morphological characters."

This statement seems so obvious to most taxonomists as to make its repetition verge on the flogging of a dead horse. Hence it was all the more surprising and disappointing to find the paper by S. J. Segal in the December 13 issue of *Science* [*Science* **126**, 1242 (1957)] describing certain hormonal experiments on "the weaver finch." Taxonomists have more or less resigned themselves to seeing generalizations in the literature of such disciplines as physiology, endocrinology, and embryology about *the* duck, *the* goose, *the* pigeon, *the* rat, or *the* rabbit; it can be reasonably assumed that the experimental animal in such cases is the common domesticated species (although I believe it should be explicitly so stated). However, "*the* weaver finch" is completely meaningless. "Weaver finch" is a general