

## COMMENTARIES AND REVIEWS

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### Galápagos Tortoise Nomenclature: Still Unresolved

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Pritchard recently reviewed the nomenclatural history of the Galápagos tortoises. His review (1996) provided an informative and valuable overview of the complexities of their nomenclature; however, he proposed a number of nomenclatural and taxonomic solutions that are inappropriate, potentially enlarging the current nomenclatural morass associated with these tortoises. Further, his proposals were not supported by a systematic analysis of any population of Galápagos tortoises. I wish to note a few of his proposals here and will address additional ones in the future.

First, Pritchard considered himself a first reviser (e.g., 1996:48) on several nomenclatural issues. This assumption is incorrect. As noted most recently by Myers and Böhme (1996), it is inadvisable to make nomenclatural decisions on name assignment and restriction of type-localities without populational analyses. Pritchard examined specimens, but nowhere in his Nomenclatural Status section nor in the preceding ones did he present data on and perform analyses of intra- and interpopulational variation of tortoise morphology or morphometry. He also did not provide an analysis of type-specimens, particularly those of uncertain provenance, to populational samples. A statement on the proportional height and width difference of the carapaces of Indefatigable and James Island tortoises was his most detailed morphometric comparison. The lack of subspecies and/or species diagnoses highlights the content of his text as a historical review of nomenclature and not as a systematic analysis of populations allowing data-supported decisions on nomenclature. This historical review does not accord the status of first reviser. If first reviser status is to be assigned,

either Rothschild or Van Denburgh obtained that title nearly a century ago.

The recognition of *Testudo nigra* Quoy and Gaimard, 1824b, as the valid senior synonym of all Galápagos tortoise populations is a questionable action. Pritchard first suggested this name change in an endnote of a popular article (1984) on “Lonesome George.” Although his suggestion has been followed by others (e.g., King and Burke, 1989; David, 1994), neither Pritchard nor the other users of *nigra* have critically examined the nomenclatural issue from a data-based analytical perspective. As Pritchard correctly noted (1996:42), *Testudo californiana* Quoy and Gaimard, 1824a, is the older name. He argued that it is a *nomen oblitum*, which it is not or at least it is no more of a forgotten name than *nigra* was when he resurrected it in 1984. The resurrection of *nigra* and its subsequent use misinterprets the intent of the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature Code’s Article 23b requirement “to maintain existing usage and refer the case to the Commission for a ruling” if the replacement of the current name will disturb nomenclatural stability. Although Pritchard (1984 and subsequently) apparently did not consider the application of the Principal of Priority to disturb nomenclatural stability in the use of specific names, his action has and continues to cause confusion with *elephantopus* appearing regularly in the general biological literature and sometimes *nigra* in the specialized chelonian literature. The wide and common use of the name *Geochelone elephantopus* (or *Testudo elephantopus*) for the past 50+ years argues for its continued use until the matter is referred to the Commission, and the Commission decides otherwise.

I offer the preceding comments to draw attention to the unresolved status of major nomenclatural issues in the Galápagos tortoises and to emphasize that within the intent of the Code the proper name remains *Geochelone elephantopus* for all Galápagos tortoises if the various populations are recognized as subspecies, and likely for the Cerro Azul, Isabela (Albemarle) population, if different populations are recognized as species (*vide* Pritchard, 1979).

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