

## Book Reviews - Recensioni

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**Reedman R., 2016.** Lapwings, Loons and Lousy Jacks. The how and why of Bird Names. Pelagic Publ., Exeter, UK. 292 pp., many b/w photos. € 19,99 (<http://www.pelagicpublishing.com/ornithology/>)

This book is the result of a very remarkable passion for birds, travels and language of Ray Reedman, retired Senior Master of a successful independent school, teacher in courses on ornithology and a world traveller in search of birds. As the same author writes, this book would have not seen the light of day if it was not for his wife, companion and support for almost sixty years.

In the past, other authors approached this subject; among them the Italian Moltoni E. (1946. L'etimologia ed il significato dei nomi volgari e scientifici degli uccelli italiani. Riv. Ital. Orn., Milano, 16: 33- 50; 69-92; 133-162), Gotch A.F. (1981. Birds. Their Latin names explained. Blandford Press), Jobling J.A. (1991. A Dictionary of scientific Bird names. Oxford Univ. Press), Lederer R. & Burr C. (2014. Latin for Birdwatchers. Quid Publ.). What separates this book from its predecessors? Reedman focuses mainly on the dialectic of the etymology reconstruction, both of the English and Latin names. Going through the explanations given by the author is fascinating to say the least and demonstrates his high historical and literature experience. This book is written in an easy and very attractive manner.

The current scientific names follow the universal language of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), who established an universal language, a system by which all organisms may be classified by scientists; before him the nomenclature situation was chaotic.

Handbooks of birds of North America have different names for what appears to be same birds. The more Ray Reedman had to look-up the American, English and scientific names, the more the topic fascinated him. Later, visits to Australia and Trinidad brought him new experiences

in other English-speaking cultures, where the names had their own local colour, and his fascination grew. There are extraordinary differences in the names of the same birds on the two sides of the Atlantic. The English name Diver (Gaviidae) is Loon for the Americans; the word loon travelled from Britain to America with the settlers, a Northern and East Anglian term which may have had its roots in the Old Norse *lómr*, the transition to loon may have been helped by the Latin roots *lunatic* (= suffering from moon-madness). Thus Great Northern Diver and Great Northern Loon are the same birds, named by British and Americans respectively. Names change over time; try to find Tanganyika or Zaire in a modern atlas, it is as difficult to find them as to find a Pewit or a Green Plover in a modern field guide on birds!

Reedman, like many ornithologists, uses the Collins Field Guide; as result of taxonomic splitting of bird names, between the first and the second editions of this guide the entire non-passerine section was realigned with the latest scientific findings, and 'new' species appeared. Names evolution is part of the history and evolution of ornithology.

I would like to start with the name *Avocetta*, that of our journal. It comes from a French form, *avocette*, which is derived from a Venetian word *avosetta* of unknown origin. It was introduced by Aldrovandi in 1603 and adopted by Linnaeus in 1758. There are other names born from Italian vernacular terms. The specific name of the Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* is of Italian Genoese origin and refers to a species which keeps company with cattle, from the Latin *bos*. It seems quite evident that the reference to cattle for this warbler is erroneous. The specific name of the Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* and that of the Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* take from the Italian verb 'zirlare' (to chirp). The Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* has a name which compares the bright crimson plumage of the male to the robe of the Roman Catholic dignitary. The name of

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the Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* is derived from the Italian name *Totano* for this group of species.

The reference to the bird sounds is frequent. The specific name of the Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* comes from Latin *collybista*, which means ‘money changer’; it was coined by Vieillot in 1817 to translate the Normandy ‘compteur d’argent’. It is recalling the repetitive song of the bird as the sound of chinking coins. Cetti’s Warbler *Cettia cetti* is named after Francesco Cetti (1726-1778); it seems that when it is singing the bird shouts his name: ‘cetti... cetti, cetti, cetti’.

Like in the case of the Cetti’s Warbler, scientific names may be the Latinate form of a distinguished scientist, explorer or friend. Barolo’s Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* commemorates the Italian philanthropist Marchese Carlo di Barolo (1782-1838), whose name also lives in the wines from his estates. Scopoli’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* is named after Giovanni Antonio Scopoli (1723-1788). The Australian Latham Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii* has a Latin name devoted to the English explorer and collector in Tasmania Charles Browne Hardwicke (1788-1851), and an English name dedicated to John Latham (1740-1837), co-founder of the Linnean Society, ‘grandfather’ of Australian ornithology, who made the first description of many species from the Cook expeditions, but failed to assign scientific names to many, including the above cited snipe. However, there are other birds whose etymology of Latin names commemorate Latham (the Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*, the Glossy Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami* and the Australian Brushturkey *Alectura lathami*). The Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* was named by Brehm after Prince Heinrich Willhelm Adalbert of Prussia (1811-1873).

The origin of names has depended much on the fantasy of ornithologists; for example, in 1822 Heinrich Boie, assistant to Temminck at Leiden, highlighted the difference between House Martin and Barn Swallow and coined an anagram of the Greek name of the swallow *Chelidon*, that is *Delichon*. The specific name of the Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* is derived from the fact that females winter further south than males; Linnaeus, aware of this winter celibacy, wrote ‘*femina sola versus austrum migrat*’.

The adjective *europaeus* is frequent in Latin bird names; for example: European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*. It is odd to read the trinomial typical subspecies *Sitta europaea europaea*, but it is also for some eastern subspecies, like the eccentric *Sitta europaea asiatica* or *Sitta europaea sinensis*. Many times the Author makes reference to Classical Legends and stories that so frequently occur in the scientific nomenclature. Mythological names are frequent among

birds. Atthis was a resplendent son of a Gange river-nymph in Greek mythology; because a pair of Little Owl moved into the Temple of Athena to breed, the bird was named after the goddess Athena herself. The Chukar *Alectoris chukar* is named after the Hindi word *chukor*. The source of the name *Diomedea*, created by Linnaeus, from which is derived the family Diomedeidae, is an ancient legend which told that the death of King Diomedes did so upset his companions that they all were transformed into seabirds eternally crying for their departed friend. A single patch of colour on the forehead accounts for the *Cyclopsitta*, *Cyclops* being the one-eyed monster of the ancient Greeks. The name of the bird of paradise Trumpet Manucode has its roots in the Malay name *manuk dewata*, which was latinized to *manucodia*. As Reedman highlights, the ‘trumpet’ element of the English name recalls the extraordinary coiled windpipe, responsible for the bird’s resonating call. The generic name of the Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* was also created by Boie, who related it to an Athenian tribe, whose name was derived from that of Cecrops, the city’s founder, a mythical half-dragon and half-fish. The specific name was coined by the Finnish-Swede Erik Laxmann, who in 1769 obtained a specimen from the Russian region of Dauria, probably by accident. Reedman informs us that when in 1825 Temminck described the Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* mistakenly believed that the word *biarmicus*, created by Linnaeus for the Bearded Tit, referred to the two moustachial stripes, but Linnaeus actually referred it to Biarmia, a Russian region adjacent to the White Sea; thus, it seems that also Linnaeus was misleading when described the Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*!

Many names are of Greek or Latin origin; for example the Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* is derived from the Greek name *khenalopex*, which in turn shares *khen* (goose) and *alopex* (fox). The Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* records the importance of the down: it is composed of the Greek *soma*, *somatos* (body) and *erion* (wool) plus the Latin very soft! The name Puffin *Fratercula arctica* was created to describe the fat chicks of the Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, and was later confused with the name of the small auk, remaining attached to it. *Hydrobates* is of Greek origin meaning ‘water walker’. As for the strange Greek name *Ephippiorhynchus* for some storks, we have Temminck to thank for that: *ephippio* means ‘saddle’ and *rhynchos* ‘bill’. Latin name *gryphus* refers to a legendary beast that the Greeks believed to be the guardian of Scythian gold. According to Scopoli, *Charadrius dubius* is easily confused with the larger *C. hiaticula*, ‘cleft dweller’. A number of Australian birds have the word *novaehollandiae* in their scientific name; in the seventeenth century the

Dutch explorer Abel Tasman named that area New Holland. The name Australia indeed was coined later.

The origin of English names is also interesting. For example, the Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* commemorates the town in Kent where the collector of the specimen sent Latham (author of the species name) lived. A few years later, the same collector sent Latham a plover that Latham himself christened Kentish Plover to acknowledge its source; however, the species had already been named by Linnaeus *Charadrius alexandrinus* after the city of Alexandria in Egypt.

Nesting Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* and their young defend themselves with a jet of regurgitated smelly oil; this unattractive behaviour led the Viking colonizers of St. Kilda to name it with the form still used, meaning 'foul gull'; Latin *glacialis* means 'of the frozen North', but actually this bird is now colonizing more southern sites. The word Shearwater is derived from the behaviour of these pelagic birds that are shearing the water, their wing-tips appearing to cut the crest of waves. The name Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* originated in Turkey and means 'wind-chaser'. The story of the name 'flamingo' begins with rosy-cheeked, blond, medieval Flemish sailors (Flemings), traders among the swallow-skinned inhabitants of Lisbon. Locally the nickname flamingo born for the pink birds.

The Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* once had many regional names. Interestingly, the author, writing about this

bird (a very nice image by Martina Nacházelová is in the front cover of the book) reports that with the advent of intensive agriculture, the disappearance of grassland and the use of chemicals, the breeding population of this species in Britain has declined so dramatically in a few generations that we may be surprised by the numerous names Lapwing was given in the past. The name is rooted in Old English *loepiwinca*, in turn derived in the linking of two older Germanic words, both meaning 'crested bird'.

Finally, the Author treats specifically the names of the birds of Australia and Trinidad; concerning the latter he writes that they represent a much wider range of language and cultures than those of either North America or Australia. The book concludes with an appendix on the legends behind the names.

The work of Reedman was very extensive, he explored the confusions and contradictions in the naming of birds, involving about 10,000 species, but also the ongoing discoveries of ornithologists, the fashions of an age, the passions and opinions of individuals that were causes and effects of so many names. To read nearly 300 pages of this book is very easy and the contents show the very deep research carried out by the author in consulting many bibliographic sources, certainly more than those reported in the book, and present in his library. This very nice book deserves to be present in the library of the inquisitive scientist.

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