South American Classification Committee

Guidelines for English names

Note: These guidelines were slightly modified from those used by the North American Classification Committee and were approved through the SACC proposal system. Sections are open to change through additional proposals.

A. Principles and Procedures

A1. Stability of English names. The SACC recognizes that there are substantial benefits to nomenclatural stability and that long-established English names should only be changed after careful deliberation and for good cause. As detailed in AOU (1983), SACC policy is to "retain well established names for well-known and widely distributed species, even if the group name or a modifier is not precisely accurate, universally appropriate, or descriptively the best possible." The SACC has long interpreted this policy as a caution against the ever-present temptation to 'improve' well-established English names, and this remains an important principle. In practice, this means that proposals to the SACC advocating a change to a long-established English name must present a strongly compelling, well-researched, and balanced rationale.

A2. Name change procedures. The SACC process of considering an English name change is the same as for other nomenclatural topics. SACC deliberations are proposal-based, and the committee welcomes proposals from interested members of the professional and non-professional ornithological communities. Proposals from previous years, which may be useful as models, are posted online. Proposals to change an established English name require a 2/3 vote in favor for passage, following the committee's long-standing policy for all proposals.

B. General Rules for Names

B1. Orthography. English names of birds are capitalized in keeping with standard ornithological practice. As noted by Parkes (1978), capitalization also prevents ambiguity between a species name and a description in such cases as “gray flycatcher” or “solitary sandpiper”. Diacritical marks are not used in most English names. With respect to the use of hyphens, the committee follows Parkes (1978).

B2. Uniqueness. The English name of every species (and of named groups within species) should be unique both within the SACC region and, with occasional exceptions, globally.

B3. Length of names. Names may consist of a single word or more than one word. However, modifiers must be used for single word or group names that apply to more than one species. Thus, Gray Catbird is used for Dumetella carolinensis rather than Catbird because there are other species of catbird (e.g., the closely related Black Catbird (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*) and eleven distantly related species of catbirds in the family Ptilonorhynchidae).

B4. Eponyms. Eponyms, names that incorporate the name of an individual historical person, add an apostrophe “s” ending (e.g., Darwin’s Tinamou, Snethlage’s Tody-Tyrant). Eponyms already ending in “s” also add an apostrophe “s” (e.g., James’s Flamingo).

B5. Geographical Names. Names based on geography may use either the adjectival (e.g., Ecuadorian Ground-Dove) or noun (e.g., Galapagos Dove) form of a name, but names should be used consistently for each geographical entity.

B6. Species marginally distributed in South America. Names generally accepted by global or regional authorities are typically used for species that occur in our area as vagrants, introduced species, or species of otherwise marginal distribution.

C. New and modified names based on changes to classification

C1. Typical species splits. In the case of true phylogenetic daughter species formerly treated as a single parental species, the usual policy is to create new names for each daughter species. For example, the split of Blue-crowned Manakin resulted in new names for each of the daughter species (Velvety and Blue-capped) rather than retention of Blue-crowned for one of the daughters. This practice is designed to prevent confusion in the literature as to what taxonomic entity the parental name (e.g., Blue-crowned Manakin) references. Note that this differs from the procedure used for scientific names, which

mandates (via ICZN) that the name of the nominate form remain unchanged. In support of the principle of stability, the choice of new names strongly considers existing names for the daughter species in widely used older literature (e.g., Ridgway and Friedmann 1901-1946, Cory-Hellmayr-Conover 1918-1949) as well as any names proposed for the new species in publications supporting the change in species limits.

C2. Exceptions (to typical species splits)– Strong association of names with particular daughter species often provide exceptions to the above policy, particularly in South America, where elevation of peripheral isolates to species rank happens frequently. In these situations, a change to the English name of one daughter species would cause much more disruption than a change to that of the other daughter species. In these cases, the potential confusion of retaining the parental name for the daughter species strongly associated with the name is weighed against the potential disruption of changing the name. Overall, the goal is to maximize stability and minimize disruption to the extent possible. The committee uses various factors to assess potential differential impact, such as major differences in range size, differences in usage in the scientific and popular literature, and relative appropriateness of a name. The Committee recognizes that such judgments are subjective and that borderline cases will inevitably occur.

C2.1 Relative range size. In many cases, relative range size is an excellent proxy for the differential effect of a name change. When one or more new daughter species are essentially peripheral isolates or have similarly small ranges compared to the other daughter species, then the parental name is often retained for the widespread, familiar daughter species to maintain stability. For example, the English name Red-winged Tinamou was retained for the widespread species *Rhynchotus rufescens* when the Andean foothill subspecies *R. r. maculirostris* was elevated to species rank, and a novel English name (Huayco Tinamou) was adopted only for the daughter species *R. maculirostris*.

C.2.2. Differential usage. In some cases, a name is much more associated with one daughter species regardless of relative range size. For example, the name Russet Antshrike has been consistently associated with birds of Middle America and northwestern South America for over a century, whereas the rare taxon (*rufescens*) of the

foothills of the eastern Andes of Peru and Bolivia is almost unknown in the literature. In this case, despite the fairly extensive range of the southern daughter species (*Thamnistes rufescens*), the parental name Russet Antshrike was retained for northern group of subspecies (*Thamnistes anabatinus* group) when the species was split into two, with the name Rufescent Antshrike to the southern daughter.

C2.3. Relative appropriateness. In some cases, a parental name is much more appropriate for one of the daughter species. In such cases, especially when no truly appropriate substitute name can be found, a parental name can be retained for that daughter.

C3. Other species splits. In the case of a change in species limits due to incorrect previous assessment of relationships, then the parental English name may be retained for the appropriate species, especially if no other suitable name is available. This differs from C2.1 above in that the changes do not involve true parent-daughter splits in the phylogenetic sense but rather a correction of previous taxonomy. For example, when Galapagos Shearwater was split from Audubon's Shearwater, the name Audubon's was not changed because new data revealed that Galapagos was not its sister and should never have been considered conspecific with Audubon's in the first place; therefore, the original classification, with both species treated as separate species with their original separate names, was restored.

C4. Species lumps. The committee occasionally merges two or more species into a single species. Guidelines for English names that result from lumps generally mirror those for species splits, in that a new name is generally preferred unless the exceptions for relative range size or appropriateness (as above in C2) apply. In practice, many lumps involve species with a great disparity in geographical range, so that in many cases the name for the more widespread former species is retained for the merged species. In a case in which the lump represents a return to species limits recognized prior to a split (i.e., in a reversal of a split), then the original name for the pre-split species is again adopted (in some cases this is the name of one of the former daughter species).

C5. Reallocation of taxa at higher taxonomic levels. In the case of reallocation of taxa at the family or genus level due to new

phylogenetic data, the Committee may occasionally change the group name of a species to reflect more accurately its phylogenetic relationships. A classic example is the change of the English name of the species formerly known as Upland Plover to Upland Sandpiper (to restrict the group name "plover" to the Charadriidae). Such changes are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with assessment of the cost of loss of stability versus the benefit of increasing phylogenetic information in the name. Note that many English group names do not have phylogenetic significance even at the family level (e.g. flycatcher, warbler, finch, sparrow, tanager, grosbeak, and bunting) and are best treated as morphotypes. Thus, changes to long-standing names of this type (e.g., *Habia* tanagers) to correspond to changes in family or genus allocation generally require special circumstances. Again, the Committee recognizes that the inevitable subjectivity in these situations will create borderline situations.

D. Special Considerations

D1. Eponyms. At present, 149 English names of SACC bird species are eponyms. The SACC recognizes that some eponyms refer to individuals or cultures who held beliefs or engaged in actions that would be considered offensive or unethical by present-day standards. These situations create a need for criteria to evaluate whether a long-established eponym is sufficiently harmful by association to warrant its change. The SACC has adopted the following guidelines:

D1.1. Ethical standards. The SACC recognizes that many individuals for whom birds are named were products of their times and cultures, and that this creates a gradient of disconnection between their actions and beliefs and our present-day mores. By itself, affiliation with a now-discredited historical movement or group is likely not sufficient for the SACC to change a long-established eponym. In contrast, the active engagement of the eponymic namesake in reprehensible events could serve as grounds for changing even long-established eponyms, especially if these actions were associated with the individual's ornithological career. The SACC recognizes that opinions will often differ on how best to handle such situations, and the Committee strives to strike a balance that recognizes the principle of nomenclatural stability while respecting circumstances in which

names should be reconsidered to reflect present-day ethical principles or to avoid ongoing harm.

D1.2. Historical association. In evaluating potential changes to eponyms, the SACC will also consider the degree of historical association between the eponym and the species it describes. Some eponyms are purely honorific in that they refer to an individual with no close association to their namesake species or to ornithology in general. Other eponyms refer to the individual who first discovered or collected that species, or to individuals who contributed substantially to advances in our discipline. These latter names have a tighter historical and ornithological affiliation and therefore a higher level of merit for retention.

D2. Foreign language names. As stated in AOU (1983), “vernacular names derived from a language other than English may be adopted when these are well established and not inappropriate.”

D3. Derogatory or otherwise offensive names. English bird names that clearly denigrate any group or class of people, or which would be generally considered offensive by present-day standards, may be changed for this reason alone. The committee will consider the degree and scope of offensiveness under present-day social standards as part of its deliberations. The SACC acknowledges that some words or terms may become secondarily offensive, even when not originally intended as derogatory, and sometimes even when there is no direct etymological link between the original name and its now-offensive connotation.
