

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Thirty-six years a synonym: the nomenclatural tale of the Pilbara blue-tailed skink, *Lerista chalybura* Storr, 1985 (Squamata: Scincidae)

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The Australian endemic skink genus *Lerista* was first proposed by Bell (1833), concurrent with the description of *Lerista lineata*, the earliest referred species of the genus. The genus is now represented by 104 taxa (comprising 97 species with 10 subspecies), the most recent of which was described by Amey et al. (2019) (*L. anyara*), and is second only to *Ctenotus* (with 116 taxa, comprising 107 species with 16 subspecies) in diversity. The highest diversity of *Lerista* occurs in Western Australia, with 74 taxa (68 species and 9 subspecies). This diversity is largely attributed to the taxonomic works of the late Glen Milton Storr (1921–1990), who, during his time as Curator of Ornithology and Herpetology at the Western Australian Museum (WAM), described a total of 42 currently recognised WA species ($n = 36$) and subspecies ($n = 6$) in published works between 1971 and posthumously to 1991.

In a revision of the *Lerista frosti* species complex in *Records of the Western Australian Museum*, Storr (1985) described a new uniquely coloured species from the Pilbara region of Western Australia, proposing the name *Lerista chalybura* for the population. The accompanying diagnosis for the species was entailed ‘A small slender *Lerista* with four fingers, four toes, movable eyelids, large ear aperture (about twice as large as nostril), comparatively long foreleg (more than 6 mm long in adults and subadults), greyish or bluish tail, and narrow, inferiorly ill-defined, dark upper lateral stripe’. The new species was described from 22 specimens, including the holotype (WAM R73934; Figure 1), 15 paratypes (R37078, R37087, R69727–29, R88824–32, R12387 and R73931–33 from WAM, R12594 from the South Australian Museum [SAMA] and R100608 from the Australian Museum [AMS]) and WAM R70741, which was excluded from the type series due to inconsistent variation with others in the type series. This specimen was later considered to represent another undescribed species, and Storr (1990) designated it as the holotype in the

description of *Lerista concolor* Storr, 1990 (now *Lerista quadrivincula* Shea, 1991, due to homonymy of the original name).

In their controversial self-published works printed the same year, Richard Wells and Ross Wellington proposed the name *Lerista zietzi* for the same population (Wells and Wellington 1985). The diagnosis presented by Wells and Wellington (1985) for *L. zietzi* essentially summarises features of three specimens detailed by Storr (1971) under geographic variation for *L. frosti*, to which the species was assigned. The two proposed new taxa are synonymous, particularly as the descriptions by Storr (1985) and Wells and Wellington (1985) share the same diagnostic information and some type material: the holotype of *L. zietzi* (WAM R37078; Figure 2), the only specimen mentioned by Wells and Wellington, is also a paratype for *L. chalybura*.

In accordance with Article 23 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (the Code; International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature [ICZN] 1999), the valid name of a taxon is the oldest available name applied to it. The printed publication date for volume 12, issue 3 of the *Records of the Western Australian Museum* containing Storr (1985), is stated as ‘30 August 1985’. The *Australian Journal of Herpetology* supplementary series number 1 containing Wells and Wellington (1985) states on the front cover ‘Published 1 March, 1985’. Therefore based on the printed publication dates of the journal issues in which Storr (1985) and Wells and Wellington (1985) occurred, the Wells and Wellington name *Lerista zietzi* takes precedence over Storr’s *Lerista chalybura*, rendering *L. chalybura* a junior synonym of *L. zietzi*. While the Western Australian state government published *Records of the Western Australian Museum* printed publication dates are considered accurate, there has been uncertainty regarding the printed dates for the self-published *Australian Journal of Herpetology* and the supplementary series (Shea and Sadlier 1999; Aplin and Smith 2001).



FIGURE 1 Holotype of *Lerista chalybura* Storr, 1985 (WAM R73934).



FIGURE 2 Holotype of *Lerista zietzi* Wells and Wellington, 1985 (WAM R37078)

Shea and Sadlier (1999) noted that they were unable to identify a copy of Wells and Wellington (1985) having been received prior to 19 September 1985, post-dating Storr (1985). As a result, they maintained the use of *L. chalybura* as the senior synonym, until the publication dates were more definitely assessed. Conversely, Aplin and Smith (2001) maintained the use of *L. zietzi*, following the nominal publication dates until Wells and Wellington (1985) were verified. Subsequently, despite *L. zietzi* generally receiving common usage, there has been inconsistent use of the two names and treatment of synonymy in publications to date. From 1985 to date (excluding publication of description), the name *L. zietzi* has been used a total of 24 times (Storr et al. 1999; Aplin and Smith 2001; Wilson and Swan 2003a,b; Amey et al. 2005; Clayton et al. 2006; Couper et al. 2006; Skinner 2007; Skinner et al. 2008; Wilson and Swan 2008; Australian Biological Resources Study 2009; Skinner and Lee 2009; Wilson and Swan 2009; Skinner 2010; Wilson and Swan 2010; Doughty et al. 2011; Wells 2012; Wilson and Swan 2013; Cogger 2014a b; Wilson and Swan 2017; Cogger 2018; Wilson and Swan 2021; Macdonald 2022) compared to only 18 times for *L. chalybura* (Wilson and Knowles 1988; Storr 1990; Cogger 1992a,b; Ehmann 1992; Hutchinson 1993; Cogger 1994, 1996; Stanger et al. 1998; Shea and Sadlier 1999; Cogger 2000a,b; Meiri 2008; Australian Biological Resources Study 2010; Wilson et al. 2017; Chapple et al. 2019; Australian Society of Herpetologists Taxonomic Committee 2022; Uetz et al. 2022).

In a 2009 review of the scincid genera *Eulamprus* and *Glaphyromorphus*, conforming with Recommendation 21F of the Code (ICZN 1999), on 31 occasions when referencing Wells and Wellington (1985), Wells (2009) stated ‘March 1985 on title page, but not published until September, 1985’, confirming suspicions that the publication date on the cover was erroneous, whether due to a delay in publication or fabrication. Despite Wells (2009) stating the actual publication date, and technically rendering *L. zietzi* a junior synonym of *L. chalybura*, the inconsistent use of the two names has continued in subsequent publications, with 11 uses of *zietzi* (Skinner 2010; Wilson and Swan 2010; Doughty et al. 2011; Wells 2012; Wilson and Swan 2013; Cogger 2014a,b; Wilson and Swan 2017; Cogger 2018; Wilson and Swan 2021; Macdonald 2022) and five uses of *chalybura* (Australian Biological Resources Study 2010; Wilson et al. 2017; Chapple et al. 2019; Australian Society of Herpetologists Taxonomic Committee 2022; Uetz et al. 2022). This oversight by subsequent authors is presumably attributed to either consideration that the name was in relatively common usage, as to not disrupt widespread acceptance; unawareness of the publication in which Wells (2009) was published, given the journal was self-published and not widely disseminated; or a simple disregard of the author and/or the journal. The latter aligning with an attempted suppression of Wells’ nomenclatural works, including Wells and Wellington

(1985), by the broader herpetological community (Australian Society of Herpetologists 1987; ICZN 1991), particularly anything published after 2000, following Kaiser et al. (2013) who recommended that anything post-2000 not be treated as published nomenclatural works and be ignored. Although the nomenclatural actions of Wells (2009) pertaining to new names are not accepted following Kaiser et al. (2013), the information concerning the publication date of Wells and Wellington (1985) contained within it is published and not affected by either the Code or Kaiser et al. (2013), therefore applicable to the resolution of the correct publication date for *L. zietzi*.

Given that all type material assigned to *L. chalybura* and *L. zietzi*, particularly holotypes, share all morphological characteristics and in the absence of any evidence to suggest the holotype specimens represent different taxon, the two are considered to represent the same taxon. In conformance with the Principle of Priority (Article 23), based on the corrected publication date of September 1985 for Wells and Wellington (1985), it post-dates the Storr’s 20 August 1985 published date, therefore *L. chalybura* is the earlier available name for the taxon. Despite more frequent use of *L. zietzi* since 1985 (24 v 18), maintenance of the junior synonym by way of prevailing usage under Article 23.9.1 of the Code (ICZN 1999) does not apply to the treatment of *L. zietzi* and *L. chalybura*. We hereby formally treat *Lerista zietzi* Wells and Wellington, 1985 as a junior synonym of *Lerista chalybura* Storr, 1985.

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