

Eleazar Albin in Don Saltero's coffee-house in 1736: how the Jamaican mango hummingbird got its name, *Trochilus mango*

STORRS L. OLSON^A and CATHERINE LEVY^B

^A Division of Birds, NHB MRC 116, Department of Vertebrate Zoology, National Museum of Natural History, P. O. Box 37012, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20013–7012 USA. (e-mail: olsons@si.edu).

^B 2 Starlight Avenue, Kingston 6, Jamaica. (e-mail: bluequit@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT: The Jamaican hummingbird that Eleazar Albin called the “Mango Bird”, which was the basis for the Linnean name *Trochilus mango*, is shown likely to have been based on a specimen he saw in Don Saltero's Coffee-House in Chelsea, London, in 1736, that was probably a gift of Sir Hans Sloane. The name “mango-bird” has long been in wide use for certain south Asian orioles, especially the Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), at least one specimen and nest of which was also on display in Don Saltero's. Albin's text concerning two species of Jamaican hummingbirds contains numerous dubious or erroneous statements and his use of “Mango Bird” for the hummingbird was most likely a lapsus confounding another bird he had heard of at Don Saltero's, particularly in light of the fact that the mango tree (*Mangifera indica*) was not introduced into Jamaica until 1782. Thus, the modern use of the word “mango” in connection with an entire group of hummingbirds arose through a purely fortuitous mistake and the birds never had any association with the mango tree.

KEY WORDS : *Anthracothorax* – *Icterus icterus* – mango-bird – *Oriolus* – James Salter – Hans Sloane – Trochilidae – troupial.

INTRODUCTION

The hummingbird now known as the Jamaican mango (*Anthracothorax mango*) appears at the beginnings of modern zoological nomenclature in the tenth edition of *Systema naturae*, where it is listed as *Trochilus mango* Linnaeus (1758: 121). The name “mango” stuck not only to the Jamaican endemic but was applied relatively early on (Gould 1861: plates 74–81¹) to all of the species formerly in *Lampornis* and now in the genus *Anthracothorax*. More recently “mangoes” has been used for the equivalent of a tribe or subfamily including at least nine modern genera of hummingbirds (McGuire *et al.* 2007).

The use of this name for a hummingbird has long been a cause of perplexity. As Gosse (1847: 88) remarked: “For what reason Linnaeus applied the trivial name of Mango to this Humming-bird I have no knowledge; that it could have no connexion with the mango tree is evident, since that tree was not introduced into the western world till long after his time.” That statement was not completely accurate, as the mango (*Mangifera indica*; Anacardiaceae), which originated in the Indian subcontinent, had been introduced to Brazil by the eighteenth century whence it was taken to Barbados by 1742. Supposedly it did not reach Jamaica until 1782 (Popenoe 1920), although Hall (1989) reported attempts to grow mangos in Jamaica during the previous decade.

It was not Linnaeus, however, who introduced the name “mango” as he had taken his description from the third and last volume of Eleazar Albin’s *A natural history of birds* (1738: 45, plate 42). Albin (*fl.* 1701–1742), who was a London-based teacher of watercolour painting (Osborne 2004), described and illustrated a Jamaican hummingbird “I had by the Name of the *Mango* Bird, which I believe to be an imposed Name”. Linnaeus (1758: 121) erroneously attributed the name “*Mellivora Mango*” to Albin, who used no such combination. Sloane (1725) had earlier described all three species of Jamaican hummingbirds with non-binomial names beginning with “*Mellivora*” but nowhere did he use the word “mango”, so the combination *Mellivora mango* must be attributed to Linnaeus himself.

DON SALTERO’S COFFEE-HOUSE

Albin’s plate and page of text with the “Mango Bird” also included the “Long-Tail-Humming Bird”, which is now the red-billed streamertail (*Trochilus polytmus*), the most emblematic of the endemic birds of Jamaica, which Albin (1738: 45) said he had “copied from the natural Bird at *Salter’s Coffee-House* at *Chelsea*.” The plate with the two hummingbirds is dated “Eleazar Albin Del. Oct. 4. 1736”. There are no other plates in the third volume with an October 1736 date (those in the first two volumes are undated) and we found no further mention of Salter’s Coffee-House anywhere else in Albin’s *Natural history of birds*. If the “Mango Bird” and the “Long-Tail-Humming Bird” were drawn on the same day then there is every reason to believe that both were based on specimens in the same coffee-house, where, as we shall document, there were indeed specimens of both species.

James Salter (d. 1728) was an extraordinary entrepreneur said once to have been a servant of Hans Sloane and to have traveled with him to the West Indies (his history is summarized from Wroth and Kell (2004) and Altick (1978)). He owned a house in Chelsea that he ran as a barber shop and coffee-house from 1708 to 1717 before he moved the enterprise to 18 Cheyne Walk. Here he accumulated an astonishing variety of cultural artifacts and curious specimens of natural history that were displayed in what became known as Don Saltero’s Coffee-House, the Spanish title and name having been bestowed upon him by Rear-Admiral John Munden. Here patrons could indulge their interests in unusual objects for the price of a cup of coffee or a bowl of punch and the accommodating Don, a passable fiddler, would provide free shaves and tooth-extractions in addition to music. Salter received specimens from far and wide. Hans Sloane was one of Salter’s benefactors and contributed duplicates originating in his travels. Thus, in time, “Don Saltero’s coffeehouse was London’s first public museum” (Altick 1978: 17). Given such importance in its day, Don Saltero’s and its proprietor seem to have received little attention from historians of natural history. Salter is not to be found in the indexes of *Archives of natural history* and its antecedent. In the volume summarizing the importance of Hans Sloane’s collections (MacGregor 1994: 240, note 33), Salter appeared only in a footnote regarding a “model of the sacred sepulchre” and he is misidentified in the index as “John Salter”.

Although Salter died in 1728, his daughter and son-in-law continued the establishment for another 30 years, after which it came into other hands and was finally closed in 1799. Fortunately for our history of the Jamaican hummingbird, the good Don was a tireless self-promoter. He and his heirs issued at least 44 editions of a catalogue of the collections to be viewed at the coffee-house, of which we have consulted the twenty third and thirty sixth

(Anonymous c. 1754, c. 1785; none of the catalogues is dated, the years being those approximated in library catalogues). The twenty third edition is little more than a numbered compilation whereas in the thirty sixth edition specimens are listed by their location in numbered glass cases, on the ceiling, or elsewhere. Of interest from the twenty third edition (Anonymous c. 1754: 9, 15) is “254 A Mango bird”, “256 A Cock and Hen Humming-Bird”, “262 Two Humming-Birds in a curious Nest”, “265 A Humming-Bird’s Nest”, and “456 A Mango-Birds-Nest”. This evidence alone would suggest that a “mango-bird” was not a hummingbird.

The thirty sixth edition of the catalogue is much more specific and “Glass-Case X” (Anonymous c. 1785: 7) included “6 The greater humming-bird, with a hook-bill. . . . 10 The beautiful long-tailed humming bird.” The latter is unquestionably the Jamaican *Trochilus polytmus*, and the former is almost certainly *Anthracothorax mango*, which Sloane (1725: 308), who may have donated the specimen, referred to as “The Largest or Blackest Humming Bird” and described as having the bill “round, black, crooked”. Although the catalogue goes on to say that there was still “70 The mango bird’s nest” near the ceiling (Anonymous c. 1785: 15), the “mango bird” itself is no longer mentioned. It is probably significant, however, that in “Glass-Case XIV” there was “2 A fine golden thrush from Bengal” (Anonymous c. 1785: 9).

THE TRUE MANGO-BIRD AND ALBIN’S MANGO-BIRD MIX-UP

Just what was meant by the name “mango-bird” as used in the catalogues of Don Saltero’s Coffee-House? This was not difficult to discover. Newton (1896: 534) informed us that “MANGO-BIRD, in Jamaica *Lampornis mango*, one of the Trochilidae (Humming-bird), but in India an Oriole, *Oriolus kundoo*.” The name “mango-bird” was long widely applied in India and adjacent areas not just to the Indian golden oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), but also to some of its congeners, owing to their frugivorous habits and appearance during the fruiting season of the mango tree (Jerdon 1863; Hume 1889; Oates 1889). These orioles make a hanging nest that in *O. kundoo* might easily attract the attention and interest of human observers for the inclusion of odd and extraneous objects such as bits of paper, rags, snake-skin, feathers and hair. The “fine golden thrush from Bengal” of the thirty sixth edition can hardly apply to anything other than an *Oriolus*. Albin (1734: 38) illustrated an *Oriolus* as “the yellow Starling from Bengall” based on a bird received from Joseph Dandridge.

Albin’s (1738: 45) text concerning Jamaican hummingbirds contains much that is dubious or erroneous. Although Albin often lifted major portions of his text on European birds from other authors, especially Willoughby (Ray 1678), there is no evidence that he took any information on Jamaican hummingbirds from the most authoritative source then available, which was Sloane (1725). Although Albin’s visit to Don Saltero’s was some eight years after James Salter died, Salter’s heirs probably retained information about the objects in their collections so that Albin’s writings on the hummingbirds may have been based partly on what he later recalled of conversations he had during his visit. Part seems to be pure fabrication. Albin claimed, for example, that he had been in Jamaica in 1701 and had observed both of the species he discussed. We know of no evidence from Albin’s ornithological writings or other sources that would corroborate his ever having been to Jamaica.² Had he ever seen the “Long-Tail-Humming Bird” he would have known that it was not the “least of its kind”, as he claimed, and also that the bill in life is red (as correctly

reported by Sloane) and not yellow as in dried specimens such as on view at Don Saltero's. Nor is the iris colour yellow as Albin described and which would have been unknowable from a mounted specimen with glass eyes. "Mango Bird" would certainly have been a name that Albin probably saw or heard at Salter's coffee-house, though he may or may not have appreciated that it applied to an Asian *Oriolus*. His use of the name for the Jamaican *Anthracothonax* was probably dredged up from gauzy recollections and interjected arbitrarily into his partially fictitious hummingbird accounts. There is no other known connection between the hummingbird and anything to do with mangos or any other word that sounds like "mango". Thus, the long use of "mango" to denote an entire genus of hummingbirds and its more recent use to designate a significant subgroup of the family Trochilidae, appears to have been based on a historical blunder that never had any etymological justification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to Leslie Overstreet and Daria Wingreen-Mason of the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution Libraries, for access to rare books and information and encouragement. We are also indebted to Professor Miles Ogborn, School of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London, for calling our attention to the Hall reference. For comments on the manuscript we thank Richard C. Banks and Frank Steinheimer.

NOTES

¹ The plates of "mangoes" were issued from 1856 to 1861 (Waterhouse 1885).

² Albin (1728: 27, plate 40) illustrated a "Banana Bird from Jamaica" from an individual said to have been brought by the first Duchess of Portland (1688–1737) from Jamaica. The bird depicted, as recognized by Audubon (1844: 367, plate 499) and others, is the troupial (*Icterus icterus*), a South American species widely kept as a cage bird and introduced to various West Indian islands. It may once have been naturalized in Jamaica (Scott 1893) but neither Scott (in 1891) nor Gosse (1847) encountered the bird and the evidence may eventually prove to rest only upon Albin. Albin also recounted that: "I have seen four or five of them set upon and kill a large Bird or Fowl, and when dead each one, according to his Place of Mastership, choose his Part, viz. the Heart, Brains, &c. keeping the Part which he makes choice of till he has satiated himself." The implication is, because this was supposed to be a Jamaican bird, that Albin saw this fabulously impossible scene in Jamaica, where the species certainly did not live in numbers in the wild in 1701 when Albin said he was there. The troupial is almost entirely frugivorous, with corresponding morphological adaptations. The idea of a gang of them killing a larger fowl and dividing up the offal according to rank is so ludicrous that Albin either made up the event from his own imagination or took it from some other author who was writing about a completely different species. In any case, this account provides absolutely no corroboration for Albin ever having been in Jamaica.

REFERENCES

- ALBIN, E., 1734 *A natural history of birds*. Volume 2. London.
- ALBIN, E., 1738 *A natural history of birds*. Volume 3. London.
- ALTICK, R. D., 1978 *The shows of London*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- ANONYMOUS, c. 1754 *A catalogue of the rarities, to be seen at Don Saltero's coffee-house in Chelsea*. Twenty third edition. London.
- ANONYMOUS, c. 1785 *A catalogue of the rarities, to be seen at Don Saltero's coffee-house in Chelsea*. Thirty sixth edition. London.
- AUDUBON, J. J., 1844 *The birds of America*. Octavo edition. Volume 7. New York.

- GOSSE, P. H., 1847 *The birds of Jamaica*. London.
- GOULD, J., 1861 *A monograph of the Trochilidae*. Volume 2. London.
- HALL, D. G., 1989 *In miserable slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica*. London.
- HUME, A. O., 1889 *The nests and eggs of Indian birds*. Second edition. London.
- JERDON, T. C., 1863 *The birds of India*. Volume 2 part 1. Calcutta.
- LINNAEUS, C., 1758 *Systema naturae*. Tenth edition. Stockholm
- MacGREGOR, A. (editor), 1994 *Sir Hans Sloane*. London.
- McGUIRE, J. A., WITT, C. C., ALTSCHULTER, D. L. and REMSEN, J. V. Jr., 2007 Phylogenetic systematics and biogeography of hummingbirds: Bayesian and maximum likelihood analyses of partitioned data and selection of appropriate partitioning strategy. *Systematic biology* **56**: 837–856.
- NEWTON, A., 1896 *A dictionary of birds*. London.
- OATES, E. W., 1889 Birds, volume 1 in BLANFORD, W. T. (editor), *The fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma*. London.
- OSBORNE, P., 2004 Albin, Eleazar (d. 1742?). *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. Oxford. (URL <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/279>, accessed 16 May 2013).
- POPENOE, W., 1920 *Manual of tropical and subtropical fruits*. New York.
- RAY, J., 1678 *The ornithology of Francis Willughby*. London.
- SCOTT, W. E. D., 1893. Observations on the birds of Jamaica West Indies. II. A. List of the birds recorded from the island with annotations. *Auk* **10**: 177–181.
- SLOANE, H., 1725 *A voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*. London.
- WATERHOUSE, F. H., 1885 *The dates of publication of some of the zoological works of the late John Gould*. London.
- WROTH, W. W. and KELL, P. E., 2004 Salter, James (d. c. 1728). *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. Oxford. (URL <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24569>, accessed 16 May 2013).

Received 12 February 2013. Accepted 23 April 2013.