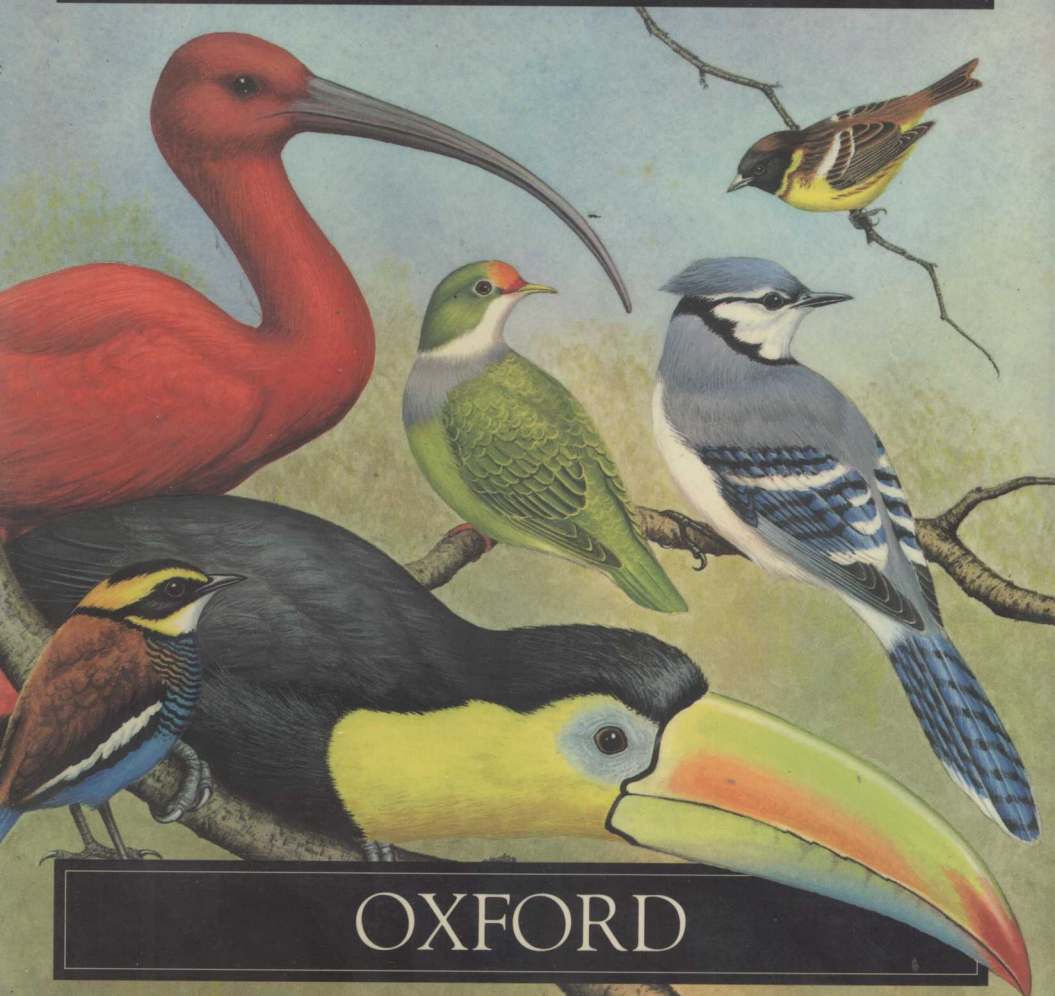
A DICTIONARY OF SCIENTIFIC BIRD NAMES



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A DICTIONARY OF SCIENTIFIC BIRD NAMES

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A DICTIONARY OF SCIENTIFIC BIRD NAMES

This Dictionary gives the derivation and meaning of all currently accepted scientific bird names. Some birds have been named for their appearance, some for a person or place, or for some aspect of their habitat, behaviour, food, or voice, or with reference to their native-language name. Each part of the name is defined separately so that *Passer domesticus*, for example, will not be found as such, but both *Passer* and *domesticus* are explained in their respective alphabetical places. The usefulness of the Dictionary will thus not be affected by future taxonomic revisions of generic or species names. About 8500 names are defined, including a selection of historical synonyms.

This book will find a permanent place on every ornithologist's shelf and will be a valuable reference source for everyone whose work or interests brings them into contact with birds.

The author, James Jobling, is a civil servant. He was born in Buckinghamshire, brought up in London, and now lives in Welwyn Garden City. Interested in languages and ornithology, he first began working on this Dictionary to fill a gap he perceived in his own library. He is a member of the British Ornithologists' Union, the American Ornithologists' Union, and the British Ornithologists' Club, and a fellow of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Correspondence may be directed to him c/o The Zoology Editor, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK.

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The experienced pen of John Farrand, Jr. brought an extensive knowledge to bear on my manuscript, and his thorough critique not only ensured that inconsistencies of treatment, content, and style were pin-pointed for eradication, but also led to renewed enquiries into the etymologies of some names.

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Welwyn Garden City J. A. J.
November 1990

Falco subbuteo European Hobby

Introduction

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone,
' it means just what I choose it to mean —neither more nor less.'

LEWIS CARROLL (1872). Through the looking-glass.

IN 1758 the tenth edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* was published in Stockholm. It described and diagnosed the natural world as then known to him, including 63 genera and 556 species of birds. This edition of Linnaeus is now accepted as the beginnings of scientific nomenclature in zoology, including ornithology. Since then, more than 30 000 scientific bird names, of genera, species, and subspecies, have been proposed and arranged in a hierarchy of taxa far more complex than that envisaged and used by Linnaeus.

Linnaeus's aims were to describe relationships, systematize the natural world, and promote world-wide understanding and discussion by providing simple two-part names for each species, using words taken directly from classical Latin or transliterated from Greek or other, mainly European, languages. Today the concept is still relevant and useful in a polyglot world made smaller by technology and instant communication. The object of this book is to explain the meaning of the international language created by Linnaeus and his successors in so far as it applies to the genera and species of birds of the world.

The importance of a system which identifies a species in any tongue is apparent when one considers, as examples, the various species world-wide sharing the names 'robin', 'wren', 'blackbird', 'warbler', 'sparrow', or 'catbird', the variety and limitations of vernacular names (Common Gull, Mew Gull, Racek bourní, Stormmåge, Láros ó tephrókhrous, Stormmöwe, Gaviota cana, Goéland cendré, Sæðingur, Gavina, Viharsirály, Fiskemåke, Mewa pospolita, Sizaya chayka, Kalalokki, Küçük marti, Kamome, all for *Larus canus*), or the debates of English-speakers over the preferred vernacular names of even common birds. When the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (1988) suggested standardizing English names and incurring the demise, amongst others, of Dunnock and Bearded Tit, strong emotions were aroused, the

Committee offered their resignation, and the project was placed on hold whilst responses were evaluated! As my dictionary is about scientific names, governed by an agreed set of rules, and not English names, rightly unfettered by codes, I have not followed any single authority on the occasions when English names are introduced.

THE PARTS OF SCIENTIFIC NAMES

The full scientific name of a bird species consists of four parts; *Parus major* Linnaeus 1758, is the scientific name of the Great Tit. The first two parts, the binomen *Parus major*, are written in a Latin or neo-Latin form and traditionally printed in italics.

The first part of the name denotes the genus, distinguishing a group of related species or an isolated, distinctive species. It must be in the form of a noun (*Parus* is the Latin word for a tit), must be unique in the zoological world, and is always capitalized.

The second, uncapitalized, part of the name is the specific name (previously also called the trivial name), distinguishing the several species within a genus. The specific name is commonly in the form of an adjective (*major* is from the Latin for larger). Only in combination with a generic name does it have any validity or make any sense, and it can be used in more than one genus: *Parus major* Linnaeus 1758 (Great Tit); *Dendrocopos major* (Linnaeus) 1758 (Great Spotted Woodpecker); *Podiceps major* (Boddaert) 1783 (Great Grebe); *Tinamus major* (Gmelin) 1789 (Great Tinamou); and *Crotophaga major* Gmelin 1788 (Greater Ani). Within the genus, however, no two species, subspecies, or forms (taxa) may bear the same specific name. For example, in 1843 the American explorer William Gambel described a chickadee he collected in the mountains of New Mexico as *Parus montanus*. That name, however, was already occupied by *Parus montanus*, the familiar Willow Tit of Europe, described by Conrad von Baldenstein in 1827. As a result Gambel's bird had to be renamed and the Mountain Chickadee is now distinguished as *Parus gambeli* Ridgway 1886, in honour of the original collector.

The third and fourth parts of a species scientific name give the author of the specific name and the year in which the name was first properly published. The author's name placed in parentheses after a specific name indicates that the current generic classification differs from the genus assigned by the original author. For example, the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus)1758 was originally described in the genus *Fringilla*.

Systematic publications, such as check-lists, may also give full publication details and the type locality (i.e. the location where the type specimen that defines the species was collected or is believed to have been collected). Non-systematic scientific works and more popular works, such as field-guides and magazines, usually give only the first two names, the 'binomen'; only this part of the scientific name will be considered further in this Dictionary.

Many species are divided by systematists into subspecies or geographic races which are populations of the species occupying a distinct geographic range and distinguished by recognizable morphological criteria from other such populations of the species. Species subdivided into subspecies are 'polytypic'; those for which no subspecies are recognized are 'monotypic'. Because of the continuity of the evolutionary process, some subspecies are so divergent that they are considered by some workers to have crossed the specific threshold and become species in their own right. In scientific nomenclature, subspecies are designated by adding a third name to the binomen, creating a trinomen.

Further, in zoological nomenclature, species and subspecies names belong to the class of species-group names and are subjected as a group to the same rules of nomenclature. When proposed, species-group names should be attached to a definite specimen, the type, which serves as the name-bearer for the species-group name. Any question as to the taxon to which a species-group name applies is resolved by reference back to the type specimen. These specimens are therefore of special value in zoological nomenclature and are specially designated and usually stored separately in museum collections. The subspecies of the Great Tit breeding in continental Europe and western Siberia is known as *Parus major major* (the nominotypical subspecies, whose name is created by repeating the specific name) to distinguish it from populations breeding in the British Isles *Parus major newtoni,* north-west Africa *Parus major excelsus,* the Holy Land *Parus major terraesanctae,* and others found elsewhere in this species' large Palaearctic and Indomalayan range. At least one of these forms, *Parus major minor* of Japan and China, has been elevated by some workers to specific rank, *Parus minor*, whilst the Turkistan Tit is considered by some workers as a distinct species, *Parus bokharensis,* and by others as a subspecies of the Great Tit, *Parus major bokharensis.* An extreme case is the Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* of the south Pacific, for which more than 70 distinct and usually easily recognizable races have been described.

Neither generic nor specific names need to be descriptive, accurate, or relevant, and they cannot be rejected if found to be erroneous in these respects. For example, *papua* need not refer to a bird found in Papua New Guinea, and *rufus* need not refer to the colour red. Many names coined in the early years of systematic zoology are now known to be inappropriate. These names may be the result of badly coloured plates or figures (*Frederickena viridis*—described from an inaccurate and garish plate, *Le Batara vert,* of the mainly black and slate (male) or brown and grey (female) Black-throated Antshrike), specimens affected by poor storage conditions (*Cotinga maculata*—named from a cabinet specimen whose plumage had suffered prolonged exposure to strong light), lay descriptions (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*—named in the belief that the swiftlets built their nests from seaweed), or mistaken provenance (*Pygoscelis papua*—based on Sonnerat's brash claim that he had seen three different species of penguin in New Guinea!).

CODES OF NOMENCLATURE

Although Linnaeus sought to lay down guidelines in his *Philosophica botanica*, 1751, there were no generally accepted rules governing the formation, use, and priorities of names in zoology, including ornithology, for nearly one hundred years afterwards. Many naturalists rushed to embrace Linnaeus's simple binominal system, but chose to do so in an uncoordinated and chaotic fashion. Men of independent spirit such as François Levaillant and the Comte de Buffon refused to recognize the order heralded by the Swedish botanist, but their works were eagerly scanned and used as bases for catalogues, classificatory systems, or nomenclators by subsequent cabinet authors. The names of Levaillant, Buffon, Azara, Marcgrave, Catesby, and others will not be found amongst the ranks of Linnaean descriptive authors, but their works are vital sources for the etymologist.

As European imperialism opened new portions of the globe to scientific exploration in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and as methods of preservation of specimens and storage of collections improved, naturalists became overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of new species brought back by soldiers, mariners, missionaries, explorers, and colonial administrators. The Linnaean binominal system, now almost universally adopted by naturalists, was threatened with collapse as authors independently described the

same species under different names, unaware of, or perhaps without regard for, the work of others. Often males, females, immature individuals, and colour morphs of the same species were described as different species. Moreover, authors differed in their approaches to the Linnaean binominal nomenclatural system, disagreeing as to whether inappropriate names, original misspellings, names based on the local vernacular, and so on, should be corrected or changed. As zoological taxonomy improved and species became better known, the earlier errors were gradually sorted out and corrected. The result, however, was a plethora of names, disagreement on availability and usage of names for individual species, and differences on the starting date for binominal nomenclature (whether it should be pre-Linnaean, Linnaeus's tenth edition of 1758, or Linnaeus's twelfth edition of 1766). Great instability in use of names and a collapse of binominal nomenclature loomed less than 100 years after Linnaeus introduced his concept of an efficient international system of biological names essential for communication between all biologists.

Clearly this situation could not continue, and individual zoologists developed sets of rules of nomenclature to bring order to the impending chaos. The most successful of these early attempts to bring uniformity to zoological nomenclature was the Strickland Code, originally conceived in 1835 by the British ornithologist, zoologist, and palaeontologist Hugh E. Strickland, presented to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1842, and adopted by the Scientific Congress in Padua in 1843, by the American Society of Geologists and Naturalists in 1845, and by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1846. The Strickland Code was the basis of subsequent codes, including the American Ornithologists' Union Code and eventually the *Règles internationales*. The Strickland Code adopted the twelfth (1766) edition of the *Systema Naturae* as the starting date for zoological nomenclature, as this was the first time Linnaeus had consistently used binominal nomenclature. Although this decision to regard 1766 as the beginning was broadly accepted at the time in Britain and parts of continental Europe, many workers in North America and Europe argued that the tenth (1758) edition of Linnaeus should be used. The nomenclature code adopted by the American Ornithologists' Union in 1886 accepted the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* (1758) as the start of zoological nomenclature. This new code was enthusiastically adopted by most workers except the British, who remained isolated

until 1901, when the Fifth International Congress of Zoology at Berlin accepted the tenth edition and promulgated the first set of rules of zoological nomenclature to be recognized internationally, the *Règles internationales de la Nomenclature zoologique*, first officially published in 1905. These rules have been modified and clarified at various times and underwent a major revision during the 1950s, resulting in publication of the new *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* in 1961 (3rd edition, 1985).

The fundamental goal of the Code is to ensure stability and universality in scientific names of animals, a basic necessity for communication between zoologists throughout the world and over time. Three basic principles need to be presented for an understanding of the names treated in this Dictionary. These are: priority, homonymy, and preservation of well-established names. These principles will be discussed in turn.

Priority

This principle was developed gradually in the early decades of the nineteenth century as a method of dealing with the different names available for the same species or genus, these names being the result of zoologists intentionally or unintentionally describing the same taxon independently, the merger of taxa, correction of inappropriate names for taxa, and so on. *The principle of priority states simply that the earliest name applied properly to a taxon of animals is the correct scientific name, with the date of publication determined by the stated date on the publication or by other means if that information is not reliable.* Priority now dates from 1 January 1758, the date fixed for the publication of the tenth edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*. If two species or two genera are merged for whatever reason, the correct name is the earliest one proposed. If taxonomic investigation indicates that a species or a genus should be divided into two, then the former name remains with the type and a new name must be proposed for the other taxon if a name does not already exist for it. Many changes in zoological nomenclature resulted from the application of priority, especially when sorting out the work of the early taxonomists. Major changes stemmed from the decision to change the beginning date for zoological nomenclature from the twelfth edition (1766) of Linnaeus to the earlier tenth edition (1758). Most of these changes in ornithology were resolved many decades ago, but they still cause difficulties when searching the literature of the last century and in the nomenclature of avian family-group names. The latter will not be treated in this Dictionary.

Homonymy

This principle states that a particular name can be used only once in zoological nomenclature. Hence a generic name or a family-group name can be used only once in the animal kingdom — it must be unique. Within a genus, a species-group name can be used only once. Thus when the generic name *Atrichia*, which had been applied to the Australian scrub-birds, was shown to be a junior objective homonym, it had to be replaced with *Atrichornis*. The rules for generic homonyms have changed over the years. Formerly genera differing only in their gender terminations, such as the feminine duck genus *Polysticta* Eyton 1836 and the masculine tyrant flycatcher genus *Polystictus* Reichenbach 1850, were regarded as homonyms or identical, and the junior name (i.e. *Polystictus*, the one last published) was replaced. *Polystictus* was renamed *Habrura* by Cabanis and Heine in 1859. This rule for homonymy is no longer accepted, and such names are now considered distinct and available. Names like *Polystictus*, that were replaced earlier, have been reinstated. The generic name *Habrura* is not a junior synonym of *Polystictus*. A specific (including subspecific) name can be used only once within a genus under the principle of homonymy, but the same name can be used in more than one genus, as explained earlier. If, through error or omission, two species or subspecies (species-level taxa) within a genus bear the same name, or if taxonomic research results in the submergence of one genus into another resulting in two species-level taxa bearing the same name, the name proposed later becomes the junior subjective homonym and that taxon must take the next available name by precedence of the date of publication or be given a new name.

Preservation of well-established names

The third principle, dealing with preservation of well-established names, is relatively recent, dating only from 1953. It is still not clearly articulated within the Code and is not fully accepted by all zoologists. *This concept is concerned with preservation of stability and universality in zoological nomenclature. It operates by protecting well-established names from being replaced by long-forgotten and hence unused senior synonyms.* At present, such protection must be achieved by action of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, often under its plenary powers. For example, strong disagreement has existed amongst ornithologists as to the proper

application of the generic name *Colymbus* Linnaeus 1758, i.e. whether it applies to the divers (loons) as claimed by British and some other European ornithologists or to the grebes as claimed by North American workers. Because a clear resolution of this dispute was not possible, the ICZN declared the name *Colymbus* suppressed and hence objectively invalid, and ruled that the generic name *Gavia* J. A. Forster 1788 (type *Colymbus immer* Linnaeus 1758) would apply to the divers and the name *Podiceps* Latham 1787 (type *Colymbus cristatus* Linnaeus 1758) would apply to the grebes.

Despite more than two hundred years of intensive scientific study, the family limits and relationships of birds, and to a lesser extent, generic and specific limits and relationships, are still the subject of considerable investigation. Most attempts to achieve some degree of consensus have foundered on conservatism, individual interpretation of the scientific evidence, still insufficient study, or, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, just plain perversity. Subspecies are incipient species, and hence may be evolving intrinsic isolating mechanisms and other attributes which separate fully evolved species. These geographic races range from poorly differentiated forms to well-marked geographic entities, often considered to be allospecies—members of a superspecies. No fixed morphological or other phenotypic criteria exist by which one may reach undisputed conclusions on full species or subspecies status. While one ornithologist (a 'lumper') considers a geographic form to be only a subspecies, another ornithologist ('a splitter') may consider the same taxon to be a full species. So whereas the lumper recognizes only one pantropical, polytypic species of darter (or anhinga) *Anhinga anhinga*, or a broad-based genus *Erithacus,* the splitter would discern four species of anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga, A. rufa, A.melanogaster,* and *A. novaehollandiae*); limit *Erithacus* to the familiar robins of Europe and Japan; and resurrect *Luscinia, Pseudaedon, Tarsiger, Cyanosylvia, Sheppardia,* and so on, for the nightingales, bluetails, rubythroats, bluethroat, and akalats. Differences of opinion such as those just illustrated—and there are many more in ornithology—are based upon individual interpretation of the same evidence, although most workers agree that little scientific knowledge is to be gained by disputing the subjective minutiae of generic and specific limits.

This is a book about bird names, not bird classification, and in order to be as comprehensive as possible I have allied myself with the splitters by including a larger than usual number of names of genera

and species. Using Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World* as a foundation, I have included those subgenera and subspecies that have been given generic or specific status by at least one of the authors mentioned in the Bibliography, although I have not adopted all of the conclusions of, for example, Mathews (1927 and 1930), or Sclater (1924 and 1930). For historical interest I have also included names such as *Colymbus, Cuncuma, Tanagra, helvola, asha,* and others now synonymized or suppressed, although the sheer volume of avian names prohibits the inclusion of all synonyms and subspecific names in this initial survey.

Throughout the text the word 'synonymized' (usually in the abbreviated form 'syn.') is used in its broadest sense, to include names preoccupied elsewhere in zoological nomenclature, coined separately for the same taxon, submerged as a result of new research into generic and specific relationships, or rejected and suppressed by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. The resultant list of names is, of necessity, arbitrary and uncritical and will not meet with the approval of all workers, but I have had neither the time nor the facilities to undertake an assessment of every form. By highlighting the diversity of birds in a comprehensive list, and explaining the origins of their names, I offer my hope that enquiry and further investigation will lead to a better understanding of their life histories, relationships, and ecology before man's indiscriminate development of 'his' world destroys the unique system we know as Earth.

GRAMMAR AND GENDER

The details of classical grammars are beyond the scope of this Dictionary, the interested reader being referred to Stearn (1983) or a standard primer for further clarification, but the following basic remarks will be useful.

All scientific names, regardless of their origin, are treated grammatically as Latin. Most are derived from classical Latin and its successors or from ancient Greek. Greek words are usually transliterated in accordance with generally accepted rules (*k* becomes c, *u* becomes y, final *-os* becomes -us, *kh* becomes ch; see Coues (1882), pp. 12–14; Stearn (1983), pp. 261–262; or International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, 3rd edition, (1985), appendix B, for complete listings). General Recommendation 16 of the ICZN states, 'A zoologist should give the etymology and gender of a new genus-group name.' When the *Systema Naturae* was published, classical Latin was

still the medium of learning and international communication between savants and it was considered unnecessary to elaborate further on the scientific names published by Linnaeus and his adherents. In the nineteenth century authors such as Jean Cabanis and Harry Oberholser took pains to provide etymologies for their newly created genera, but those of the stamp of Prince Bonaparte and Gregory Mathews seldom threw light on the origins of the names they coined. Not all naturalists and ornithologists were classical scholars, however, and whilst some were poorly served by their printers, others were early students of Humpty Dumpty, so the purist will not have to search far to discover errors of grammar, structure, or transliteration. Indeed, earlier authors tried, unsuccessfully, to purge nomenclature of improperly formed names and those barbarisms considered unsuitable, erroneous, or without a classical pedigree.

Latin nouns are declined and verbs are conjugated; that is, their terminations change according to their case, tense, person, and number, or, more simply, the manner in which they are used. In this Dictionary nouns are indicated in the nominative singular (*ager*, the field), and, where the derivation is from the stem of the noun, they are also indicated in the genitive or possessive case (*agri*, of the field), although the genitive is shown only once in the first of a series of epithets sharing the initial combining form (e.g. see *albicapilla* to *albiventer*). Latin verbs are shown in the present infinitive (*clamare*, to shout) rather than the present indicative (*clamo*, I shout).

Adjectival epithets or trivial names have to agree in gender with the genus to which they are assigned. If a species is transferred from a masculine genus to a feminine one, or vice versa, then the specific termination must be changed accordingly. For example, Bonelli's Eagle was originally described in the feminine genus *Aquila* by Vieillot (in 1822) as *Aquila fasciata*. Later regarded as sufficiently distinct to warrant inclusion in the masculine genus *Hieraaetus*, it became known as *Hieraaetus fasciatus*, the binomen it still holds. Some species names that may look like adjectives (such as *arada* in *Cyphorhinus arada* or *cirlus* in *Emberiza cirlus*, which are based on native vernacular names) are, in fact, nouns in apposition given an adjectival function, and their terminations do not change to agree with the gender of the generic name.

The most common terminations are:

(1) *-us* (masculine), *-a* (feminine), *-um* (neuter) (e.g. *auritus, aurita, auritum*, long-eared);

(2) *-is* (masculine), *-is* (feminine), *-e* (neuter) (e.g. *agilis, agilis, agile,* nimble);

(3) *-er* (masculine), *-era* (feminine), *-erum* (neuter) (e.g. *pulcher, pulchra, pulchrum,* beautiful).

Although the Dictionary lists all accepted described forms in alphabetical order, in the etymologies only the masculine forms (*auritus, agilis, pulcher*) are shown, but the gender of the epithet and, thus, the generic name may also be identified from the examples of endings given here.

ANALYSIS OF NAMES

The scientific names of birds can be conveniently divided into categories according to their meaning, as follows: 1. appearance, 2. eponym, 3. native name, 4. toponym, 5. classification, 6. habitat, 7. behaviour, 8. food, 9. voice. These are analysed briefly below.

1. *Appearance.* The plumage, colours, and physical characteristics of birds form the largest category, accounting for over 55 per cent of all specific names and nearly 45 per cent of all generic names. Genera are more obvious candidates for names highlighting physical features (*Oxyura,* stifftail, *Recurvirostra,* recurved-bill, *Heteroscelus,* uneven-legs, *Lagopus,* hare-foot), whilst specific epithets incline more towards colour or pattern (*rufus* occurs in twenty-eight genera, *striatus* in twenty-four), although there are many exceptions to these generalizations.

Specific names of a general nature, such as those last mentioned, carried by more than a few species, may apply to only parts of the plumage or solely to the female or male bird. For example, of those species bearing the epithet *badius* (bay-coloured), *Accipiter badius* has rufous barred underparts, *Caprimulgus badius* has a tawny half-collar, *Ducula badia* has reddish-purple and dark brown upperparts which fade to chestnut in worn plumage, *Halcyon badia* has dark chocolate head and back, *Molothrus badius* has only rufous chestnut wings, *Phodilus badius* has rich chestnut upperparts, and only the breeding male *Ploceus badius* has chestnut mantle and underparts. Considerations of space prevent such detailed analysis under each entry in the main text.

2. *Eponym.* A popular form in nomenclature, representing nearly 20 per cent of all specific names, an eponym commemorates a real