

Comment on the family name for the storm petrels (Aves)
(Case 2024: see BZN 42: 398–400)

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Melville (1985) has performed a good service in reviewing the complicated nomenclatural history of the family names used for the storm petrels and dippers, but I am strongly opposed to his very lengthy and convoluted resolution of the problems involved. Melville proposes to validate HYDROBATIDAE Mathews, 1912, which he correctly emphasises to be *doubly* invalid, because it is in 'current usage'. His proposal also results in the extremely inconsistent situation wherein a given family includes a subfamily (OCEANITINAE Forbes, 1881) with an older name. My views concerning the undesirability of such practices have been aired recently in this *Bulletin* and need not be repeated (Olson *et al.*, 1986).

Contrary to Melville, HYDROBATIDAE Mathews is in many quarters *not* in current usage. Following Brodkorb (1963), many authors, including virtually all avian paleontologists, have adopted the older name OCEANITIDAE Forbes, 1881, and discontinued the use of HYDROBATIDAE because it is clearly invalid (e.g. Condon, 1975; Clancey, 1980; Harrison, 1983; Maclean, 1985; Olson, 1985, and Beehler *et al.*, 1986).

Regardless of how 'current' one or the other name may be, there is still no real justification for sustaining the name HYDROBATIDAE Mathews, 1912, with the curious date citation 1912 (1865), derived from THALASSIDROMIDAE J. W. von Müller, 1865, as Melville proposes in conformance with Article 40b of the Code. Because it is based on the always troublesome precept of 'general acceptance', I am not convinced of the wisdom of Article 40b; why should the Commission in the present case abrogate the much more basic principles established in Articles 23a (Priority) and 52a (Homonymy)?

Melville's proposals require an arbitrary selection of Articles to be followed and others to be ignored, and he sets forth a long and burdensome list of unnecessary Official and Rejected names as well. The use of the plenary powers to override the basic rules of the Code merely decreases the usefulness of those rules and only leads to ambiguity and uncertainty concerning their proper application.

This particular case illustrates admirably the desirability of simply abiding by the Code, for if authors were only to continue to use OCEANITIDAE, as many do, no action would be required by the Commission, and the literature would not be taxed with additional Official and Rejected names.

References

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