

What's in a Name?

The Eponym Dictionary of Mammals. By Bo Beolens, Michael Watkins, and Michael Grayson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2009. 574 pp., \$65.00 (cloth). ISBN-13: 978-0-801-89304-9.

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Have you ever found yourself reading a scientific paper, encountering a name (e.g., *Rousettus leschenaultii*), and wondering just who that critter was named after? Wouldn't it be neat to have a book on your desk that would quickly tell you that Jean Baptiste Louis Claude Theodore Leschenault de la Tour (1773–1826) was a French botanist who served as a naturalist to Kings Louis XVII and Charles X? With a copy of this volume at hand, you can find out more about Leschenault, Buffon, Greenhall, Maximilian, Patton, and more than 1,300 others for whom mammals are named. This book provides a brief look at the real people, from Abbott to Zyl, behind the scientific and vernacular mammal names found in field guides, textbooks, journal articles, and other scholarly works. It covers most of the currently recognized species, and a few subspecies and synonyms as well, that bear the names of people (eponyms).

Each biographical sketch lists the scientific and vernacular names of all species named after the person, although a quick perusal of several entries suggests that some names were overlooked. The account for Hardwicke lists *Kerivoula hardwickii*, but not *Rhinopoma hardwickii*, for instance. This is of little consequence, however, as your search for *hardwickii* would lead you to the account for Hardwicke in any event. The accounts outline the individual's major contributions to mammalogy or other branches of science, or provide some indication of why the eponym was chosen. Some information about the distribution of their namesakes is also provided. Two appendices list scientific and common

names for cross-reference, but would have been far more useful if done as indices with page numbers. In some cases, individual entries include mammals commonly—but mistakenly—believed to be named after people. Oldfield Thomas named *Diclidurus isabellus*, and given his penchant for using popular feminine names the bat is known as Isabelle's Ghost Bat. However, he surely would have called it *isabellae* had he intended to honor yet another mysterious female, and the entry for Isabelle suggests the plausible alternative that he intended the reference to be *isabelline*, referring to the pale brown coloration of the bat.

There is much to like about this volume, as it opens the door to a wide variety of people for whom mammals are named. Who knew, for example, that *Pteronotus davyi* was named for Dr. John Davy, the brother of Sir Humphry Davy, inventor of the Miner's safety lamp. According to the book at hand, all British schoolchildren know that Sir Humphry did that, but it was news to me. Some entries are so terse that one longs to know more. Milne-Edwards named *Lophiomys imhausi* after Monsieur Imhaus of Aden, who purchased it, but nothing more is known of him. This rat is known only from the horn of Africa south to Tanzania, so presumably Imhaus bought the specimen from someone who collected it on the African continent.

Mouse opossum fans with a touch of nomenclatorial knowledge might have wondered why Tate named a *Marmosa tyleriana* rather than *M. tyleri*. However, tropical botanists familiar with the plant genus *Tyleria* will surely surmise that he named it after the *Tyleria* forest that forms its habitat. Sure enough, he named it after Sidney F. Tyler Jr., supporter of the Tyler-Duida expedition to the type locality. *The Eponym Dictionary of Mammals* correctly points out that he named it after him “at one remove” by calling it *M. tyleriana*.

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As with any work of this magnitude, there are errors of both omission and commission, but they are few and not obvious. Omissions are not uncommon, perhaps due to their using Duff and Lawson (2004) as the basis for their scientific names. Probably needless to say, that would not have been my reference of choice for a checklist of mammal species of the world. Page one of Wilson and Reeder (2005) contains the names *Tachyglossus aculeatus lawesii*, *Zaglossus bartoni diamondi*, and *Z. g. smeenki*, yet *The Eponym Dictionary of Mammals* contains no entries for Lawes, Diamond, or Smeenk. Granted, these are all subspecies names, but the authors do include a smattering of other subspecies names in the book. Among currently recognized species, for instance, *Nycteris parisii* is missing from the book. Today's generation might labor under the delusion that it was named for Paris Hilton, so an entry for Parisi could have relieved that nightmare. Dr. Bruno Parisi was in fact the Director of the Zoology Section of the Museum of Natural History in Milan, Italy.

On the other hand, the authors are aware of recent taxonomic changes that might seem obscure to some. *Marmosops dorothea* Thomas, 1911 is one of those intriguing feminine-sounding scientific names that Oldfield Thomas favored. Under the heading Dorothy they shed no light on who she may have been, but they do outline the latest taxonomic findings about the species, which now rests in the synonymy of *Marmosops ocellatus* Tate, 1931.

Scientific names are formed based on quite explicit rules of nomenclature, and eponyms are obvious, if not easily traceable to their source. Common names follow no such rules, and some eponyms are not at all obvious. Thus, the authors' decision to include English vernacular names and their eponyms complicates things a bit. For example, take the very first entry in the book, that of Dr. William Louis Abbott, who collected many specimens of birds and mammals for the Smithsonian around the turn of the 19–20th centuries. Abbott's Grey Gibbon *Hylobates muelleri abbotti* Kloss, 1929 clearly honors Abbott. But what about Abbott's Duiker *Cephalophus spadix* True, 1890? Why is it called Abbott's Duiker? The account points out that Abbott collected material in East Africa for the Smithsonian, and by consulting the account for Frederick William True, you would quickly find that he was Head Curator of the Department of Biology at the U.S. National Museum. Putting two and two together, it would seem clear that Abbott must have collected the type specimen. That much can be confirmed by consulting True's original description in the *Proceedings of the United States National Museum*, but True did not specifically call it "Abbott's Duiker" in that paper. So even after this interesting history lesson, I am

left with the nagging question of who first decided to call *Cephalophus spadix* "Abbott's Duiker"?

Willem Bosman was a Dutch sea captain who is credited as the supposed discoverer of the potto. Under an entry for Bosman, they list Bosman's Potto *Perodicticus potto* Müller, 1766, apparently because the potto is still sometimes referred to as Bosman's potto, at least in the U.K., even though *Perodicticus* is monotypic, and there are no other pottos, save the false potto, *Pseudopotto martini*. And that, in turn, might lead one to assume *martini* had some intriguing reference to a popular adult beverage, but actually it was named for Professor Robert Denis Martin, former Provost for Academic Affairs at the Field Museum in Chicago. Having one entry spur you on to another and another is one of the enjoyable things about the book.

John Edwards Hill provided us with one of the coolest scientific names to come down the pike when he named *Craseonycteris thonglongyai* after the discoverer, Kitti Thonglongya, in 1974. Because the bat is called Kitti's Hog-nosed Bat in some circles, the authors' have included entries for both Kitti and Thonglongya.

Some entries lead to unexpected, but fascinating bits of information. The Little Red Kaluta *Dasykaluta rosamondae* was named for Rosamond Clifford, a mistress of King Henry II: "This small carnivorous marsupial has reddish fur and was discovered on an Australian sheep farm called Woodstock Station, living amid prickly spinifex bushes. Rosamond herself was red-haired and was kept locked in the Royal Manor of Woodstock, which was surrounded by a maze of prickly hedges. She eventually died there, supposedly murdered by Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife to the King, either by poison, stabbing, beheading, or being bled to death in her bath" (p. 348). Good grief.

So who is the winner when it comes to eponyms? Oldfield Thomas, of course, with 29 species bearing his name in either the common or scientific name. This is only fitting, as he also described more species of mammals than anyone. *The Eponym Dictionary of Mammals* is a small treasure trove of information about the people whose names are immortalized in mammalian nomenclature. Given that we mammalogists are prone to ancestor worship, I expect it to be a best-seller.

References

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