

**A HAND-LIST OF BRITISH BIRDS,
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE
DISTRIBUTION OF EACH SPECIES
IN THE BRITISH ISLES AND
ABROAD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649117352

A hand-list of British birds, with an account of the distribution of each species in the British Isles and abroad by Various

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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VARIOUS

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A HAND-LIST OF
BRITISH BIRDS

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF EACH
SPECIES IN THE BRITISH ISLES AND ABROAD.

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WITHERBY & CO.
326 HIGH HOLBORN LONDON, W.C.
1912.

Nomenclature is only "a means, not an end," but without
uniformity it is a confusion.

INTRODUCTION.

IN preparing this Hand-List our chief aims have been (1) to give an up-to-date and useful account of the distribution at home and abroad of all those birds which in our opinion are entitled to a place on the British list, and (2) to give each bird its correct scientific name in conformity with the Rules of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.

In drawing up this account of the distribution of each species in the British Isles we have had in view the necessity of giving such details as will indicate to the student whether a bird is worthy of special record on account of its general rarity, its scarcity in any particular part of the country, or at some particular season of the year, or because of the want of previous observations. For these and other such reasons it has been necessary to treat some species much more fully than others. The distribution abroad has been given in more general terms, but here again a species of wide range does not require so much detail as one of more restricted or unequal distribution. Moreover our knowledge of the distribution of some species is much more complete than that of others.

The notes on migration refer chiefly to passage-movements or are given in cases where the known migrations of a species are too complicated to be treated in the distributional accounts.

For various reasons nearly every bird on our List has been given at one time or another more than one scientific name, and the difficulty always has been to know by which name it should be called. Nomenclature is proverbially a vexed subject, but there is one necessity which all, however diverse their views, must agree is of the first importance—the necessity for uniformity; not a partial uniformity confined to British ornithologists or to any other section of the ornithological world, for such a uniformity could

only have a local and transient value, but a world-wide uniformity, based upon Rules which can be accepted by ornithologists of all nations. If the scientific names of birds were uniform all over the world, what an enormous benefit it would be to ornithologists and science generally. Should we not all unite in striving to reach this end? After all, what is nomenclature? It is little more than a system of labelling, and yet we have neglected for more than 150 years one of the requisites of greatest importance—that our labels should everywhere be the same for the same bird.

How has the evil of want of uniformity arisen and continued? In early times, with slow and difficult means of communication there was plenty of excuse for describing as new a bird which had already been named by someone else in another part of the world, and since those times many even of the most familiar birds have in ignorance of previous descriptions and names been redescribed and renamed, so that there has gradually grown up a long list of synonyms for one and the same species. The evil has continued for want of the adoption of a uniform system of nomenclature, based on the strictest priority, by which the correct names can be fixed. Unfortunately, authorities have hitherto made it very much a matter of individual choice as to which name should be employed, and we regret to say that this "method" even now obtains. But such a proceeding can never lead to uniformity, for so long as the matter is one of choice ungoverned by rules which can be accepted as authoritative by all the world, then so long will there be chaos.

Let us take a few examples, out of many which might be cited, where uniformity in deciding upon the name to be used is an impossibility without the universal adoption of one code of Rules based on absolute priority.

While Stephens in Shaw's "General Zoology" (1809) used the name *Lanius ruficollis* for the Woodchat, MacGillivray, Yarrell, in the 2nd and 3rd editions, and Harting in the 1st edition of his "Handbook," called the bird *Lanius rutilus*. But even at this period Gray (1863) and Gould (1850-68) preferred to use *Lanius* or *Enneoctonus rufus*. In 1871 Newton adopted the name *auriculatus* in the 4th edition of Yarrell and was followed by Dresser in the "Birds of Europe." But the committee of the B.O.U. in their "List" (1883) changed the name to *L. pomeranus*. Seebohm, who was a member of this committee, preferred to use the name

L. rufus in his "History of British Birds," and Lord Lilford, the President of the Union, again changed the name back to *L. rutilus* (1890-93). Saunders, in the 2nd edition of his "Manual" (1899) used *L. pomeranus*, but Harting in the 2nd edition of his "Handbook," changed the name once more to *L. rufus*. This by no means exhausts the list of names used even by British writers for this unfortunate bird, but it is enough to show how impossible it is to expect agreement without observance of law. Let us hope that under the name of *L. senator* L. (1758) it may be allowed to rest.

The Whitethroat used to be called *Sylvia cinerea*, until Newton, Dresser, and others introduced the name *rufa*, while several Continental ornithologists began to call it *Sylvia sylvia*. A careful perusal of the original description, however, shows that the names *rufa* and *sylvia* are quite doubtful, and cannot be adopted, while Latham clearly described the species under the name *communis*.

The specific names of the Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas have been transposed many times, the Arctic Skua having been called *parasiticus* by Fleming, Gray, Harting (1872) and others, *cepheus* by Leach, *Richardsoni* by MacGillivray, Yarrell (2nd and 3rd editions), Lilford, and Seebohm, *crepidatus* by Dresser, Harting (1901), Yarrell (4th edition), Saunders, and in the B.O.U. "List." The Long-tailed Skua has been called *parasiticus* by MacGillivray, Dresser, Yarrell (4th edition), Harting (1901), Saunders, and in the B.O.U. "List," *cepheus* by Gray, *buffoni* by Yarrell (2nd and 3rd edition) and Seebohm, *crepidatus* by Brehm and Naumann, *longicaudus* by Gould and Harting (1872).

Many other instances of great confusion of names for one and the same bird might be given, but enough has been said to show that only by the adoption of one code of Rules and by strict adherence to those rules, can uniformity be attained. If our decision upon the name to be used rests on a set of Rules, and is not in any way governed by individual choice or taste, then there must needs be but one correct name and that name must be universally employed. It has been said that uniformity would never be attained. This is, however, not logical, because one name only is the oldest, and the few doubtful cases, and they are few, are being decided upon and cleared up by careful nomenclators, with the help of the International Commission, which discusses doubtful cases, and brings them finally before the International Zoological Congresses for decision.

For these reasons we have adopted the "International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature," and have been strictly obedient to those Rules in deciding upon the correct name to be used for the birds on the British list. Although this has involved a good many changes from the names that British ornithologists are accustomed to, and will thus cause some temporary inconvenience, we are sure that the principle upon which we have acted is the only scientific one possible, and we firmly believe that this principle will very soon be universally conceded.

These Rules have the highest international authority, and only international authority can be universally accepted. But the Rules must be followed implicitly, and no exceptions to them must be made, for once an exception is allowed, then the old evil of individual choice must enter, and uniformity be lost again. There may be, in certain cases, some dissension in the interpretation of the Rules, but when once these difficulties are overcome uniformity will be accomplished, and following uniformity will come stability.

Let everyone help towards this most desirable end by studying and upholding the strict letter of the law, rather than his own convenience, likes, and dislikes.

The more important Rules affecting specific and subspecific names are given below, and of these it may be remarked that numbers 26 and 27 are the most important, and have the greatest effect upon the British list, because most British authors have, since 1846, adopted the 12th edition of Linné as the starting point, instead of the 10th, and have had scant regard for the strict law of priority:—

"ARTICLE 2.—The scientific designation of animals is uninominal for subgenera and all higher groups, binominal for species, and trinominal for subspecies.

"ARTICLE 11.—Specific and subspecific names are subject to the same rules and recommendations, and from a nomenclatural standpoint they are co-ordinate, that is, they are of the same value.

"ARTICLE 12.—A specific name becomes a subspecific name when the species so named becomes a subspecies, and vice versa.

"ARTICLE 17.—If it is desired to cite the subspecific name, such name is written immediately following the specific name, without the interposition of any mark of punctuation.

Example: *Rana esculenta marmorata* Hallowell, but not *Rana esculenta (marmorata)* or *Rana marmorata* Hallowell.

“ARTICLE 19.—The original orthography of a name is to be preserved, unless an error of transcription, a *lapsus calami*, or a typographical error is evident.

“ARTICLE 25.—The valid name of a genus or species can be only that name under which it was first designated *in the condition*:

- (a) That this name was published and accompanied by an indication, or a definition, or a description; and
- (b) That the author has applied the principles of binary nomenclature.

“ARTICLE 26.—The 10th edition of Linné’s “*Systema Naturæ*,” 1758, is the work which inaugurated the consistent general application of the binary nomenclature in zoology. The date 1758, therefore, is accepted as the starting-point of zoological nomenclature and of the Law of Priority.

“ARTICLE 27.—The Law of Priority obtains and consequently the oldest available name is retained:

- (a) When any part of an animal is named before the animal itself;
- (b) When the larva is named before the adult;
- (c) When the two sexes of an animal have been considered as distinct species or even as belonging to a distinct genera;
- (d) When an animal represents a regular succession of dissimilar generations which have been considered as belonging to different species or even to different genera.

“ARTICLE 32.—A generic or a specific name, once published, cannot be rejected even by its author, because of inappropriateness. Examples: Names like *Polyodon*, *Apus*, *albus*, etc., when once published, are not to be rejected because of a claim that they indicate characters contradictory to those possessed by the animals in question.

“Article 33.—A name is not to be rejected because of tautonymy, that is, because the specific or the specific and subspecific names are identical with the generic name. Examples: *Trutta trutta*, *Apus apus apus*.”

As the use of trinomials for subspecies—or, better, geographical or local races—does not seem to be generally understood, it may here be explained that when a species is divided into two or more races, or when two or more species are grouped as races of one