

New Names for Old.—The Case of *Malurus elegans* Gould, 1837

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A general question of interest to those concerned with the stability of nomenclature is contained in the proposal of Tom Iredale (*Emu*, 1937, vol. 37, p. 98) to change the name of *Malurus elegans* Gould 1837, on the discovery that Forster (1794) had re-named *Motacilla superba* of White (1790) as *Motacilla elegans*.

The question is—If a species bearing a certain name is transferred from genus A to genus B in which there already exists a species bearing the same name, what is the nomenclatural status of the species if the species of genus A antedates that of genus B. There are four main cases, depending on whether the species from genus A is transferred to genus B as—

- (1) a full species,
- (2) a subspecies,
- (3) a synonym of the species in genus B bearing the same name, or
- (4) a synonym of some species of genus B other than that bearing the same name.

It must be noted that the cases are covered neither by Article 35 of the Code nor by Opinion 83.

Article 35 states—

- (1) "A specific name is to be rejected as a homonym when it has previously been used for some other species or subspecies of the same genus."

In the foregoing the name has existed in genus A for one species and in genus B for another. In cases 1 and 2 the name does not exist in genus B until the transfer has taken place. *That is, the date of the transfer must be taken as the operative date for the species transferred from genus A.*

The second section of the Article states—

"When in consequence of the union of the two genera, two different animals having the same specific or sub-specific name are brought into one genus, the more recent specific or sub-specific name is to be rejected as a homonym."

It is to be noted that this section deals strictly with the union or amalgamation of two genera as a whole and no provision is made for the transferring of species from one genus to another.

In cases 1 and 2 the key dating should again be the date of transference.

Opinion 83 deals with the position which arises when a species is transferred from a genus and in effect answers in the negative the question—"Is it permissible then to use the same specific name in another sense in the original genus?" Both *Taenia ovilla* 1878 and *Acanthiza pyrrhopygia* 1848 were preoccupied in their original genus and the issue

was not affected by whether the earlier or later name of each of the pair was transferred to another genus.

Opinion 83 gives no assistance in deciding our cases 1 and 2. Case 3 is a special one—at first sight, not involving homonyms but priority of authorship. However, as the species entered as a synonym may be later regarded as a separate species of the genus, the principles outlined in cases 1 and 2 should hold, the date of transfer being taken as the date of origin. In other words, since at that date an earlier species occurred in the genus B the species transferred from genus A should be transferred into synonymy under *its own original generic and specific name*. If it is to be later erected as a full species of genus B, it should be re-named.

Case 4 is of even greater importance in the question of stability of nomenclature.

The special case is—

- (a) 1783 Latham named a species *Motacilla cyanea* based on a Tasmanian species of the superb warbler, or Blue Wren.
- (b) 1789 Shaw and Nodder named a Tasmanian species of the superb warbler, *Motacilla superba*.
- (c) 1790 White issued a plate using the name *Motacilla superba* for the New South Wales superb warbler.
- (d) 1794 Forster named the Sydney bird *Motacilla elegans*, but this fact was not recognized in subsequent literature until 1937.
- (e) 1837 Gould used the name *Malurus elegans* when describing the Western Australian Red-winged Wren, a different species from the above forms.
- (f) 1904 North, admitting *Motacilla cyanea* as the genotype of *Malurus*, added to the synonymy *Motacilla superba* Shaw and Nodder and re-named the New South Wales species of White, *Malurus australis*.
- (g) 1937 Iredale discovers Forster's lost name, *Motacilla elegans*, and proposes that *Malurus elegans* Gould 1837 be known as *Malurus warreni* Mathews 1916, as he considers that *Malurus elegans* Gould 1837 is a homonym of *Motacilla elegans* Forster 1794.

Now there have been two points of view among ornithologists on the classificatory side regarding the New South Wales and Tasmanian superb warblers.

- (a) That *Motacilla cyanea* Latham (*Malurus cyaneus*) embraces New South Wales, South Australian, Victorian and Tasmanian superb warblers and that consequently *Motacilla superba* Shaw, *Motacilla superba* White, *Motacilla elegans* Forster and *Malurus australis* North are synonymous.
- (b) That *Motacilla cyaneus* Latham (*Malurus cyaneus*) (Latham) applies only to the Tasmanian birds with synonym *Motacilla superba* Shaw and that *Malurus*

australis North (N.S.W., S.A., Victoria) is a separate species with synonyms *Motacilla superba* White 1790 and *Motacilla elegans* Forster 1794.

Regarding (a): If this view is held then *Motacilla elegans* Forster 1794 should be placed in the synonymy of *Motacilla cyaneus* Latham and quoted as *Motacilla elegans* Forster, not as *Malurus elegans* (Forster).

Regarding (b): If this view is held then *Motacilla elegans* Forster should be brought into the synonymy of *Malurus australis* North as *Motacilla elegans* Forster, and if *elegans* were available would replace *australis*. However, *elegans* is already occupied in the genus *Malurus*, so that *elegans* of Forster from *Motacilla* is unavailable: therefore the next name, *australis*, should be retained.

The name *elegans* was first used in *Motacilla* in 1794, and in *Malurus* in 1837, therefore it would seem that any later use of *elegans* in *Malurus*, e.g. that of Iredale in 1937, is barred.

Regarding the Western Australian *Malurus elegans* two points of view appear to be held among ornithologists—

- (a) The species is regarded as belonging to the genus *Malurus*.
- (b) The species is regarded as belonging to the genus *Leggeornis*, that genus being either a genus closely allied to *Malurus* or a subgenus of it.

Regarding (b) Iredale (1937) states—"For those who follow Mathews and place the latter [*Malurus elegans* Gould] in *Leggeornis* there is no trouble." The point is that Forster's species is admitted into synonymy not as *Malurus elegans* (Forster) but as *Motacilla elegans* Forster.

To sum up—If it is desired to transfer a species from genus A to genus B the case must be considered from the point of view of the standing of the species in—

- (1) genus A
- (2) genus B.
- (a) To be available for transfer from genus A, the name must be valid in genus A, i.e. the principles laid down in Rules 35 and 36 and Opinion 83 must be followed.
- (b) To be available for transfer to genus B, the name must be available in genus B *at the date of transfer*.

Accordingly—

- (1) The combination *Motacilla elegans* Forster 1794 is available for transfer from the genus *Motacilla*.
- (2) The name *elegans* is not available in *Malurus* as of 1937 as it is preoccupied by *Malurus elegans* Gould 1837.
- (3) Forster's species is to be entered either in the synonymy of *Malurus cyanea* (Latham) as *Motacilla elegans* Forster, or in the synonymy of *Malurus australis* North as *Motacilla elegans* Forster in the event of North's species being regarded as separate.