

Use versus priority in zoological nomenclature: a contribution to the discussion

(see BZN 44: 79–85; 45: 45–46, 47, 144, 145)

R. V. Melville

93 Lock Road, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7LL, U.K.

The age-old conflict between usage and priority in zoological nomenclature has been conducted as a series of assaults on the Principle of Priority by the proponents of usage. Yet priority still stands as the central first principle in our Code and it is hard to see what can replace it that will be as easily understood and as equitable. Some landmarks in this struggle stand out clearly: the plenary powers resolution of 1913, which empowered the Commission to set aside the Principle of Priority in individual cases; the repeated but doomed attempts to draft satisfactory limitation of the Principle, culminating in the Monaco (1972) redrafting of Article 23b (which had rejected as *nomina oblita* names unused for 50 years) and the present text of that provision and Article 79c; and now Cornelius's proposal (BZN 44: 79–85) for Protected Works. This is a bold and wide-reaching proposal and deserves careful consideration.

Key (1988; BZN 45: 45–46) has pointed out the delay inherent in the process of incorporating a provision on Protected Works into the Code and has drawn attention to the positive elements in Article 79 that facilitate conservation without the associated suppression of one or more senior names. This is a helpful suggestion and I hope it will be practically tested without delay. If a list of names to be directly conserved was published, the extent of agreement or disagreement on its contents would quickly appear. The Commission would have to lay down the criteria to be satisfied by any name on such a list; each would have to be accompanied by its original reference and by a statement of its name-bearing type and how this was fixed, with any relevant references.

My own experience with works that might well be thought to qualify for protection gives me some misgivings. I can think of two in the Echinoidea: *Essai de nomenclature raisonnée des Echinides* by Lambert & Thiéry (1909–1924); and Th. Mortensen's splendid *Monograph of the Echinoidea* (1928–1951). Lambert & Thiéry is a very useful compendium of all echinoid names published to that date and has a very complete bibliography, but the one thing that is not reasoned about it is its nomenclature, especially in the family group. Mortensen, although a fierce defender of usage, thought fit to use a number of pre-Linnaean generic names from polynominal works that had not been used as valid names for many decades (except by an occasional eccentric French author). Thus, even if Mortensen was proposed for protection, much detailed work would need to be done to cull such weeds from it.

The example of L. B. Holthuis shows that nomenclatural probity need not necessarily hinder an active career as a taxonomist. Why can this example not be followed, especially by workers in major museums with access to major libraries?

Lastly, I have misgivings as to durability of Protected Works for taxonomic relevance. Olson (1987) has analysed 276 name changes in North American birds between 1957 and 1983. Of these, 259 were made for systematic reasons and only 17 for nomenclatural reasons. Of the latter, three arose from secondary homonymies arising from generic mergers (i.e. from taxonomic actions) and only two arose directly from the application of the Principle of Priority. Olson points out that in North American birds — a group

considered to be especially thoroughly known and to have an exceptionally stable nomenclature — the nomenclature of 50 years ago would be all but impenetrable now to any but a specialist.

In spite of my misgivings, I hope that a serious test case for a Protected Work will be prepared. I suspect that the labour of preparing it may be greater, and the durability of its protection less, than its promoters would hope.

References

- Cornelius, P. F. S.** 1987. Use versus priority in zoological nomenclature: a solution to an old problem. *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*, **44**: 79–85.
- Key, K. H. L.** 1988. Use versus priority: comments on a paper by P. F. S. Cornelius, with alternative proposals for the conservation of well-known names. *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*, **45**: 45–46.
- Lambert, J. & Thiéry, P.** 1909–1924. *Essai de nomenclature raisonnée des Echinides*. 607 pp., 13 pl. Ferrière, Chaumont.
- Mortensen, T.** 1928–1951. *A Monograph of the Echinoidea*. Vols. 1–5. Reitzel, Copenhagen.
- Olson, S.** 1987. On the extent and source of instability in avian nomenclature as exemplified by North American birds. *Auk*, **104**: 538–542.

Comment on the proposed conservation of *Harmothoe imbricata* (Linnaeus, 1767) and *Pholoe minuta* (Fabricius, 1780) (Annelida, Polychaeta)
(Case 2452; see BZN 46: 22–24)

Marion H. Pettibone

National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
20560, U.S.A.

Chambers and Heppell have made a very good case for conserving the polychaete names *Harmothoe imbricata* (Linnaeus, 1767) and *Pholoe minuta* (Fabricius, 1780). Both names have been widely used and it would cause great confusion if they were to be replaced.



Melville, R. V. 1989. "Use Versus Priority In Zoological Nomenclature: A Contribution To The Discussion." *The Bulletin of zoological nomenclature* 46, 185–186. <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.528>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/44487>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.528>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/528>

Holding Institution

Natural History Museum Library, London

Sponsored by

Natural History Museum Library, London

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.