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**Comment on the proposed suppression of all prior usages of generic and specific names of birds (Aves) by John Gould and others conventionally accepted as published in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (Case 3044; see BZN 54: 172-182)**

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The application of Schodde & Bock comes as a response to the paper of Bruce & McAllan (1990), who showed that numerous names of birds proposed by John Gould and other ornithologists in monographic works and in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London (PZS)* had appeared earlier in more popular periodicals such as *The Athenaeum*, *The Literary Gazette*, and *The Analyst* (for the sake of brevity I shall refer to these as the 'ancillary' publications, with no intent of impugning their significance to nomenclature). I oppose this application, first of all on the general principle that there should be some reasonable curb to further additions to the gigantic subsidiary literature of suppressed names and works already created by the Commission. Such suppressions should be undertaken only when there is a very real need — when there is truly a threat to communication and understanding in the zoological community. This is definitely not the case with almost all parts of the application of Schodde & Bock, to which I expand my objection on the following points.

1. The application must be viewed in the context of the acrimonious confrontations that have enveloped the nomenclature of Australian vertebrates in recent years, during the course of which Schodde vs. Bruce and McAllan have occupied bitterly opposing camps (e.g. see Olson, 1990). Although Bruce & McAllan (1990) have produced an important contribution to the history and bibliography of Australian ornithology, this is marred by their rather disingenuously making claims of priority for a few names that are certainly *nomina nuda* and a few others that are little better.

This is not true, however, for the majority of names they discussed. The application of Schodde & Bock is plainly reactionary in nature and attempts to suppress everything that Bruce & McAllan (1990) uncovered that bears on nomenclature, regardless of the actual effect on names currently in use. The result is a poorly researched broadside that is likely to create as many problems as it proposes to resolve.

2. In an attempt to prejudice a ruling in their favor, Schodde & Bock have characterized the descriptions in the ancillary publications as 'sketchy and often ambiguous accounts' (para. 3, ii), which is at best exaggeration and at worst egregious dissembly. Bruce & McAllan (1990) reproduced all of these descriptions verbatim so that they may be more readily evaluated. Of the 43 species descriptions that Schodde and Bock wish to have suppressed, I would assess 30 as ranging from spare, but undeniably adequate, to wonderfully detailed (e.g. *Casuarius bennetti*). No fewer than 13 in my estimation are extremely good.

3. In continuing their dissembling, Schodde & Bock (para. 3, iii) portray 'many of the names' as being open 'to interpretation as nomina nuda and argument as to whether they are available,' citing the examples of *Ptiloris victoriae*, *Excalfactoria minima*, and *Chrysococcyx minutillus*. The last two definitely are nomina nuda where they appear in the ancillary sources, as is also *Meleagris mexicana*, so these citations require no action by the Commission. Discounting the species of *Dinornis* attributed to Owen in the *Literary Gazette* of 1843, which present a separate set of problems, only six or seven of the specific names in contention (not 'many') might be disputed on grounds of equivocal descriptions, such as that of *Ptiloris victoriae* and those that essentially only repeat the specific name in English (e.g. *Odontophorus hyperythrus*, *Podiceps micropterus*, *Chordeiles pusillus*). As noted above, the rest constitute valid descriptions and must be evaluated on their merits.

4. Four of the generic and 39 of the specific citations from the ancillary literature proposed for suppression involve the same name, spelled the same way, by the same author, and used for the same taxon as those names currently in use. Thus they present no threat whatever to existing nomenclature and only require that the citation of the original description be changed. Suppressing the earlier publications actually increases the vulnerability of existing nomenclature to different competing names that may have been published between the first publication of the names in question and their subsequent appearance in publications that Schodde and Bock wish to conserve. In one case (*Anser serrirostris*), the lapse between first appearance in *The Literary Gazette* and subsequent publication in *PZS* was 19 years! Thus, when there is no difference in a name used in two or more publications, stability of nomenclature is actually enhanced by citing the earliest valid appearance of a name.

5. The extent to which names may have been cited in previous literature as dating from the ancillary publications has not received sufficient investigation by Schodde and Bock, who cite only two modern, highly derivative sources. It is certain that the ancillary publications have not always been overlooked. For example, Richmond (1992) discovered the publication of most of the names cited by Bruce & McAllan as dating from *The Athenaeum*. Although not published until the Richmond Index was made available on microfiche in 1992, Richmond corresponded widely with taxonomists with whom he doubtless shared his findings and who may in fact have cited various of the ancillary publications. Wetmore (1965, p. 322), for example, gives the

publication of *Odontophorus veraguensis* Gould in *The Athenaeum* precedence over that in *PZS*. Schodde & Bock note that the citation for *Balaeniceps rex* Gould is now accepted as of its appearance in *The Athenaeum*, and if that journal is of sufficient stature for so singular a bird as *Balaeniceps*, then why should it not be acceptable for others as well?

6. Although Wetmore (1968, p. 507) overlooked the appearance of the name *Aulacorhamphus caeruleogularis* Gould in *The Athenaeum* of 26 February 1853, he gives its publication in *The Zoologist* in April 1853 as the original citation for the species, rather than that in the *PZS* published 24 July 1854. Note that *Aulacorhamphus caeruleogularis* was also described as a 'new species' in *The Annals and Magazine of Natural History* in May 1855, although admittedly as a verbatim reprint of the description from *PZS*. So here we have four different publications containing what may be taken as the original description for the name *Aulacorhamphus caeruleogularis*. How does one decide which has precedence? Is this to be done by determining which of these serials is considered to be the least 'rare and inaccessible' (Schodde & Bock, para. 3, ii) in the 1990s, by the scientific prestige of a given journal in the 1850s, or should this determination in fact be made by the objective criterion of priority, which is supposed to be the cornerstone of the rules of zoological nomenclature?

7. The matter of the name cited above as dating from *The Zoologist* raises yet another issue, which is that Bruce and McAllan's investigations extended only to selected periodicals, whereas earlier citations than those cited for suppression by Schodde & Bock based on Bruce & McAllan certainly exist in other journals. Schodde & Bock (para. 8(1)(b)) propose to circumvent this problem by suppressing 'all uses of the names prior to the publication of the same names given' in their para. 8(2). The business of wholesale suppression of publications is bad enough, but I would particularly deplore its extension to works that have never been explicitly identified.

8. None of the authors involved has correctly resolved the name *Nyctidus pectoralis* published in *The Athenaeum* 18 November 1837, as all failed to note that Gould (1838, pl. xviii & text) shortly thereafter described a species *Nyctibius pectoralis* from northern Brazil. Thus Bruce & McAllan erred in considering the name in *The Athenaeum* to supplant the name now in use for the Haitian *Nyctibius*, as there was no connection in that publication between the drawing Gould exhibited of 'Nyctidus' and specimens that he also exhibited from Turkey and Haiti. Nothing about the name *Nyctidus pectoralis* in *The Athenaeum* requires formal suppression because the name is utterly unidentifiable at that point, the only information given being that its tarsus was 'scarcely a quarter of an inch long.' Had it not specifically been stated to be a bird, even that much would have to be surmised. *Nyctidus* is clearly only a misspelling, but even if it were identifiable it would simply be a junior synonym of *Nyctibius* Vieillot, 1816.

9. The application of Schodde & Bock adds to what is already a vexatious mess regarding certain names of moas (*Dinornis*) described by Owen. Bruce & McAllan (1990, p. 458) claim that the names *Dinornis giganteus*, *D. struthoides*, *D. didiformis*, and *D. otidiformis* should date from *The Literary Gazette* of 2 December 1843 rather than *PZS* March 1844. Neither they nor Schodde & Bock make any mention of the new name *D. dromaeoides*, which also appears in both publications, although any

necessary action concerning the first four species seemingly ought to apply to this one as well. Bruce & McAllan (1990, p. 458) note that the descriptions in *The Literary Gazette* 'although superficial, are no more so than the accounts given in *PZS*'. This considerably misrepresents the case, as in both publications the names are absolute or virtual nomina nuda. Richmond (1992) regarded all the names in *PZS* as nomina nuda. Archey & Allan (1954) likewise regarded *D. struthoides* to be a nomen nudum as of its appearance in *PZS*, although they mistakenly stated that the name *D. ingens* appeared in this publication also. Proper descriptions of these species first appeared in the *Transactions of the Zoological Society* (1844) rather than the *PZS*.

The only species with any claim of dating from either of the publications earlier than the *Transactions* is *Dinornis gigantea*, which was described in *PZS* as having a tibiotarsus 2 feet 11 inches long (2 feet 10 inches long in *The Literary Gazette*) which is perhaps sufficient characterization of the species. This is the only species of the five for which Brodkorb (1963, p. 217) gives *PZS* as the original citation, all the rest being attributed to the *Transactions*. All of the other species are characterized in *The Literary Gazette* and *PZS* solely by extrapolations of their height relative to each other and to other large birds. These are inferences based on data that are not presented and cannot be considered to be descriptions.

*Dinornis struthoides* and *D. otidiformis* have already been placed on the Official List, with the *Transactions* cited as place of publication (Opinion 229; Opinion 1874 [not 1876 as in Schodde & Bock]). The application of Schodde & Bock proposes to add *D. giganteus* and *D. didiformis* to the Official List but as of their appearance in *PZS*. This should not be allowed because at least the latter is unquestionably a nomen nudum at that point.

10. I cannot see that the use of *Didus nazarenus* by Bartlett, either in *The Literary Gazette* (1851) or *PZS* (1854), is anything more than the identification of some bones supposedly from the island of Rodriguez with the name *Didus nazarenus* Gmelin, 1788, based on descriptions from an early Mascarene voyage. I certainly oppose placing the nonexistent name *Didus nazarenus* Bartlett, 1854 on an Official List over *Didus nazarenus* Gmelin, 1788, which latter name Schodde & Bock never mention or consider, although Bruce & McAllan at least refer to it.

11. In attempting to suppress *Somateria v-nigrum* G.R. Gray as of its appearance 1 December 1855 in *The Athenaeum*, Schodde & Bock fail to make any disposition of the earlier publication of this name for the same taxon by Bonaparte 22 October 1855 in a serial (*Comptes Rendus*) that certainly cannot be considered 'rare and inaccessible,' if that were really a consideration. The existence of Bonaparte's name was pointed out by Bruce & McAllan and was also known to Richmond (1992). That a name published by such a well-known author in such a prominent journal has remained overlooked is curious, but it is the earliest usage and involves no threat to current nomenclature.

12. Schodde & Bock engage in hyperbole in suggesting that the acceptance of names from the ancillary publications would 'displace a number of names in current use.' Of course, they do not specify the 'number', but it is actually very few. Out of the 54 suppressions they seek, 43 involve no change in existing nomenclature. Another six or so arise from obvious typographical errors that may be corrected (*Dendrochetia, ealconeri*), or easily comprehended variants in spelling that can be adopted without confusion, viz. *thibetanus* vs. *tibetanus*, *wallacei* vs. *wallacii*, *Aplornis*

vs. *Aplonis*, *Semeioptera* vs. *Semioptera*). The last two changes can be embraced on etymological grounds as well.

This leaves only two instances, out of this great farrago of potentially suppressed names, where existing nomenclature might change significantly, and one of these changes is not without its advantages.

Among Gould's many contributions to Australian ornithology was the description of the systematically important Noisy Scrub-bird. The first notice of this was in *The Athenaeum* for 27 January 1844 under the name *Atricha clamosa*. In Gould's *Birds of Australia* (1 March 1844) this species was again named as new, but as *Atrichia clamosa*, under which name it was recognized for 41 years, except for the mention by Sladen (1845), who used the first spelling, *Atricha*. When *Atrichia* Gould 1844 was found to be preoccupied by an insect, the name *Atrichornis* Stejneger, 1885 was substituted, and this still has currency. *Atricha*, however, is not preoccupied, and the publication of the name *Atricha clamosa* in *The Athenaeum* was prominently acknowledged nearly fifty years ago by Whitley (1938). It is curious that Bruce & McAllan do not cite Whitley, whereas Schodde & Bock do, although in an ambiguous manner not directly linked to the use of *Atricha*. That no one took up the use of *Atricha* from 1938 onward is inexplicable given that prominent authors were aware of it but ignored it while accepting names published in much more ephemeral sources (Bruce & McAllan, 1990, p. 459). *Atricha*, *Atrichia* and *Atrichornis* are all recognizably based on the same root and I do not consider that it would be overly confusing to revert to the earliest usage, thus bringing the attribution of the genus back to Gould where it rightly belongs. Why continue with a substitute name by a later author that must always be referred back to a preoccupied name, when an earlier and very similar name by the original author that is not preoccupied is available?

The only serious nomenclatural issue raised in the entire Bruce & McAllan paper is the ephemeral earlier use by Gould of the generic name *Pedionomus* for an utterly different bird from that to which it has been applied in all subsequent literature. Now this is an instance where suppression would be completely justified and here it is worth noting that Bruce & McAllan also supported suppression of 'the original publication of *Pedionomus* and *P. ocellatus* in *The Athenaeum*'. If these authors were unwilling to revive the earlier use of *Pedionomus*, then it seems unlikely that anyone else would, so the actual threat to stability of established nomenclature does not seem great. Nevertheless, if Schodde and Bock wish to go through the formality of specifically suppressing this first use of *Pedionomus*, there could be no reasonable grounds for opposition.

The rest of the application of Schodde & Bock, however, is too flawed, frivolous, expansive, and unnecessary to merit approval. Because it is so poorly researched and would have such undesirable effects as placing nomina nuda and nonexistent usages on the Official Lists, possibly along with other problems as yet unforeseen, it should be rejected in toto.

#### Additional references

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