

CORRESPONDENCE

THE ENGLISH NAME 'MOLLYMAUK'

Sir, — Some time ago I was criticized by an anonymous referee for using the name mollymauk (spelling of *New Dictionary*) for Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatrosses. Much against my inclination I removed the term but later New Zealand friends urged that I ought to have resisted and in retrospect I believe so too.

Among the seamen, whalers and islanders of the southern Atlantic with whom I have been associated during the years I have worked on seabirds, the smaller albatrosses have always been mollymauks or mollys. This is evidently so about New Zealand and Australia and I think there is much to be said for preserving such an English name. Quite apart from contributing a variety and richness to ornithological language, the mollymauks are collectively different from other members of the genus *Diomedea* in their breeding habits, behaviour and distributions.

By way of definition, the mollymauks are usually thought of as comprising the Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophrys*, the Grey-headed Albatross *D. chrysostoma*, the Yellow-nosed Albatross *D. chlororhynchos*, Buller's Albatross *D. bulleri* and the White-capped Albatross *D. cauta*. The albatrosses of the Bounty Islands and of Pyramid Rock in the Chatham Islands are also included whether they are considered

subspecies of *D. cauta* or the species *D. salvini* and *D. eremita*.

The Laysan Albatross *D. immutabilis* and Black-footed Albatross *D. nigripes* of the north Pacific Ocean are not mollymauks. In plumage and anatomy the Laysan does indeed resemble a mollymauk but it is strikingly different in behaviour, nesting habits and oceanic range.

I have always been content to employ the term 'albatross' for species names and to retain 'mollymauk' as a non-specific group term as do Serventy, Serventy and Warham in their *Handbook of Australian Sea-Birds*. On the other hand, Falla, Sibson and Turbott in their *Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* have taken the quite logical step of using 'Mollymauk' instead of 'Albatross'.

Whatever the usage, the name is well understood round Australia and New Zealand; what concerns me is that in parts of the world beyond the range of these seabirds there is a tendency for the name mollymauk to be eliminated because it is said to be confusing. It is only unfamiliarity that makes it confusing and I am sure that, if those of us who are attracted by the birds and their name, were to use it a little more positively in our writings then its usefulness would become more widely appreciated.

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INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE ANNOUNCEMENT

A.N.(S.)97

Required six months' notice is given of the possible use of plenary powers by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in connexion with the following name listed by case number: (see *Bull. zool. Nom.* 32, part 3, 22 September 1975).

2108. *Thamnophilus ruficollis* Spix, 1825 (Aves, Formicariidae):
proposed suppression.

Comments should be sent in duplicate, citing case number, to the Secretary, International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, England. Those received early enough will be published in the Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature.

R. V. MELVILLE

Secretary to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.

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