

Petition to AOS Leadership on the Recent Decision to Change all Eponymous Bird Names
Packet Table of Contents

- 1) [Introductory Letter](#)
- 2) [Petition to AOS Leadership on the Recent Decision to Change all Eponymous Bird Names](#)
- 3) [Comments left on the petition site by those that signed the petition.](#)
- 4) [Comments by those that responded publicly to regular petition updates.](#)
- 5) [Comments and essays written by prominent ornithologists and birders.](#)
- 6) [Published papers that are relevant to the AOS decision.](#)

A spreadsheet of 5,788 signatures was submitted to the AOS with this packet but is not included here to protect the privacy of those that signed the petition.

March 1, 2024

To: AOS Officers & Elective Councilors

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James Kushlan - Honorary
John Fitzpatrick - Honorary
Scott Lanyon - Honorary
Frank Moore - Honorary
Dennis Power - Honorary
C. John Ralph - Honorary
Martin Raphael - Honorary
Terry Rich - Honorary
John Rotenberry - Honorary
J. Michael Scott - Honorary
Kimberly Sullivan - Honorary
Olivia Wang - Student Member
Jacob Drucker – Student Member

About the Petition

The petition is submitted with 5,788 signatures and 260 additional comments submitted via the petition website. Additional 48 comments are submitted via the petition website by individuals responding to petition updates.

The petition is signed by people from every state in the U.S., including DC, and includes representatives from **59 countries** outside the United States. Clearly this is a topic of world-wide interest.

Many casual and serious birdwatchers have signed this document.

And importantly, more than 25,000 papers that have been published in scientific journals can be attributed to some of the many distinguished signatories of this petition including ornithologists, academics, AOS members, and scientists from all areas of expertise.

About Eponyms

We believe there are many reasons to keep most eponyms including:

- 1) One of the guiding principles of the AOS is to maintain a list that “fosters stability for the sake of effective communication.” The destabilization of 150 English bird names is unprecedented and is the opposite of a primary stated goal of the AOS.
- 2) A momentous decision that destabilizes English names used by many thousands of people requires listening to a diversity of voices rather than a few. Yet the AOS has never polled membership or the public regarding a decision that will impact the entire world-wide birding community.
- 3) Eponymous bird names are tied to a rich and varied ornithological history. Those in North America honor many of the founders of ornithology in our hemisphere, including the American Ornithological Society itself. The total removal of eponymous names dishonors these people, most of whom have no dark sides to their pasts and are thus inadvertently disgraced by guilt-by-association.
- 4) Many species slated to be renamed are of rare to accidental occurrence in the U.S. Of the 150+ species slated to have their names changed, only about 89 breed in the United States or Canada, and many of those are neotropical migrants that spend 8-9 months of the year on wintering grounds in other countries. The remaining 60 or so are birds that are mainly found in other countries and occur in the U.S. or Canada as rarities or are species found exclusively in countries in Latin America or the Caribbean. It is imperative that the English names of these species only be changed in consultation with ornithological bodies in other countries.
- 5) Financial impacts have not been fully explored. Just in the U.S. alone many federal, state, and local agencies will be affected by this decision in having to change documents and signage at taxpayer expense to update the names of 80+ species. **The time, energy, and**

funds spent debating this issue and implementing these changes would be better spent on and on protecting birds and their habitats.

- 6) There are better and more concrete ways for the AOS to actively work on increasing diversity within the birding and the ornithological community such as:
 - a) Offer active outreach programs to urban youth communities where socioeconomic realities offer fewer opportunities for communities of color to experience birds and nature.
 - b) Increase the number of travel scholarships for students and young researchers from the Global South to travel to AOS meetings and present their research.
 - c) Ask native English speakers to include an abstract in the relevant national language when publishing.
 - d) Provide for greater representation by under-represented groups on AOS committees.

About the AOS Decision

AOS leadership needs to be made eminently aware of how this decision has affected the birding community and ornithology in general.

What began as a well-intentioned action to combat racism and promote diversity and inclusivity, has spiraled out of control into a spider web of personal emotional issues such as the belief that a bird should not be named after a human. While these individual perspectives are to be respected, they have nothing to do with the original intent of the AOS mission.

Friends are unfriending friends on Facebook, colleagues are no longer talking with each other. People that publicly oppose this decision have been branded as “racist” and with other harmful and derogatory labels. Supporters of this petition have had their employment threatened after going public with their opinions.

AOS leadership was warned ahead of time that this decision would result in a deep cultural divide and was asked to listen to more voices on this matter. Because leadership did not listen, what once was a peaceful activity we could all engage in together, is now a hotbed of slurs and slander and cancel culture wars.

About our Position

We believe AOS Leadership are the only ones in the position to begin the healing process for the birding and ornithological community.

As a first step in this healing process, the petition asks the AOS to resume their own case-by-case method of review to remove offensive or exclusionary bird names rather than the blanket removal of eponymous names as announced on Nov. 1, 2023.

About the PDF Document in this Packet

Included in the packet are the following documents:

- 1) Introductory Letter
- 2) Petition to AOS Leadership on the Recent Decision to Change all Eponymous Bird Names
- 3) A spreadsheet of all names that are signatories on the petition.
- 4) Comments left on the petition site by those that signed the petition.
- 5) Comments by those that responded publicly to regular petition updates.
- 6) Comments and essays written by prominent ornithologists and birders.
- 7) Published papers that are relevant to the AOS decision.

Note: #3 Not included in this website packet due to privacy issues.

I hope that you will consider putting the petition and enclosed material on the agenda for your March Board meeting.

I thank you in advance for your consideration.

Rachel Kolokoff Hopper
Fort Collins, CO 80524
info@birdnamesforstability.org

To see the current number of signatures on the original petition please go to:

<https://chng.it/VHyjZp5snr>

[Back to TOC](#)

Petition to AOS Leadership on the Recent Decision to Change all Eponymous Bird Names

In response to a petition from Bird Names for Birds (BN4B) signed by approximately 2,500 people, AOS leadership announced the major decision to change all eponymous names in “an effort to address past wrongs and engage far more people in the enjoyment, protection, and study of birds.”

We the undersigned strongly support diversity and inclusion in the birding community but disagree with this decision for the following reasons:

The destabilization of 150 English bird names is unprecedented. We believe that such a momentous decision that affects the English names used by many thousands of people requires listening to a diversity of voices rather than a few. One of the guiding principles of the AOS is to maintain a list that “fosters stability for the sake of effective communication,” yet it has never polled membership or the public regarding a decision that will impact the entire world-wide birding community. This one-sided decision is discriminatory against those that would rather see no change or are willing to compromise. Furthermore, no other ornithological or birding organizations were consulted. The International Ornithological Union, which monitors taxonomic changes and maintains a global list of standard bird names, have already indicated they will not follow suit and remove all eponyms.

The attempt by AOS leadership to appear more diverse and inclusive has created an unprecedented and unnecessary division within the birding community unseen in our lifetimes. This decree has brought culture wars to ornithology and birding.

We challenge the AOS to produce evidence that bird names are having a negative impact on the stated goals of the organization or birding in general. There is much to remedy in a science that has historically been dominated by white males, but changing bird names, many of which were described and named in a different era, and trying to hide ornithological history will not remedy this history. In all reality this decision will have little to no impact in removing obstacles to minorities in ornithology and birding.

Rather than a total purge of eponyms, we suggest that the previous case-by-case method be resumed to remove offensive names rather than dishonoring the many people who founded ornithology in the Americas, many of whom are inadvertently disgraced by guilt by association.

This methodology was also endorsed by the entire North American Checklist Committee (NACC) and all but one member of the South American Checklist Committee (SACC) although the committees recommendations were ignored by the AOS.

We predict that assessing reaction from a broader portion of the user base will favor this approach.

Differing opinions on this matter deserve to have a voice.

Initial Supporters Include:

Caleb Gordon

Curtis Marantz

Don Roberson

Gary Rosenberg

David J. Stejskal

Guy McCaskie

Chris Gooddie

Rohan Pethiyagoda

Kevin Winker

John Rowlett

John Coons

Jon Dunn

Paul Lehman

Van Remsen

Steve N G Howell

Kevin Zimmer

Louis Bevier

Matt Heindel

Narca Moore

Paul McKenzie

Robert Behrstock

Steve Heint

Steve Mlodinow

Comments from the Petition

Name	City	State	Postal Code	Country	Commented Date	Comment
Dennis Paulson	Seattle	WA	98115	US	11/29/23	"The wording of this document is exactly what I have been saying to many friends and colleagues over the past months."
Mark Tomboulian	Seattle	WA	98133	US	11/29/23	"This has been a topic of much discussion in my personal community of birders and we all agree on this exact approach and wording. The contributions of scientists, including their names attached to species, is a direct link to history--either good or bad, it's still history--and we can learn from it."
Roger Craik	Maple Ridge		vzx3n7	Canada	11/29/23	"It's a sad state of affairs when the cancel culture thinks they represent the majority of birders. The birds don't care."
Jamie Acker	Bainbridge Island	WA	98110	US	11/29/23	"I am most definitely opposed to renaming 70-80 bird species based solely on the fact that they were named after a person. Many, if not most, of these species are named after avian pioneers in North America or were named in honor of an individual and to discredit them is an injustice. Should elements named after people be renamed? Plants? Where do we want to draw a reasonable line?"
Viki Penneman	Albuquerque	NM	87122	US	11/29/23	"I feel that there could be an asterisk by the name and then a brief explanation of who the bird was named after and why it could be controversial for some people."
Stacy Tripp	Fontana	CA	92336	US	11/30/23	"I'm signing this because it was arrogant of you to not gain a consensus before moving forward with this."
Rob Tymstra	Pelee Island		N0R1M0	Canada	11/30/23	"I'm happy to honour the initial describers of species. I like the names we have."
Douglas Karalun	Highland	CA	92346-5876	US	11/30/23	"And watch people's shock when these same activists push to change the scientific names."
Alan Richards	Naselle	WA	98638	US	11/30/23	"I'm glad this petition has started, and I'm proud to be signing it."
Dion Hobcroft	Sydney		2137	Australia	11/30/23	"The confusion it will cause is enormous, a lot of ornithological history will be relegated and overall the benefit is minimal. Not against change in a well considered manner but not a fan of sweeping reforms being launched on the birding world."
John Mariani	Porter	TX	77365	US	11/30/23	"I'm signing because this is a purposefully divisive move that is at its heart ideologically motivated, as evidenced by all mocking comments on numerous threads towards critics of this decision, dismissing them as old, bigoted, and using politically charged terms like "conservative tears." The popularity of this decision neatly tracks the current political divide, with a large segment of people on the left in favor and the vast majority of those on the right opposed. I don't think we should cater to activism that is going to further divide birding along political lines, because while it may be enticing to the majority of birders who share similar politics and ideology, alienating a large segment of the population is not the way to make birding more inclusive. Sadly, at least from my point of view, that has already happened."
Theodore Cooper	Denver	CO	80230	US	11/30/23	"Theodore Cooper"
Joan Garvey	New Orleans	LA	70122	US	11/30/23	"I'm signing because I don't agree with the elimination of all eponymous names because just a few should be changed."
Ian Lewis	Poole	ENG	BH12	UK	11/30/23	"Why is ornithology the only discipline that has to shoulder this (unnecessary) burden, no other branch of the natural sciences are following this, nor names of buildings, states, countries, units of measurement like Watt, Amp, Joule etc"
Durward Hulce	San Simon	AZ	85632	US	11/30/23	"This is basically just another attempt to rewrite and change history, which is never a good thing...."

Joe Scott				US	11/30/23	"Erasing history is redculous.. unless the name ITSELF can be taken as being offensive. Leave the names alone and address on a name by name basis."
Raymond Bullock	Poulsbo	WA	98370	US	11/30/23	"Wholesale renaming will create needless confusion. Urge AOS to be more selective."
Deborah Alperin	New York	NY	10001-2703	US	11/30/23	"I believe in removing ego from a species' name."
Mike McMurry	La Grange	TX	78945	US	11/30/23	"Are we changing the name of bluebirds because someone has the last name of Blue? Ridiculous nonsense!"
Cecilia Verkley	Toronto		M8W2H7	Canada	11/30/23	"for all the points made in this letter."
Alan Richards	Naselle	WA	98638	US	11/30/23	"Good point. And cars like Chevrolet, Ford, DeSoto, Dodge, Chrysler, etc."
Alan Richards	Naselle	WA	98638	US	11/30/23	"Many species names are honoring avian pioneers for cumulative centuries of arduous effort in the field. For many, this was well before the optics and other tools we can take for granted today. We owe these early ornithologists a lot. For those species named for financial currying of favor, or relatives of rich potential sponsors, or powerful political / military figures, let's consider changing those names, but not all of the names in our rich bird history."
Phil Gregory			4881	Australia	11/30/23	"it's an outrageous diktat by a cabal wanting to impose their view of history on everyone else"
Michael Hurben	Bloomington	MN	55438	US	11/30/23	"One aspect that is so troubling is the apparent willingness of the AOS (and the other organizations backing this sweeping change) to throw every ornithologist of the past under the bus. We have "journalists" now writing copy with article titles along the lines of "80 birds named after racists will get new monikers," often accompanied by a photo of a Wilson's Warbler. What is the conclusion one is to draw about Alexander Wilson from that? How many of these people have ever read his biography and understand how heroic he was? Reasonable people do not engage in assigning guilt by association. If you are going to retroactively judge historical figures by current standards (which is not a good idea to start with) then at least have the decency to treat them as individuals instead of making these tiresome over-generalizations that they were all bad because some people having similar skin color did some terrible things."
Winifred Burkett	Port Bolivar	TX	77650	US	11/30/23	"I don't think changing bird names will have any impact on the diversity of the birding community and will eliminate alot of ornithological history."
Vicki Von Schmidt	Red Feather Lakes	CO	80545	US	12/1/23	"We should learn about history not replace it or erase it."
Calvin Hall	Palmer	AK	99645	US	12/1/23	""fosters stability for the sake of effective communication"??? Your plans seem to be exactly the opposite of this, and much more likely to cause division and confusion. Disgraceful, arrogant power play."
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/1/23	"The constant pressures to change language in order to satisfy activism is plain anti-science as science relies on clear communications. Furthermore, imagine if all the English Language was subjected to such a purge, plant names, star names, place names, all the animal kingdom, microbiology, eponyms are ubiquitous. This idea of a purge if done at scale would be insanity."
Alan Richards	Naselle	WA	98638	US	12/1/23	"Yes! Disgraceful, divisive, confusing and arrogant all in one place."
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/1/23	"Can you imagine such a change at scale, across astronomy, medicine, microbiology, plants, it would be pure insanity. And if it ain't scalable, it should happen."
Mary Keleher	Mashpee	MA	2649	US	12/1/23	"Changing bird names won't change what happened in the past. Every year birdwatching is listed as one of the fastest growing "hobbies." How is it that every year more and more people are getting involved with birdwatching yet the AOS thinks it's exclusionary?"

Nick Brownfield	Oxnard	CA	93035	US	12/1/23	"I'm no conservative, I just think the decision is absurd. Outrage over one issue someone can't control being taken out on another thing they can control. This isn't a group of civil war general's names on military bases in a country they seceded from. They're just dead scientists who named birds at a time when it was socially normal to be racist. Judging the past by present morals is wrong. In 2100 some group will be offended by this name change for some reason you can't foresee. The whole thing is just stupid."
George Sangster				Netherlands	12/1/23	"I support the change of English bird names of North and Central American bird names, if the person being honored, was a bad human being (i.e. someone who nowadays would be considered a criminal). However, changing ALL honorifics is an overreaction and a very bad move. Please reconsider."
Frank Krell	Keenesburg	CO	80643	US	12/1/23	"Wholesale abandonment of all person-based names is counter-productive as it cancels history. History needs to be remembered, the good and the bad parts. If we do not want to be reminded on the bad parts, then change the respective names, but not all of them. Also, Amerigo Vespucci was a slave holder which owned five household slaves and was also involved in the slave trade. The AOS has still the A in its name."
Alan Knox	Aberdeen			UK	12/1/23	"It's a retrograde, culturally inept, ill thought out suggestion."
Tim Marshall	Peterhead	SCT	AB42 4YB	UK	12/1/23	"It is an absolutely ridiculous idea. History happened - learn from it, don't delete it!"
Simon Moore	Whitchurch	ENG	RG28 7DN	UK	12/1/23	"Any sort of change to long-established nomenclature brings confusion"
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/1/23	""bad" is such a relative term, every 10 years who that would be would be changeable."
Brad Boyle	Tucson	AZ	85716	US	12/1/23	"I am not opposed to changing common names which are demonstrably offensive to some, but agree that these changes can and should be done on a case-by-case basis, with the goal of keeping the changes as few as possible. The challenges of this approach are fewer and less serious than the numerous unintended consequences of the proposed bulk name changes. In addition to those listed in the petition, I would add the following. (1) Discouraging birders with learning disabilities. I know birders with learning challenges who will be deeply discouraged by having to relearn the names of so many birds after struggling so long to learn them the first time. (2) Dual accepted names. Many of the species whose names would be changed are also Old Word species; it is unlikely their English-language names will be changed throughout their global ranges. Such species will therefore have two accepted names: one in Europe, Africa, Asia, etc., and another in North and South America."
Ulisses Caramaschi	Rio de Janeiro			Brazil	12/1/23	"I think that it is obvious!"
R Lee	Burbage	ENG	Le10 2dz	UK	12/1/23	"It's the right thing to do"
Jeri Sjoberg	Reno	NV	89509	US	12/1/23	"I am signing this petition because I agree with all of the information included in the petition. In addition, it will not be easy for us older biologists and birding enthusiasts to relearn 150+ common names of birds within our lifetimes. I also find it interesting that eponymous names used in the specific epithet of several species of birds will not be changed due to a stricter set of rules defined by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (eg., Bullock's Oriole (<i>Icterus bullockii</i>), Ross's Goose (<i>Anser rossii</i>), and Thick-billed Longspur (<i>Rynchophanes mccownii</i>). This highlights inconsistencies with this new naming effort and fails to address the original intent of changing the names in the first place, and whatever perceived offense associated with the common name will remain in the scientific name. Maybe the renaming of so many bird species was not as well thought out as it could have been."
Kathryn Grandison	Cedar City	UT	84720	US	12/1/23	"This would be too confusing. Please leave the names as they are."

Richard Heil	Peabody	MA	1960	US	12/2/23	"This is the first time (starting with Oldsquaw and McCown's Longspur) in history that bird's names were changed for radical Leftist woke religious purposes, that is, for POLITICAL rather than scientific reasons. All being done by an unelected self-appointed authority. There is no rational reason to eliminate eponymous bird names. You also should judge historical figures based on today's moral standards."
Richard Heil	Peabody	MA	1960	US	12/2/23	"... should NOT judge historical ..."
John Talent			2154	Australia	12/2/23	"Changing the names of birds on this occasion would be a precedent for future changes, such as frivolously renaming taxa after political leaders. Stability of names brings great rewards, but it has not been well demonstrated that the unpalatable names cause very much of a problem."
Samuel Sweet	Santa Barbara	CA	93106	US	12/2/23	"The current paroxysm of cancel culture reminds me most of Stalin's airbrushing pogroms. It is an utter disservice as applied to 'bird names' for Chrissakes. History will be most unkind to you, and the long-established names will continue to be used. You are "engaging more people", indeed, but they are not those you want to encourage."
John Sullivan	Ithaca	NY	14850	US	12/2/23	"Changing these names will cause widespread confusion and inconvenience while advancing "equity" not one iota."
Rachel Lachow	Reisterstown	MD	21136	US	12/2/23	"The reasons to not change the names makes a lot of sense to me!"
Travis Williams	Portland	OR	97202	US	12/2/23	"I believe we should learn from the past, and approach this matter with more thoughtfulness. Address truly problematic names on a case by case basis."
Josh Bruening	Fort Collins	CO	80525	US	12/2/23	"I'm signing because of the broad overreach that the AOS board has engaged in. I'm signing because in an effort to be more inclusive, the AOS has created a deeper divide than existed previous to the announcement. I'm signing to combat the trolls and weaklings of the world that see this only as some left-leaning, "woke" blah, blah, blah: Of the people I know that have signed this already, there are just as many bleeding-heart liberals as staunch conservatives. I'm signing because the AOS ALLOWED this news to go out to the world and ALLOWED the media to paint every single name associated with a bird as racists and every other negative. Not only the people the birds are named after, but the utter vitriol being spewed by some at others who have disagreed in a public forum on this matter is abhorrent. Shame on you, AOS. I'm not opposed to litigating in a thoughtful way. I'm not opposed to changing any name that is derogatory or the person does not deserve the honorific. I do think we need to do what we can to make this a more diverse and inclusive hobby. This couldn't be further from what is needed. The scientific names will remain. The IOC won't honor this. What a monumental swing and a miss from the AOS!?! The entire board should resign. Shame on you, AOS!"
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/2/23	"Very well stated"
Joel Geier	Corvallis	OR	97330	US	12/3/23	"I don't agree with everything in this petition, but I support the call to reconsider this direction. I'm a strong supporter of diversity, equity and inclusion in birding, but this move by the AOS is fundamentally lazy. The AOS could make a much stronger statement by announcing a plan to review all of these eponymic names on a case-by-case basis, state clearly the reasons for specific changes, and then defend those decisions. In so doing, the AOS could actually acknowledge that there have been some bad actors in the history of American ornithology. This move is more like "punting on third down" on the real issues, and seems like a bureaucratic move to sweep everything under the same rug. Yes, Audubon is a problematic figure, but is Georg Steller really in the same category? If the AOS really wants to show its commitment to fixing errors of the past, it should face up to those errors, one by one. Otherwise this seems like one of those non-apologies: "Sorry for anything we did that might have offended you." It's pathetic."

Charles Gates	Powell Butte	OR	97753	US	12/3/23	"No thought was given to the overwhelming amount of work that will be required by people who track birds on spreadsheets and databases, create various checklists or bird lists, have websites or blogs that will have to be revised. It will take days for me to change these names in my various items. And then we do it all again next year. For what? I suspect that this woke movement would have had a short shelf life had the AOS decided to ponder this for a while and to gauge the opinions of regular people. This move has all the earmarks of a rush to action before changing of eponyms loses its 15 minutes of fame and is dropped for the next woke fad."
Steve Howell	Bolinas	CA	94924	US	12/3/23	"Along with most of the thinking world, I don't think re-writing history has ever been a good thing. Moreover, the disruption caused does not help birds, and they need all the help they can get in this time of burgeoning anthropogenocide."
Burr Heneman	Point Reyes Station	CA	94956	US	12/3/23	"I agree completely with the statement of the petition."
Linda Castor	Norman	OK	73071	US	12/3/23	"I agree with the issues brought forth in the petition."
Janet Swihart	Randle		98377	US	12/4/23	"What are you people doing?"
Donald wleklinski	Terre Haute	IN	47803	US	12/4/23	"Needs attention."
Ashley Quinn				US	12/4/23	"As a natural history collections manager with a strength in ornithology, the arbitrary renaming of many bird species based on someone's feelings is counter to actual science. A speciation has not occurred, a reappointment in systematics has not occurred, and no genomic information is new. Whatever current political correct fad that is festering should not have any influence on SCIENCE."
Alasdair Hunter	Denholm		J8N 9B2	Canada	12/4/23	"I am against the removal of eponymous bird names. For one thing, not all those whose names were attached to an avian species were guilty of inappropriate/evil behaviour. Secondly, removing the name does not correct the wrong doing and nor does it inform the birding public of the wrong doing, or remove the damage done. Better to leave the name but publicize the damage done (a role for the AOC?) Finally it will add to the complexity of the variability in current bird name usage and use of guide books already in hand"
Jim McCormac	Columbus		43235	US	12/4/23	"Thank you for launching this petition. I think it's important to demonstrate that many people oppose the abrupt and sweeping changes to English bird names as currently proposed. It should be abundantly clear to anyone who has followed this, and viewed pros and cons, that the way that this came about, and the details of the proposal, were not clearly thought out. I like I suspect many others, am not opposed to selectively changing names that honor certain particularly bad actors or possibly people who had nothing whatsoever to do with ornithology or the discovery of the bird in question. However, clear parameters as to what warrants a change in eponymous names need to be established. A blanket removal of them all is entirely unsatisfactory in my view. Furthermore, the AOS line that it would be "too much work" to individually vet names is a complete cop out. After all, some if not many of the people slated for removal spent much of their lives furthering our knowledge of natural history. It's only fair to give due diligence to them and that's not been done. In my opinion, this proposal needs tabled, and rethought with a greater input, including people with expertise in the biographies of the people in question."
Michael Hurben	Bloomington	MN	55438	US	12/4/23	"Absolutely well said Jim."
John Gerwin	Raleigh	NC	276061638	US	12/4/23	"This was handled in an extremely poor, dictatorial manner. So much for "inclusion"."

Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/5/23	"Indeed, I just read Jon Dunn's account of AOS's cancellation of the North American Classification and Nomenclature Committee (link on first page of petition) The AOS have disavowed their own operational guidelines: "The committee prefers to act conservatively in its treatments of taxonomy and nomenclature; thus, proposals that suggest but do not strongly support taxonomic change, or that cause instability" https://americanornithology.org/about/committees/nacc/ "
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/5/23	"After reading Jon Dunn's account of AOS's cancellation of the North American Classification and Nomenclature Committee (link on first page of petition) we can see how this is not only a purge of eponyms, but also an ageist purge of the "stuff" nomenclature committee The AOS have disavowed their own operational guidelines: "The committee prefers to act conservatively in its treatments of taxonomy and nomenclature; thus, proposals that suggest but do not strongly support taxonomic change, or that cause instability" https://americanornithology.org/about/committees/nacc/ It seems this was no longer acceptable to the woke activists who declare all must be changed, NOW, even when it makes no sense. Other regions have said no, and the Zoological group (who decide Latin binomials) have said no."
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/5/23	"Evolution is by definition exclusionary and ableist. DEI has absolutely no business here. Biophobes can go ruin the humanities instead."
Nancy Mumpton	Chandler	AZ	85248	US	12/5/23	"strongly support diversity and inclusion in the birding community but disagree with this decision."
Harry Power	Stockett	MT	59480	US	12/5/23	"The officers of the AOS are out of control and are engaging in actions totally contrary to the spirit and traditions of American ornithology not only in this action but in their attitude of total contempt for the blood, sweat and tears of prior generations of ornithologists. They should be forced to resign, not only as officers but also as members of the AOS."
Thomas Schultz	Green Lake	WI	54941	US	12/6/23	"I believe the decision to eliminate all eponymous bird names is going way too far. I can understand the reasoning behind getting rid of some, but there are many good reasons to retain most of these names -- including not feeling like we should be forcing this onto other parts of the world, which we would be doing."
Isabel Raymundo González			22800	Mexico	12/6/23	"Firmo porque la historia buena o mala es parte de la construcción de un mejor futuro. Las aves son de todos; y nos han enseñado que no existen barreras."
Tracy Allard	Whitehorse		Y1A	Canada	12/6/23	"¡Gracias!"
Danielle Fournier	Austin	TX	78729	US	12/6/23	"You don't just throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Case-by-case is the only way."
Robert Hamilton	Long Beach	CA	90806	US	12/6/23	"This issue does NOT "neatly track" politically. Do you honestly believe that the nearly 1,000 signers of this petition are, for the most part, politically conservative? I don't doubt that those who pushed the hardest for the BN4B petition are generally quite liberal, but I am confident there's a much larger number of liberal birders who oppose the AOS's response to the petition just as strongly as you do. Across-the-board removal of all eponymous common bird names is probably the worst way the AOS leadership could have chosen "to address past wrongs and engage far more people in the enjoyment, protection, and study of birds." The powerful and multifaceted arguments against this hasty and highly reactive decision, set forth by so many experienced and respected AOS members, can't simply be swept under the rug. If AOS leadership insists on pushing through this indiscriminant cleanse, it will be a huge stain on American ornithology and a disservice to the AOS membership. It's not too late for responsible leaders to reconsider and salvage the organization's reputation.""

Alexandre Aleixo	Ananindeua			Brazil	12/7/23	"Because amongst those common names that will be suppressed, many were given as tributes to many people who devoted their lives to the bird faunas of South America, ornithologists such as Emilie Snethlage, a trail blazer in Neotropical ornithology who was one of the first women to obtain their PhD in the northern hemisphere and who adopted Brazil as her country, working tirelessly to improve the knowledge of the country's avifauna. Others were environmental activists like Chico Mendes, who was assassinated at home for championing the cause of small farmers in Brazilian Amazonia. This decision to suppress all eponyms is a "one-size fits all" measure that ignores very important subtleties and which will do a disservice to suppress the memory of many people who made a huge difference as ornithology champions and supporters across the globe."
chris rose	melrose	SCT	TD6 OSH	UK	12/7/23	"Eponymous Bird names have been used for decades if not centuries with no discernable ill effects on anyone in the birding fraternity. They also recognise the often pioneering work these people did in classification and a better understanding of ornithology. Whatever else their role in history, which is documented elsewhere for anyone with an interest, the names of birds should not be changed. These people can and in some cases have been denounced for their unsavoury part in human history, but leave the Bird names alone, please. Ornithology was almost always done with a rifle rather than binoculars, which if they existed were of poor enough quality to be almost useless for the task, so does that mean that many of the avid Ornithologists of the 1800s who did so much to further our understanding of ornithology should be wiped from history too? Names such as Verreaux, Moussier, Guldenstatd, Ross and many others will be lost from history and we will all be the poorer for it. Stop this woke, PC nonsense now!"
Philip Espin	Louth		Lincs	UK	12/7/23	"I support the idea that species names should only be changed with good reason on a case by case basis. I am concerned that an action that will affect the global birding community is being taken without the broad support of our global community. Time for a birding UN?"
Alan Childs	Bexley	ENG	DA52AR	UK	12/7/23	"This another ludicrous decision relating to wokism. Complete madness."
Brian Short	Hastings	ENG	TN38	UK	12/7/23	"I do not support the name changes due to historic implied wrong doings. I do not understand how the change will increase interest in birds."
Tracey Mc keever	london	ENG	sw3 5ay	UK	12/7/23	"what a total waste of money on woke idiots who have nothing to do GET A JOB"
Brian Hedley	Gainsborough	ENG	DN21	UK	12/7/23	"The existing names give a sense of history and place to some birds."
Keith Bennett	Newtownards	NIR	BT22 1DS	UK	12/7/23	"An unnecessary distraction from more important issues in bird taxonomy and names; works against recent efforts for more global co-operation in bird names"
Patrick Lee	King's Lynn, Norfolk	ENG	PE318BU	UK	12/7/23	"Unwanted!"
Steve Watson	Hibaldstow	ENG	DN209QE	UK	12/7/23	"So just to make their mark they want to make 1000's of books wrong!!! - Young folks are just being educated in the names so we shouldn't change what is broken unless thing need the odd tweak IE Hegde Sparrow to Dunnock"
Diego Calderon				Colombia	12/7/23	"Erasing history is never been good..."
John Mariani	Porter	TX	77365	US	12/7/23	"I totally agree that there are a lot of liberal birders who disagree with AOS decision, and I know that most of the signers of this petition are liberals, not conservatives. The Left is split on this issue, as it is not monolithic, with both moderates and more extreme ideologues. On the conservative side, opinion is not split. I ran a poll with 94 respondents in a birding group on a conservative platform and had only 1 vote in favor of the AOS decision. I think it does neatly track with the political divide, on the left that divide is just more nuanced."
Patricia Hamilton	Dalry	SCT	KA24 5EH	UK	12/8/23	"This nonsense needs to stop, what's next for God's sake"

Martha Wild	San Diego	CA	92104	US	12/8/23	"I'm signing because having to remember that many new names in a short time will be difficult and confusing. Especially for some of us older birders! It's hard enough sometimes to name the bird let alone remember the NEW name for the bird!!! Heck, I still call out Marsh Hawk whenever I see what everyone calls a Harrier now. Fine - change a few names, the egregious ones. And maybe, if you want, pick a few every couple of years that might benefit from a change. But otherwise leave well enough alone."
Adele Josepho	Homer	AK	99603	US	12/8/23	"Changing bird names should be made in consultation parties who have equity in the matter, on a case by case basis. Wholesale change of all names would be patronizing and as unsupportable as changing the names of all states, counties cities or streets or tearing down the White House or Capitol Building. Failing to reflect on individual changes may be expedient, but will remedy nothing. Reparations must be thoughtful and meaningful."
Caryl Earle	Nottingham		NG7	UK	12/9/23	"The World has gone mad - the energy being used to promote this pointless waste of time and money could and should be channelled into IMPORTANT things, such as species conservation."
Jennifer Quinn	Gate City	VA	24251	US	12/9/23	"for all the reasons stated in the Petition. I find it sad that politics has been allowed to infuse every aspect of American life."
France Davis	Portland	OR	97219	US	12/9/23	"Changing the name of a species should be based on scientific, not political, reasons. Ornithological history, in fact all of history, carries a lot of baggage. And the way to address that baggage is not to erase it, or cover it up, or re-name it. That accomplishes exactly....nothing. Not one racist law is overturned, not one racist's mind is changed, not one person's civil rights is restored. Another, but admittedly rather minor, concern: with the stated goal of re-naming a handful of species each year, the proposed effort will take a decade or more to complete. During this period, will the publishers of field guides put out a new edition every year, or every few years? Or will they wait until the entire effort has ended to revise their guides? Either way there are going to be an ever confusing mix of up-to-date and out-of-date field guides. How will this confusion possibly encourage new birders or foster inclusivity?"
France Davis	Portland	OR	97219	US	12/10/23	"And what's next? If accomplished, this opens the door for all sorts of complaints. For example, do we "honor" the states of Kentucky & Tennessee (where voting rights, women's rights, and minority rights are ignored or opposed) by naming warblers after them?"
Ivar Husa	Richland	WA	99352	US	12/10/23	"Changing so many names is pointless. Is there a soul out there who has ever found a reason to be offended by a bird's namesake? There are no "Hitler Albatrosses" or similar (Himmeler?) to take obvious offense at. Maybe write a book about the book to introduce us all to those whose names are (almost?) immortalized in bird names. Most of us have no clue who Kittlitz (Murrelet) is. Mostly though, we wouldn't care."
Pamela Heatherington	San Diego	CA	92128	US	12/10/23	"For the sake of transparency this should not be a small group's decision."
Town Peterson	Lawrence	KS	66045	US	12/10/23	"I disagree with the AOS's sweeping edict that is not transparent or representative."
Margaret Mamula	Cambridge Springs	PA	16403	US	12/11/23	"...reactionary name-changing without considering the many people it affects, or assuming that the new name will inherently better without careful consideration is flawed. Name by name change for truly offensive cases and studied consideration of new alternatives by an open forum will lessen the possibility of offending yet again."
Judith Rabi	New York	NY	10024	US	12/11/23	"Naming birds, renaming birds. The how of this, all important. Needs input from so many sources, not by riding roughshod over the many diverse voices of the birding community"
Dominic Chaplin			4870	Australia	12/11/23	"Why are they concentrating on the trivial matter of bird names. Surely it would make more sense to change the names of all streets, towns and cities named after people? Make a start with say Washington, assess the response from the small but vocal minority then decide if it really is such a good idea."

Martin Williams	Cheung Chau		0	Hong Kong	12/12/23	"I dislike too many often ill-considered changes to common names for birds. Multiple reasons; just seen comments by Jon Dunn - a level-headed chap, which seem valid. Also by Chris Goodie, inc the idea for "a strategy that will make birds IRRESISTIBLE to future generations" - I fully agree with this point; but naming by committee/ unduly detail obsessed individuals rarely works like this. [Thick-billed Longspur indeed seems a dull, utterly uninspired moniker. Ever tried reading some se Asian bird lists, with blue-throated this and thats; leave drab science for the Latin if need be, and have some of the joy of birding inc species' discoveries in the common names!]"
Jennifer Golden	Tustin	CA	92691	US	12/12/23	"Our history is our history. It is better to explain why we no longer name birds after people, including colonists and slaveholders, than to revise hundreds of names, destabilizing a system which has served us well."
Tim Kalbach	Greenville	SC	29607	US	12/12/23	"The birds don't know or care about all this human nonsense. I think if the AOS had stuck to changing names actually associated with historical villains rather than deciding to use a broad brush there would be almost no pushback or controversy. It's the over-reaching, self-righteous, we-know-better-what's-good-for-everyone attitude I'm seeing among the supporters of this movement that turns me off."
Michael Boatwright	Amherst	VA	24521	US	12/12/23	"I do not agree with all points in this petition nor with many of the comments from the original supporters. However, I do believe a more measured approach (case by case) with input from other stakeholders is needed."
Kirk Huffstater				US	12/12/23	"Read all the previous "Reasons for signing" they encompass my perspectives and more"
Ian McAllan			2074	Australia	12/13/23	"Renaming bird common-names en-masse makes more confusion and makes all field guides out-of-date. Not great for new birdwatchers starting out."
Robert Bochenek	Farmington		48331	US	12/13/23	"robert bochenek"
Robin Sexton	West Palm Beach	FL	33407	US	12/13/23	"I do not believe in grievance, resentment, and virtue signaling. Keep politics out of the beautiful and refined birding world, is anything sacred??"
Chris Gladwin			2023	Australia	12/13/23	"This will achieve the opposite of what the AOS seeks because it will turn people off birding when they can't find in the book the (new) name of the bird they have had pointed out. All those sign boards in Bird Blinds, web sites, leaflets, information signs would all either need a costly (and resource wasteful) update or cause confusion. When people see confusion, they disengage."
dawn nelson	ELSTED, MIDHURST	ENG	GU29 0LA	UK	12/13/23	"I can't see why it is needed and will mean a lot of people, will get very confused. All the old books (many of which are expensive and will last for decades, will become useless."
David Ludlow	Royal Leamington Spa	ENG	CV31	UK	12/13/23	"Woke nonsense"
Gary Motta	Brookings	OR	97415	US	12/14/23	"I am sure that too many people would disagree with this decision, especially older folks like me who would be challenged to relearn all the changes."

Aidan Sinha	San Jose	CA	95138	US	12/14/23	<p>"Here are several articles/writing pieces discussing the changing bird names. The first two are from legallyblindbirding, both posted by Van Remsen to the Louisiana birding listserve. The third is a letter from Kevin Winker explaining his decision to leave the AOS. https://legallyblindbirding.net/2023/11/08/bird-names-and-barriers/ https://legallyblindbirding.net/2023/11/10/bird-names-and-barriers-part-ii/ https://www.universityofalaskamuseumbirds.org/winker-resigns-from-the-american-ornithological-union/"</p> <p>"I signed this and am opposed to removing all eponymous bird names for the following reasons: 1. If all eponymous bird names were to be removed, it would disrupt the stability of the current bird names and the birding community in general. Many birdwatchers would be confused by the new names, and it would also result in major, complicated changes to field guides and other resources like eBird for reasons that are unnecessary from a scientific point of view. Also, as noted in the petition, the IOU will not remove eponymous bird names, which will result in even more confusion since bird species with eponyms will consequently have various different names from different organizations. Finally, it will - and has - caused major divides in the birding community - 2 members of the NACC have already resigned due to this, and the comments on this petition and elsewhere show the clear divide this action has resulted in. 2. Also, purging all eponyms from bird names will result in some of these people being unjustly shamed and hated. As others have noted, news organizations have effectively been saying that all people who have birds named after them are racist, even though some were good people, such as Alexander Wilson (known as the "Father of American Ornithology") and Georg Wilhelm Steller. While some people with eponyms were people who do not deserve to be recognized or honored, other people were truly worthy of this. 3. In addition, this project to rename eponymous bird names will utilize a large amount of time and resources that could be used to protect and conserve birds and their habitats, which are in severe danger due to climate change and other human-caused factors. For example, 1,000 migratory songbirds were killed earlier this year in a single night because of a single building in Chicago. This is just one of many major issues that need to be addressed to help protect migratory birds from extinction. The birds will not care what names we give them, but will be affected by the dangers facing them today. 4. Finally, this project was decided on by the AOS through a severely biased decision-making process. The NACC and SACC had near-unanimous consent on changing eponymous bird names through evaluation and discussion on each eponym rather than simply going through with a blanket purge, but this idea was ignored by the AOS. Also, both committees were in favor of starting a poll amongst birders regarding the issue, but as Van Remsen posted to the Louisiana birding listserve, "The EBNC report was fine with a polling system for choosing new English names but when it came to polling AOS members on whether the changes were a good idea in the first place crickets". The AOS and their committee for the changing of bird names (the EBNC) essentially chose to make the massive decision of changing eponymous bird names themselves, rather than asking the general birding community for their opinions on the matter. In addition, the committee formed specifically by AOS (the EBNC) to make decisions on the changing of bird names was very biased towards removing eponyms in bird names. At least several of the members were extremely opposed to eponyms, and the only one on the committee that was not opposed had very little influence over the proceedings. Van Remsen also posted to the Louisiana listserve that "Our token NACC representative on the EBNC reported that she was repeatedly dismissed, ignored, and was openly dismayed about the futility of disagreeing with the rest of the committee". This means the committee was at least dominated by, if not entirely composed of, people opposing eponymous bird names, and that the decision to change bird names was therefore incredibly biased and should be reversed. Overall, I believe that eponymous bird names should not be changed without the full input of birders from around the country, and that AOS should create a poll for birders to provide their feedback and thoughts on the changes."</p> <p>"Here are several articles/writing pieces discussing the changing bird names. The first two are from legallyblindbirding, both posted by Van Remsen to the Louisiana birding listserve. The third is a letter from Kevin Winker explaining his decision to leave the AOS. https://legallyblindbirding.net/2023/11/08/bird-names-and-barriers/ https://legallyblindbirding.net/2023/11/10/bird-names-and-barriers-part-ii/ https://www.universityofalaskamuseumbirds.org/winker-resigns-from-the-american-ornithological-union/"</p>
Ian Bentley	Farsley	ENG	LS28 5HX	UK	12/14/23	"Let's keep the names we know and are used to."

Gregory Hanisek	Waterbury	CT	6708	US	12/15/23	"Decisions by purportedly scientific organizations should not be driven by political considerations"
Jalna Jaeger	Norwalk	CT	6851	US	12/15/23	"Leave the names alone. Too many changes! Just NO!"
VISHNUPRIYAN KARTHA			682022	India	12/16/23	"I am comfortable with the long standing names many of which have a poetic touch to it though they may err on the side of political correctness ,and also unnecessary sanitization of named not warranted, I feel..."
Barry Walker	Cusco		cusco	UK	12/16/23	"I will fight this until the end. Apart from honoring deserved people the secrecy involved in what is purportedly a democratic society seems like dirty politics. I believe eponyms add glamor to bird names instead of just gray this, blackish that and who are we to judge on historical figures of the distant past. History is history and writing a new convenient history does not sit well with me. In different times different realities existed. Leave history and romantic bird names alone or at minimum judge on a case by case basis (this would get messy)"
Robert Hamilton	Baton Rouge	LA	70808	US	12/16/23	"Althoug I never thought that non-descriptive names was a good idea, I do not believe changing them for non-descriptive reasons is a good idea either. Are we about birds or are we about other things?"
Barry Tillman	Natchez	MS	39120	US	12/17/23	"The cancellation of all eponymous bird names is a bad solution to a non-problem. A true passion and thrill for studying birds should not be significantly impacted by the names of the objects of study. Ornithology is a science, and rigorous scientific pursuits require working on a higher plane—not squabbling over names. The focus should be on the real problems at hand in the world of birds. Men and women of science should not be virtue signaling. This is particularly appalling when the virtues being signaled are not virtues at all. How is it virtuous to paint with a broad prejudicial brush and sweep all eponymous bird names into a single bin of shame? How is it virtuous not to use due process and take the time and intellectual effort to sort through the names? How is it virtuous to not honor those of significant achievement? How is it virtuous to ignore the role of recognition based on merit and accept the inevitable mediocrity that follows? The heavy-handedness of the process whereby the AOS “decided” to cancel all eponymous bird names is distressing. The unanimous rejection by the AOS Checklist Committee should have put the process on pause. Efforts to reach a consensus should have been pursued instead of issuing a dictum impacting countless birders who had no say in the matter"
Jon Andrew	Arlington	VA	22209	US	12/17/23	"Too broad a scope - poor involvement of the bird community. Needs to be a slower more thoughtful consideration."
Jane Ruster	East Tawas	MI	48730	US	12/17/23	"{"videoUrl":"https://customer-g2wndu9j9b1p498o.cloudflarestream.com/c7bb24615fetc2af06d631af2c5465ff/downloads/default.mp4","cloudflareUid":"c7bb24615fetc2af06d631af2c5465ff"}"
Michael Hurben	Bloomington	MN	55438	US	12/18/23	"Very well said."
CHRISTINE SELEMBBA	LUTON	ENG	LU2 7HB	UK	12/18/23	"What next, leave the names alone."
James Remsen	Saint Gabriel	LA	70776	US	12/18/23	"Terrific synopsis"
Richard Cimino	Larkspur	CA	94904	US	12/18/23	"Because we had a procedure that worked. I feel that the procedure was hijacked to satisfy individual egos, canceling out the input of the over all birding community."

James Seelhorst	Louisville	KY	40207-2225	US	12/18/23	"Let's be clear. The impetus behind the move to change eponymous bird names for the sake of diversity, equity, inclusion is really the practical extension of a deeper ideological movement at work. The rational is rooted in critical race theory, which along with feminism in general, is rooted in critical theory. Critical theory is merely the application of Marxist ideas regarding power, class, economic status, etc. to society as a whole. In this light, it is an effort to make Marxism more palatable to the public at large. In reality, the efforts amount to nothing more than the confiscation and exploitation of race and gender by Marxist theorists for a deeper political agenda. It's easy to identify these Marxist "birds" and their efforts by their calls; hence, the mixture of derogatory epithets – racist, misogynist, capitalist, colonialist, imperialist, white privilege, or any combination of the above, etc. Deep down their pogroms to revise our history regarding race and gender actually express their ultimate true hatred of anything capitalist, our representative democracy, and our constitutional republic. Ironically, this movement has become a McCarthyism from the political left. Opposing voices of reason asking for grace and forgiveness, which are rooted in theological concepts, will fall on depth ears. For Marxist theorists, whose guiding principles are based on humanism, don't believe in God, and in fact consider such a belief part of the problem. I oppose ANY removal of eponymous names as an effort of D.E.I. The eponyms were given for contributions to ornithology, not for wrongdoing. Indeed, NONE of us are without wrongdoing of some sort (pick a cause). Only those without any wrongdoing may cast the first stone."
John McCormack	Los Angeles	CA	90042	US	12/19/23	"I'm not against common names changing. In fact, if you flip open a bird book from the early 1900s, you see that bird names have changed a lot. This, however, is bad process. The process could very easily proceed on a case-by-case basis, which should satisfy most people. The argument that "oh, it would be too hard to judge, so therefore we must do all of them" is a *total cop out* and actually makes no logical sense. If you are saying you can judge that all eponyms must go, then surely you can judge them on a case-by-case basis. That would instill much more trust in the process. As is, this was a huge overreach by AOS."
Alan Lewis				Guam	12/19/23	"I'm signing because AOS board has no jurisdiction in this matter and has not sought consensus with other organisations or its members. Further, these changes will have widespread consequences well beyond North America. I support changes to eponymous names where those individuals are clearly not worthy of recognition."
Helen Larson	Sydney		2015	Australia	12/20/23	"What a ridiculous idea."
Michael Hurben	Bloomington	MN	55438	US	12/20/23	"Well said."
Connor Williams	Syracuse	NY	13261	US	12/20/23	"Its a load of horseshit. This ruins birding for me and for all!!!!"
Barbara Buck	Apache Junction	AZ	85119	US	12/22/23	"Relevant bird features makes it more educational than memorizing a person's last name."
Betsy Checchia	Albuquerque	NM	87105	US	12/22/23	"The history of these names should not be lost."
Michael Brady	Ballwin	MO	63021	US	12/22/23	"Many of the bird names in line to be changed to offer up a neutral or "pc" list is just to many and will not achieve the desired effect it is trying to do."
Pat Goltz	Tucson	AZ	85740	US	12/22/23	"I am not in favor of catering to the DEI overlords. I have encountered highly confused birders because of the few name changes that usually occur. The eponymous bird names should not be tampered with. But while we are at it, revert the Rivoli's Hummingbird back to "Magnificent Hummingbird.""
Robert Hunt	Prescott	AZ	86303	US	12/22/23	"I am all in favor of well-thought out name changes, like changing names for some birds named after proven racists and other creepy people of the past, regardless of their ornithological contributions and skills, but this action by the AOS is arbitrary and reactionary. I'd be more impressed if the AOS started assigning names for birds given to them by the first people to actually see them and name them: locals and indigenous pre-colonial peoples. Case-by-case will take time, but it avoids the AOS leadership's arrogation."

David Wallington	Hornsey		N8	UK	12/23/23	"I'm sick of history being rewritten."
Melissa Kelly	Etowah	TN	32561	US	12/23/23	"The original names come with history that provides significant information on the birds, and the evolution of birding and conservation."
BEVERLEY MORRIS	leicestershire	ENG	le67 9wb	UK	12/26/23	"WHY?"
Carolyn Wright	Montgomery	AL	36109	US	12/26/23	"This is the stupidest thing I've ever heard of! There is no need to change the bird names."
Edna Caudle	Warrior	AL	35180	US	12/26/23	"At my age, it will be very hard to remember so many name changes."
Diana Whatley		FL	33907	US	12/26/23	"Changes should be made on a case by case basis, if actually needed."
Angie Baggett	Evergreen	AL	36401	US	12/27/23	"You can never make EVERYONE happy. Why would you even try? Every socially different group has a very different view on every topic. Leave current bird names alone. Get to to more important job of saving them!!"
Kenneth Wills	Hoover	AL	35226	US	12/29/23	"Removing all people's names from bird names is an extreme way to address concerns about a few people who had some faults, but even those imperfect people (remember we all have faults) deserve to be recognized for their historical contributions to ornithology."
Terry Doyle	Anchorage	AK	99516	US	1/1/24	"I believe AOS made a poor decision that needs to be reversed. This petition presents a better alternative that should be adopted."
Lauren Maas	Pooler	GA	31322	US	1/3/24	"We love birds"
Greg Levandoski	Longmont	CO	80501	US	1/4/24	"I support the removal of eponymous bird names and always have since I started biriding 30 years ago. Naming an entire species after an individual of another species is simply vanity. However, I do not support the AOS's proposed plan to do so. Renaming 80 species at a time will be disruptive, but more importantly I feel that we should not reward the profane Twitter loudmouths who spurred this on with vulgarities, an utter lack of civility, and strong-arm tactics. We, the birding and bird conservation community, are better than this. Yes, please, let's rename them all, but via a process with calm, careful consideration, and respect for each other."
Paul Matthews	Rancho Palos Verdes	CA	90275	US	1/5/24	"neo puritannical attitudes do not lead to any good, instead of changing the facade/names/outfit the un-sustainable system we are living in need to be changed radically not only aesthetically"
chris balchin	essex	ENG	co11 2ru	UK	1/7/24	"I do not think it is a good idea, infact it seems to create more problems than it solves."
Jesús Molinari	Merida			Venezuela	1/7/24	"The AOU ideologists are creating a nomenclature chaos and disrespecting Latin American ornithologists."

Brooke McDonald	Redding	CA	96001	US	1/8/24	"I could say a lot here. I will confine myself to a few thoughts: These people were our spiritual and intellectual ancestors. Maybe some of them were "bad," but almost to a man, they had a passion for natural exploration and they did so at personal cost and risk. This thing we do, they pioneered it. Who among us, with the values we have now and knowing what we know now, would not jump at the chance to be part of the Lewis and Clark expedition (with the attendant baggage of Manifest Destiny) or Darwin's travels (with the attendant baggage of scientific racism)? Is this going to end at the names of people, or are we going to get rid of bird names that reference, say, the Catholic church or colonial states that don't exist anymore? Finally, and I haven't seen this point made by anyone else, non-birders already think bird names are a joke, and beginning birders already struggle with bird names that in many cases are a letter or two apart or frustratingly synonymous. Streaked, lined, barred, marbled, dotted, undulated, scalloped, scaly, speckled, stippled, spotted, striped, striated, striolated. There are over 200 species in the world with common names that start with "yellow." When you think of a white-throated kingbird and a white-chinned kingbird, does the same mental image come to mind? It's hard enough to get people to care about the conservation of charismatic animals with "good" names. It's even harder to get people to care about the small, skulking, and non-descript creatures with unimaginative names. Of the, what, 50-odd species that are proposed for re-naming, how many are going to wind up with adjective-body part-taxon names? Grace's Warbler is a lovely name for a lovely bird. Will it be as lovely when it's the Yellow-fronted Warbler?"
Stennie Meadours	Bacliff	TX	77518	US	1/8/24	"Bird names will be more appropriate AND accepted by birders when given careful and thoughtful consideration."
Patricia Armfelt	New Castle		19720	US	1/9/24	"It's ridiculous"
vicky vicars	Cleveland	TN	37311	US	1/10/24	"It's ridiculous to do this!"
janet ebaugh	Coulee Dam	WA	99116	US	1/10/24	"The destabilization of 150 English bird names is unprecedented. We believe that such a momentous decision that affects the English names used by many thousands of people requires listening to a diversity of voices rather than a few."
Thomas Miko				US	1/10/24	"They are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Sure, some of the 19th century ornithologists were bad people, but many others were not, so throwing out all of the eponyms is either laziness, or something worse."
John Groves	El Paso	TX	79932	US	1/11/24	"Case by case is the way!!! What hell did MacGillivray do?"
Frank O'Connor	Nedlands		6009	Australia	1/11/24	"Fixing 0.0001% of eponymous names in general society does nothing. It is fixing a problem that doesn't exist."
Patty Heyden	El Cajon	CA	92021	US	1/11/24	"I do not. believe that birds named after their discoverer have anything to do with racism or inconclusion"
Cody Porter	Jackson	MI	49201	US	1/12/24	"So true"
Pat Goltz	Tucson	AZ	85740	US	1/12/24	"They would be tampering with people's internal database bigtime! We don't need that kind of tyranny in the birding world. Common names should never be changed. They can mess with scientific names all they want, but only to choose the earliest synonym, nothing more."
Pat Goltz	Tucson	AZ	85740	US	1/12/24	"I have no desire to associate with Darwin, but I agree with you otherwise. Why not credit the discoverer of a bird, with the common name? If he never saw one, don't name the bird after him."
Pat Goltz	Tucson	AZ	85740	US	1/12/24	"I should add: this proposed action would mess with the inner databases of birders in an unprecedented way, and wreak total confusion. But I mentioned reverting the name of the hummingbird. One wonders if Rivoli ever even saw a Magnificent Hummingbird. Reserve eponymous names for the people who first described them."
April Barnes	Anchorage	AK	99507	US	1/12/24	"This is a stupid political idea and waste of time effort and money and has nothing to do with protecting our feathered friends."

Martin Tucker	Hartley Wintney	ENG	rg27 8pp	UK	1/12/24	"Who are these fools wanting to fiddle with our language? Go back to train spotting and leave our birds alone."
Alan Craig	Guayaquil			Ecuador	1/13/24	"I am signing for many reasons but one of the main reasons, as emphasized by others, is that the name changes will require huge money expenditures that should be spent for land acquisition or other projects to benefit bird populations. The affected agencies and organizations should seriously consider a lawsuit to reverse the decision of the AOS leadership."
Douglas Sheeley	Omaha	NE	68127	US	1/13/24	"Unless blatantly offensive, naming conventions which honor men's and women's contributions to science are not universally offensive and should not be treated as such. In addition, AOS should encourage and respect input from others before enforcing such changes. To not do so is as intolerant and offensive as the very small number of eponyms that may require adjustment."
Norm Grant				US	1/13/24	"I see no reason, or need, to change the nomenclature of the birds. While the names might not be "politically correct", they're still a part of history that shouldn't be allowed to be changed."
Lisa Feldman	Grove City	OH	43123	US	1/13/24	"Science must win the day over domination of patriarchy past."
James Wilkinson	Columbia	MD	21045	US	1/13/24	"A complete purge of all eponymous bird names is unnecessary and unwise. The renaming process will cause confusion and remove many references to the ornithological history of North America. Also I do not know what happens to the latinized species names. Will they also be removed?"
Connie Starcher	Columbus	OH	43230	US	1/13/24	"Name changes are unnecessary and moronic."
Lisa Whitehead	Lancaster	OH	43130	US	1/14/24	"The study of Ornithology is bigger than the current woke-ism. Vilifying past birders with no real scrutiny as to why is ridiculous."
Kathleen Bradley	Berea	OH	44017	US	1/14/24	"I want to continue to honor Anna Blackburne, English naturalist, with the Blackburnian warbler name. Also- too few choosing the new names."
Kyri Freeman	Barstow	CA	92311	US	1/14/24	"Specific names that are actively offensive should be changed, but the expense and difficulty of changing all of the names seems out of proportion to the benefit. I would prefer to see more active ways of increasing diversity among birders, such as outreach to young people in minoritized communities. I would also ask that the new names take into consideration uniqueness/memorability (please, please don't make Wilson's Warbler 'Black-capped Warbler'), representation of both the male and female bird, and aesthetic appeal, and use Native American names where practicable. Thank you for considering my comments."
Sandy McPhail	Columbia	NJ	7832	US	1/15/24	"Put this ridiculous amount of effort to cancel history into PROTECTING our birds! Changing names changes nothing. I will NOT use a different name that some "woke" idiot changes it to. Leave birds out of politics!!"
Stephen Brauning	Santo Domingo			Dominican Republic	1/15/24	"Because, where does it stop? Cornell will have to change their name. That Cornell guy, he was rich and conservative. Must have been the devil. The AOS will have to change its name - Amerigo Vespucci- you never know, maybe he had some moral flaw! So, just stop. It's just silly."
F Arthur McMorris	Bala Cynwyd	PA	19004	US	1/15/24	"I am confident that AOS had good intentions when proposing this change, but the proposed change is nonsensical. Some eponymous names probably should be removed, and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. But a blanket change of all eponymous names is unjustified and wrong-headed. There's an old expression for this sort of action: "Throwing out the baby with the bath water.""
Kim Springer	Hermitage	PA	16148	US	1/15/24	"I strongly feel that these names should NOT be changed!!! If we keep changing the history books, we will have nothing left to learn."
Joseph Pescatore	Washington	DC	56972	US	1/15/24	"There are far more meaningful and productive ways to address "racism" in America. Where does this all end?!? Who exactly is offended by "Wilson's Warbler", etc.? Let's please end this foolishness and move on to more important initiatives like saving critically endangered species."
Jeanette Jacobs	Reno	NV	89509	US	1/15/24	"I disagree that these names need to be changed. I see nothing negative about the eponymous names and that is how we all identify these birds."
Gavin Stacey	College Place	WA	99324	US	1/15/24	"We should not simply erase history based off today's standard. Unbelievable. Do better birding community"

GEORGE HUFF	Harrisburg	PA	17112	US	1/15/24	"I love the current names."
Ken Januski	Philadelphia	PA	19128	US	1/15/24	"Baby, bath water, it all has to go! Puritanism is always with us."
Anthony Metcalf	Moreno Valley	CA	92557-3527	US	1/15/24	"As a birder, academic and a progressive politically, I am signing this petition because of poor process, and the lack of inspection for unintended consequences in this decision."
Gabrielle de Benedictis	Santa Monica	CA	90405	US	1/15/24	"A case by case review of offensive names would be far better than a global purge."
Stephen Calvert	Bradford	ENG	BD6 2DD	UK	1/16/24	"Change the names? STUPID!"
Peter Lane	QuÃ©bec		G1G4B3	Canada	1/16/24	"Un changement complètement inutile !!!"
Claude Lalande	Montréal		H3G	Canada	1/16/24	"Il est important pour moi de ne pas faire table rase du passé. Chaque homme célèbre peut avoir sa part d'ombre. Ce n'est pas une raison pour qu'on le sorte de notre mémoire collective. Dans le cas qui nous occupe ici, il s'agit d'hommes qui ont beaucoup fait pour la science ornithologique, Jean-Jacques Audubon le premier. S'il-vous-plaît, préservons et honorons leur mémoire."
Susan Martin	Oceanside	CA	92054	US	1/16/24	"For three major reasons: 1) part of the tradition of the scientific study of birds was to honor those who have done the work and studied these birds and brought these birds into a greater understanding for prosperity. These honors should not be taken away due to potential offense by some imaginary person. 2) The amount of financial and human time involved in changing all the data collected all the information collected associated with specific names rewriting books is enormous. An enormous cost for a potential harm that doesn't actually exist.3) The change to these names is a totally knee-jerk reaction to political events. Those should not have a place in a scientific pursuit of the study of birds."
Peter Gordon	Lake Forest		92630	US	1/16/24	"Trying to rewrite history is wrong."
Ted Winterer	Santa Monica	CA	90405	US	1/16/24	"I'm about as woke as they come, former mayor of a progressive CA city. But this is too much and a complete overreach. Decide on names on a case by case basis. If Anna really offends someone because of her past, then consider changing the name of the hummingbird. Otherwise this initiative is at best silly."
Nancy Salem	Long Beach	CA	90803	US	1/17/24	"Bird names are memorized by Birders, and easily remembered when seen. Changing names may create confusion and perhaps data errors."
Phil Taylor	Crediton	ENG	EX17 5NQ	UK	1/17/24	"How bloody stupid. Don't these people have better things to do."
Pierre Poulin	Pabos		G0C2H0	Canada	1/17/24	"Changements en français inutiles."
Cheryl Overend	Laguna hills	CA	92653	US	1/17/24	"I agree with petition"
Janet Watton	Randolph Center	VT	5061	US	1/17/24	"This totally unnecessary set of changes puts a burden on all of us birders out there who have painstakingly over time learned all the names of the birds we observe. Now this starts that arduous process all over again. In addition, it necessitates our purchasing yet another bird guide. I would vouchsafe that none of us wince and grumble when we hear the name LINCOLN'S sparrow, BICKNELL'S thrush, CAPE MAY warbler, AUDUBON'S shearwater, WILSON'S snipe, etc. etc. We don't think of the nomenclator and who it was, even if we know, We are just glad we remember the NAME and associate it with the right bird. AOS should spend their time and efforts on more important projects than torturing all its thousands of "constituents.""

Bret Whitney				US	1/18/24	<p>"In the spirit of camaraderie, as all of us in this debate hold birds/birding/ornithology close to our hearts, I'll suggest that the lists of approximately 150 species with eponymous/problematical English names, plus all three of the Sayornis phoebes, because they were so named for Phoebe, a woman in Greek mythology (thus eponymous names), be made available online to the public in the form of a voting ballot. At the top of the ballot, following basic instructions for voting (how to use the ballot), there should be brief, general paragraphs summarizing the two opposing views, to the effect of, "Rationale for MAINTENANCE of an eponymous English name of a bird in the purview of the AOS" and a paragraph "Rationale for CHANGE of an eponymous English name of a bird in the purview of the AOS". [I'll offer a start on this, below.] Immediately below this should be the option for a voter to select "MAINTENANCE of ALL current AOS eponymous English names of birds" and the option "CHANGE of ALL current AOS eponymous English names of birds". Choosing either of these options represents a completed ballot. Next, on the voting ballot, beside each of the eponymous or problematical names, it would be fundamental to present a brief, historical or biographical sketch of the origin of the eponymous name. This "sketch" should include the reasoning presented by the describer for honoring that person/entity and any other positive attributes that may be known or presented, as well as specifics of any currently identified and equally clearly documented, negative attributes. Finally, beside each species, have two fields for voters to choose from: one MAINTAIN, the other CHANGE. Ask voters to be as complete as possible, rather than skip many species, but explain that it is fine to skip any species for which they do not have a strong opinion after considering the brief biographical information provided. I would suggest leaving the voting open for at least one month, but not more than two. I imagine AOS would get at least several hundred, possibly several thousand, completed ballots. I suppose there should be some way to verify the identity of voters and individual ballots such that no one could submit multiple ballots. I guess that could be accomplished through the AOS portal, in the manner used for society elections, even if the non-member public is participating heavily. Employing the above, or a similar, public voting protocol, would much more accurately identify which eponymous names the majority of the public (and us scientists, too!) wishes to see changed, and which are best left as is. It would be simple and transparent to present the results in a timely manner. If voting is not open to the general public — whether bird people or not — the AOS and the EBNC will have failed, right off the bat, in their stated goal to be available, inviting of diversity, and transparent. "Sticky or gray areas" are largely eliminated by making it clear, at the outset, that the majority will decide MAINTAIN or CHANGE, and science and culture will then forge ahead (mostly in tandem, we expect). Should social media groups spring up, attempting to garner large numbers in favor of MAINTAIN or CHANGE, then so be it — that is the "public culture" the AOS is living in, and trying to involve. If, in the future, some hold-outs cover their ears and refuse to use AOS English names, or attempt to come up with maverick names or naming protocols, then, again, so be it — maybe that would foster the idea of using scientific names more widely, certainly not a bad thing. PROPOSED DRAFTS, comment on amendments welcome: Rationale for MAINTENANCE of an eponymous English name of a bird in the purview of the AOS Application of eponyms is among the oldest traditions in all of descriptive science; it has endured through the centuries, and it continues strongly to this day. After all, people, not birds, play the naming game (birds could not care less). Eponyms in ornithology honor an individual/tribe/culture/entity, usually in recognition of one or more actions or characteristics pertinent to the introduction of a species of bird new to science, or to the elevation of a subspecies to species rank. Maintenance of eponymous names uniquely acts to preserve historical context, both of the discovery and study of species and of the field, museum, and conservation workers related to each. For better or for worse, birds now must look to us, human beings, for fostering their preservation, or fomenting their demise, for on their own, they can no longer affect either. Maintenance of these names, indeed all English names, whether deemed "accurate"/appropriate, or not, also is important in preserving stability of nomenclature. Rationale for CHANGE of an eponymous English name of a bird in the purview of the AOS The principal reasons proffered in support of expunging all eponymous English names of birds, are 1) focus should be on characteristics/habitat/geography of birds – their "natural essence" – and not on people; 2) it should not be implied that people can own a species of bird (as if use of the possessive apostrophe defines a physical "ownership" of a free-ranging species); 3) many of the birds having eponymous English names also have eponymous scientific names, which remain fixed by the ICZN (genitive case endings: ae for females, i for males), and this should be deemed a sufficient honor; and 4) some birds have been named in honor of reprehensible individuals or entities, whether viewed through the lens of their day or contemporarily. The recent</p>
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						case of McCown's Longspur (<i>Rhynchophanes mccownii</i>), changed to Thick-billed Longspur, is exemplary. In favor of vacating all eponymous English names, it has been voiced that the task of separating the reprehensibles from the imperfect/problematic through to the apparently deserving people involves too much "gray area," such that the best path forward is to simply change all eponymous English names. BretWhitney"
Jimmy Lee	kendall park	NJ	8824	US	1/18/24	"I don't think the eponyms need to be changed. as a birder of a minority people in USA I don't find the old names offensive nor an obstacle into professional or amateur ornithology in particular beyond other bias other than the history of the some people of 200 years ago. also the amateur/ birding community should have been given an opportunity for input and discussion of the issues. I only heard about the changes when it made the mass media."
jean-luc saint-marc	Pantin		93500	France	1/18/24	"L'air du temps n'est pas toujours le meilleur"
Michel Julien	Boucherville		J4B	Canada	1/18/24	"Changing the birds name won't improve anything"
Sonya Pastran	Calgary		t3h-4z3	Canada	1/19/24	"The amount of fighting within the community is crazy. Names should be changed on a case by case basis not as a grand political statement."
Sophie Hanrahan	Bath	ENG	BA1 4EJ	UK	1/20/24	"I think it is ridiculous woke bullshit!"
Hazel Fox	Leicester		LE3	UK	1/20/24	"To change somethings name is ridiculous, they should put the money they're using to change this into protecting them & raising awareness !"
valerie mallon	Swindon		SN1	UK	1/20/24	"NO !! NO !! NO!! WE MUST NOT ALLOW THIS !! THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS - BY SOCIOPATHIC HUMAN MONSTERS !!"
Lori Brumbaugh	Cleveland	OH	44125	US	1/20/24	"Don't erase the history of ornithology."
Melanie White	Nottingham	ENG	NG11 6AL	UK	1/20/24	"Stop this genocde now."
Tiffany Sprague	Phoenix	AZ	85015	US	1/20/24	"As a scientist and wildlife biologist, i am very much against this change. I fully support diversity, equity, and inclusion, but this is a superficial and ineffective idea on how to improve DEI that would, instead, have enormous effects on scientific research. Taxonomy and common names matter in science. It's tough enough to keep up with changing names of plants and animals. Let's not make that infinitely more difficult. Instead, let's focus our DEI efforts on things that will actually make a positive difference."
Nick Addey	Scarborough	ENG	YO12 7NJ	UK	1/20/24	"No need to change. Just leave the names as is."

Simon Mitchell	Goole	ENG	DN14 9BQ	UK	1/21/24	"Although I agree with changing eponymous names for people who were demonstrably immoral on a case-by-case basis, the AOS decision to rename 150+ species (60+ of which do not even breed in the US) without any wider consultation of its own members is a very poor decision. In particular, no birders from outside the US have been allowed to have any input - simply more cultural imperialism from the US foisted upon the rest of the world."
Lewis Erskine	Heltonville	IN	47436	US	1/21/24	"Naming birds happened one at a time over decades."
Elizabeth LaRue	Las Vegas	NV	89117	US	1/21/24	"Typical bureaucratic solution: one size fits all. Ridiculous."
Kenneth Able	McArthur	CA	96056	US	1/21/24	"There are many effective ways to promote diversity in our society. Sadly, this fool's errand is not one of them."
Craig Bechtloff	Panorama City	CA	91402	US	1/22/24	"It needs to be Done"
Javad GHARAMANI	New York	NY	10075	US	1/22/24	"Be reasonable. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."
Kelly Campbell		WA		US	1/22/24	"1. There are bigger things that need to be fixed. 2. These names are a part of birding culture. This is a ham-handed way to approach being diverse & inclusive that will actually change very little."
Julia Osborne	Woburn	MA	1801	US	1/22/24	"I think many of the current names are appropriate; only a few need to be changed."
Lawrence Field	Marblehead	MA	1945	US	1/22/24	"Some honorifics are honorably earned."
Pam Perry	Fairhaven	MA	2719	US	1/22/24	"It seems there might be a better way to address racism and prejudice. Erasing distasteful history doesn't correct it; studying it and learning from it might go a long way to never repeating our mistakes."
Sylvia Martin	Newton	MA	2459	US	1/22/24	"I'm signing this petition as a longtime birder, bird trip leader, birding organization board member, and professional editor of academic nonfiction including field guides. In my experience, revisionist historians usually throw the baby out with the bathwater. They are so intent on making their mark on a field (and, frankly, needing a thesis topic or a publication) that they underrate the major contributions to knowledge provided by the people whose names they would erase. From the earliest days of the political correctness movement, it has seemed to me that some of these agitators just don't have something more constructive to do. Surely some of the early bird studiers were not saints. That's only partly the point, in my view. They lived in their times, not ours. They shot birds so others could learn about those species, and perhaps did other things we moderns do not approve of. That doesn't mean they should be erased. We take their contributions along with their foibles and faults, for who has none of the latter? As for "Well, birds have changed names before": Not like this, not wholesale, and not for such weak reasons. Thus, with respect I oppose the renaming of eponymic birds."
Hubert d'Hondt			78110	France	1/23/24	"I do sign for the following reasons: 1) I do not support judging people from the past with today criteria; 2) changing so many names will result into many books becoming irrelevant resulting in turn into new books / versions to be printed. This is a cost for every birdwatcher. This is a waste of natural resources. Thanks & regards, Hubert."
Peggy Friar	Scarborough	ME	4074	US	1/23/24	"I don't agree with the decision to rename all birds with eponymous names because it dishonors people who have contributed to ornithology. This should be done on a case by case basis."
France Quintal	Otterburn Park		J3H 2M3	Canada	1/23/24	"There is a limit to the « politically correct »!!!!"
Jonathan Atwood	Marlborough	NH	3455	US	1/23/24	"I personally don't know anyone who is opposed to eliminating eponymous bird names that honor scoundrels. That's the right thing to do. But there are a lot of eponymous names that honor people who deserve the recognition. By taking the approach that the AOS has followed, where all birds that carry a person's name will be changed, without a careful review of that person's background (such as Van Remsen's recent posts are providing) makes no sense. The AOS policy of replacing all eponymous bird names is overkill - let's not 'throw the baby out with the bath water'."

Giuseppe Bernardo Micali	Milan		20146	Italy	1/24/24	"I find the reason behind the decision of AOS silly, most the persons quoted in the common names of birds are either quoted in the scientific names (which luckily could not go through this review) or as scientific authorities of first scientific descriptions. If the reason is not to offend birdwatchers I find this something like a discrimination between professional ornithologists which have the logical means to cope with discutibile biographies and birdwatchers which do not have the same capacity"
Peggy Friar	Scarborough	ME	4074	US	1/24/24	"Well said!"
Henry Streby	Toledo	OH	43537	US	1/26/24	"How much money do you think went into this decision? Hahahah"
Niels Poul Dreyer	Fuglebjerg			Denmark	1/26/24	"I think Woke has split our society and poisoned the political and social debate. We need to stand up and defend our history and be proud of our heritage."
Sandra Bondy	Scottsdale	AZ	85254	US	1/26/24	"I don't feel it necessary to rename birds that took time and memory exercise to learn. It is taking the pleasure out of birding. IMO"
Greg Jackson	Birmingham	AL	35244	US	1/28/24	"I disagree with this decision."
John Collins	Raritan	NJ	8869	US	1/30/24	"The AOS has gone too far and such name changes will erase many names of scientists and explorers who had a most positive effect on ornithology and as such, does a great disservice to those people. The AOS's moves are also a slippery slope -- where will it all end? It is divisive and quite frankly, useless as many of the names they are trying to erase will still be present in birds' scientific names (which they can't change). I also agree with many others who have noted "the AOS must provide proof that bird's with names of human beings are hurtful, etc. -- something AOS has failed to provide." Stop this useless action now."
Suzanne Maillé	Boileau		JOT 1G0	Canada	1/30/24	"Tout ce temps perdu, tout cet argent qui pourrait servir au mieux être des gens, ou à développer l'activité ornithologique! Ridicule!"
M Connor	Liverpool	ENG	L13	UK	2/1/24	"These woke idiots need to wake up and grow up ! Enough of this pervasive stupidity !"
Sheila Bearham	2 Crocklands Corner, Greenstead Green, Halstead	ENG	CO9 1QX	UK	2/1/24	"Names are names. When people know a bird by a name they do not associate it with anything in the past, changing a name does nothing except accuse people of something they have not done. People have names linked to the past, why does that matter now?"
Paulette Attie	Brimley	MI	49715	US	2/2/24	"Keep the names as they are."
Christopher Harnack	Chicago	IL	60657	US	2/2/24	"This is an unjust and ignorant overreaction."
David Jackson	Wolverhampton	ENG	WV45QW	UK	2/3/24	"The current eponymous bird names are universal and renaming them will cause great confusion."
Alastair Smith	Canberra		2600	Australia	2/4/24	"Voices against this idiocy need to be heard. 2500 people signed a petition for change and yet this petition already has 5000 signatures. This is supposedly about inclusivity and yet BN4B is supported by some organisations that appear anything but inclusive."
Rudolf Koes	Winnipeg		R2K0G1	Canada	2/5/24	"These names have history - be it positive or negative - and should be kept. Changing them to bland descriptive names is a grave error."
Blaise DeSibour				US	2/5/24	"I think there are many more pressing issues that face birds and bird population decline than erasing history and changing bird names."
Eric Hutchins	Broomfield	CO	80020	US	2/6/24	"I have signed this petition because the AOS Board's new policy of a wholesale purge of eponyms is unnecessary, counterproductive, and harmful to the greater community. This new policy is a solution in search of a problem. The pre-existing process was a reasonable one: names were evaluated on a case-by-case basis, which required discussion and consensus before taking the extraordinary step of renaming a species. The new policy rejects such community discussion and consensus. However well-intentioned AOS's policy may be, short-circuiting that community discussion is not a reasonable solution and will only create a rift with the International Ornithological Union and other organizations that reject AOS's heavy-handed approach."

Colin Rees	Blockley	ENG	GL56 9BP	UK	2/7/24	"It simply militates against sense and there are more important issues to address."
Roberta Goodall	Saul	ENG	GL2 7JY	UK	2/11/24	"I don't think that a blanket ban on all eponymous bird names is appropriate, and especially for those that are endemic in countries other than the USA. For the AOS to take a unilateral decision is high-handed and unwarranted. Some people for whom birds were named are deserving of the memorial. I beg that you reconsider."
Nick Godfrey	Burlington		L7R	Canada	2/12/24	"You can't change history by changing names."
Ian Edgington	Cradley Heath	ENG	B64.6AG.	UK	2/12/24	"This is not right."
Susan Dickson	Richmond	VA	23227	US	2/13/24	"I love eponymous names. They provide a bit of history and honor the discoverers. Also, they are useful in remembering different but similar species. Please do not get rid of the eponymous names!"
Manuel A. Plenge	Lima			Peru	2/16/24	"Manuel A. Plenge Citizen of Peru, South America. Life Member since 1967 of the American Ornithologists' Union and recently Fellow of the American Ornithological Society (AOS). I was very surprised to learn that the AOS English Bird Names Committee, by majority opinion, proposed that eponymous English bird names in the Western Hemisphere be replaced. I find the proposal unacceptable. Naming a bird after a person brings with it the story of an entire life of effort and dedication, to research and study. At the same time, it serves as motivation and inspiration for new generations of ornithologists, to follow that example and that dedication to research."
Richard Wood	Juneau	AK	99802-2165	US	2/18/24	"It's a terrible idea! Richard Alan Wood, owner of these facebook groups: The History of Alaskan Ornithology https://www.facebook.com/groups/546537439597431/ Alexander Wilson, the Father of American Ornithology https://www.facebook.com/groups/758001285026475 Audubon prints https://www.facebook.com/groups/788391904632630/"
Larry Cunningham	Gahanna	OH	43230	US	2/19/24	"Such a wholesale change in the common names of birds will cause massive unnecessary confusion, dictated by a tiny group of officers without bothering to poll ornithologists and birders."
Darrick Adams	Swanzy	NH	3446	US	2/19/24	"I agree with what it says"
Jeffrey Ward	Indianapolis	IN	46259	US	2/20/24	"At what point do you stop purging eponymous names? Does it extend to birds named after regions that were named after people? The Virginia Rail, Baltimore Oriole, Louisiana WaterThrush, Carolina Chickadee...."
Sonia Brady	Newcastle Upon Tyne		NE4	UK	2/20/24	"When will this stop, if anyone finds a bird's name offensive then they're mentally ill, stop this absolute ludicrous bollocks and spend your time doing something good, if this is your job or your decision to think a bird's name needs changing because of the woke society then you're a disgrace to humanity"
David C. Chafin, M.D.	Cleveland	TN	37312	US	2/20/24	"I am in total agreement with the posted comments of Paul Lehman. Did someone say "legislation without representation"?"
Melissa Cole	Springfield	TN	37172	US	2/21/24	"We shouldn't change the names because someone is offended over something that happened in the past."
George Finlayson	Corby	ENG	NN18	UK	2/21/24	"We need to stop crazy people taking over the world ,"
Joe de Graauw	Springfield	TN	37172	US	2/21/24	"With a 30+ year career in birds, I believe this is a knee-jerk reaction from a small group of folks that believe they should be 'offended' on behalf of a certain class of people. Have they asked any minority or indigenous people if they are offended? Doubtful. I forwarded the AOS proposal to several of my friends that happen to be minorities. Their responses were all negative towards the AOS. Most said they hadn't even considered the names offensive. A few were actually 'offended' that the AOS feels like they have to fight their battles for them."

Marvin Nelson	Glendale	CA	91202	US	2/25/24	"I don't like the unnecessary renaming."
Dale Mitchell	Lebanon	OR	97355	US	2/26/24	"I am in a particularly difficult position on this issue. I am the author of 3 books on the herptiles of the world and I took the stance that 'now' (while a world listing of these critters was wholly 'new' to most folks) was the one great time to change or modify the English names of practically every species and subspecies to thereby make the underlying taxonomy (such as huge mess that is 'frog' vs 'toad') much clearer and thus not slide distinctive evolutionary forms under the rug, so to speak. Frankly, I would love to 'redo' all the birds of the world in the same fashion. Let's get our 'busy on' and clean up the mess of 'warblers' and 'finches'! But . . . in the case of birds, I feel that ship has sailed (sadly). If the AOS really wants to do a proper job, in my opinion, let them start by taking the easy, easy, fruit of 'Mountain' from M. Plover, 'Ring-necked' from the more accurately and usefully nicknamed 'Ring-billed Duck', 'Lark' from 'Meadowlark' and so on. In this spirit, I would love to drop all person's names from the birds of the world. (Something I was unable to do in many cases in my own publications due to a lack of sufficient alternative data I could apply.) Thus to cut to the chase, as is sadly so, so, many times with the AOS, all they could be accomplishing by dropping scattered eponyms from 'our' bird names would be to mow a small sitting space around their feet in a great waving grassland--as seen by my lights and my very lonely efforts to bring lovely and scientifically-significant names to other creatures as an act of love and a deeper respect for the wonderful diversity we now know underlies all of nature. (And, yes, 'my names' would sometimes have to change again at times!) That is where we really should be putting our efforts--not this thin and pointless grandstanding by the AOS to act like they are doing some great messianic work to correct history. Nor does changing the English common names of a few species, and waving some sparkler of triumph, matter in light of the true mess that nearly all our official vernacular names are in. Anyway, turning from Common Naming, human history will always be complex and compromised as seen by generations of the future. If my name was on a species (and there are a few herptiles I have saddled with 'Mitchell' but none of these eponyms refers to myself!), surly folks of the future would cry bloody murder to have the nasty little thing removed because I actually (gasp!) sometimes ate the flesh of animals. So, there we are. You get out there and you teach history. You teach it warts and all. You learn from it, nod, and push on hopefully all the wiser."

[Back to TOC](#)

Comments from the Petition Updates

Location of Comment	Name	Comment
Comment on Petition Update Site	Mark Brazil	Eponymous names add considerably to the attraction of a species, inviting birders to delve into histories and the lives of people they may have never encountered before. Expunging such names would be a sad loss and seems a bizarre attempt to rewrite history. What next? Expunge them from scientific names too? More significantly, that the ornithological community of any one single country considers itself the adjudicator on names that affect the global birding community smacks of rampant imperialism.
Comment on Petition Update Site	David Bishop	One of the arguments for erasing eponymous names is that it will make birding and ornithology more accessible and attractive to new and /or younger aspiring birders. I regard this as a false premise. The intrigue and charisma that eponymous names undoubtedly adds considerably to the allure of birds and birding not the converse. Take for example Wallace's Standardising (a monotypic bird of paradise in its own unique genus) which was named after the great Victorian naturalist A. R. Wallace, a contemporary and co-author of Darwin. Instead, those who would obliterate history would reduce this to the nonentity of Standardising Bird of Paradise! Ugh! Thus I strongly maintain that the AOS is behaving in an ill-considered, imperialistic manner which has no place in birding and ornithology.
Comment on Petition Update Site	Bob Righter	Changing all the eponymous names would eliminate precious links to our countries, rich ornithological history, but also to those areas of history that we now deem unpleasant and it is those areas where mistakes were made that we need to be constantly reminded of. Canceling doesn't do any good it just reinforces the mistakes.
Comment on Petition Update Site	Dan Gibson	I think "AOS" decision to re-name the American Ornithologists' Union, and its journal, were monumental errors -- errors from which we will not ever be able to recover -- and I think if the organization continues to recast ornithological history by pursuing the replacement of eponymous English names of birds it will have then thoroughly squandered its position in the scientific study of birds.
Comment on Petition Update Site	Steve West	I favor some names being changed but I think we should go at it slowly and with the other ornithological institutions helping out. Going over Clement's checklist there are already lots of changes and too many would be more difficult for someone pursuing a world list. Some names should go, like Audubon, Darwin, etc. who have either promoted or fought for slavery, robbed Native American graves, or in their writings, took a holier-than-thou attitude when dealing with "primitive tribes." I think it will help attract others into birding but the real reason we should be doing it is because it is the right thing to do. Back when those names were used to name things after Audubon, much of society was racist and no one even gave it a thought. But surely we have grown? I hope.
Comment on Petition Update Site	James Allsop	Absolutely pathetic to change these names

Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Jeffrey Kozma	I completely agree with all your points, especially number 12. I had the same discussion with some of my peers. I can't imagine that anyone has looked up to see why a particular bird was named after that person, and decided...nope, birdwatching is not for me! Such a ridiculous notion. I've looked up plenty, but never delved into their complete history and backstory to determine if they were a "good" individual. Thank you for putting together this thorough views and clarifications on many of these misconceptions. I am all for inclusiveness in natural resources, but is this really the way to achieve that?
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Paula Hansley	Thank you. I wish you could write such a thorough discussion re: changing names of mountains and other geographic features named after people. As a geologist, I shudder at the cost of reprinting all the various geological maps.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Andrew Black	Every point is well argued and I support them all. AOS cannot allow such an autocratic dictum to stand. Any proposal for a name change must be considered individually so that a reasoned judgement can be offered to the birding public.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Bruce Barrett	I agree wholeheartedly. If we are going to remove criminals from bird names, why stop there. There are a few insurrectionists, criminals under the law at the time of their actions, on several US coins and banknotes!
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Fred Collins	Early ornithologists and explorers are memorialized and introduced to us in these bird names. Learning about the person has been inspirational in almost all cases. How can any thinking person think it a good idea to erase this ornithological history?
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Christian Knight	Politics is in everything these days. Keep it out of the birding hobby, please.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Paul Willoughby	As a 55 year old birder, the thought of re-learning so many bird names fills me with dread. I literally feel sick to the stomach thinking about it. Quite the opposite of inclusionary, the name changes are discriminatory towards older people who do not have the learning capacity of younger people.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Kevin Dougherty	You have written the response I have been contemplating since this fiasco was first proposed; I commend you for your clear, concise and logical dissertation. As a taxonomist at one time (botanical) I address the last part of your point 14; the International Code of Nomenclature is absolutely based on priority of valid publication; wholesale or individual review of scientific names for cultural or political reasons is effectively prohibited.

Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Stephen Brauning	It is ironic that point #3) in this article is an argument used by a group that claims to have the right to control naming birds. Who gave the AOS the "jurisdiction" that they claim? No one. They just claimed it. And that leads to #10) - The way they are doing this will erode the AOS' influence and other legitimate taxonomies will be fortified. Really, no one has to tow the line. The AOS can change all the names they want, I'll just keep using the names that I know. Their publications, programs, etc. will lose followers and adherents.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Paul Plotnick	Names change. When I became interested in birds in the late 1930's, it was Pigeon Hawk, Duck Hawk and Sparrow Hawk, Sharp's Seedeater, Audubon's Caracara, Hudsonian Chickadee - later Common Gallinule, then Moorhen, now back to Gallinule, Marsh Hawk, Old Squaw - others I can't recall. People with too much time on their hands trying to rewrite history. The only folks who will love this are the guidebook publishers.
Response to Gary Rosenberg Essay on Misinformation	Jan Eichensehr	I feel that by changing names of birds and the cost to do so that money would be better spent on conservation. I'm a hobby birder and the names I have learned and in all my guides will stay in my mind.
Response to David Ascanio	Todd Mark	Tabula rasa. I believe history has shown that purges are unproductive in terms of greater human enjoyment, although extremely temporarily, they have benefited [and hence did not] the purgers. The Humanities explores the vast differences in the life ways and expressions of Homo sapiens. Birding/Ornithology is one of those expressions. It can be entirely a leisure activity or it could be a bird you are hunting for protein. Do you suppose a bird being hunted cares about its name given it by the hunter? That would be absurd. And the name would be different if it were a subsistence hunter vs an eBird-connected lister, but the bird would still be wary.
Response to David Ascanio	Frank Renfrow	So sorry you had to experience this David. I have had similar such as "don't listen to him he is just an old white guy" way back in 2016 and things have just gotten worse since then. In my view the common bird names should be a vehicle for common people to remember them. There can be only so many birds described by their appearance until it gets redundant and confusing. The dedicated surnames and first names of people add in to the mix to keep things more interesting. Many learn much knowledge of early naturalists by looking up why a bird was named after a person and who that person was. It is just a way to make knowledge of birds and natural history more interesting and accessible as well as in some cases honoring the person. Human language cannot be contrived and conformed in formula fashion. There needs to be freedom to go outside of constrained boxes in naming our birds in my opinion. Speaking for myself as a Jew, we were almost exterminated by the Nazis, but "Hitler's Beetle"? That does not offend me. It certainly makes the name stick in the memory does it not?

Response to David Ascanio	Trevor Feltner	The AOS has entered into politics, and added to the turmoil already rampant in the general Populous. If the proposed new names are anything like the now dead Cordilleran. and Pacific Slope titles so help us. I, for one, shall continue to use all the present names.
Response to David Ascanio	Derek Hill	Biologists and birders should boycott and reject the AOS. If they're going to to reject the opinions of the leaders of the field, reject logic, and cater to emotional charges and irrational garbage of a minority, then begone with them. We will continue to use the bird names we use, in our writings and publications, despite the AOS nonsense.
Response to David Ascanio	Gil Peate	Absurd. human intelligence is obviously sinking lower and lower with each idiotic decision we are seeing made.
Response to David Ascanio	Janet	I have an opinion. People everywhere can call the birds any damn thing they want and people who don't like it can call them anything they want and everybody just stop being such self centered, egocentric, controlling freaks. There. Now, how's that?
Response to David Ascanio	Carl Nollen	Maybe the birds south of the USA border should carry common names as known to local people there. If not the Spanish name, at least the English translation of it. It is not necessary for every species to have a name which describes some noticeable feature of its body.
Response to David Ascanio	Jennifer Kalb	These names reflect the richness of human ornithological history and can be endlessly interesting and inspiring to their human successors (or in the case of certain individuals, a reason to consider some of our less admirable human characteristics. The tradition of naming birds after the discoverers or their associates or honorees is an old one which spurs us on, and has been pointed out is a source of pride and recognition to many who have discovered or devoted their lives to birds, including in areas where the study of birds is only now coming into its own. For north americans to erase our own history, good and bad, and that of our southern neighbors as well, is arrogant and short sighted as well as confusing to many birders.
Response to David Ascanio	Blair Bernson	Who gets to determine what words seem harmful. Consider: Peckers, boobies and tits are repulsive to some. Mustn't all species with those words be changed. Isn't "black" offensive to some. Same with "yellow" and "brown". White to some is associated with colonialism. Crow recalls Jim Crow. Blue is associated by some with nudity or distasteful sexual themes. Hawks are warmongers and doves are peaceniks. Bearded might associate with hippies. Swallow has a prurient connotation. Goose...well I don't want that to be done to me. Cardinals are religious. To me these are extreme interpretations/applications but less so than many names of historical figures who have an important place in the history and science of ornithology. Very few words/names if seen in a certain context aren't offensive in that limited context. Should the hundreds of species with names with those words be changed as well? No. And neither should the eponymous ones.

Response to David Ascanio	Grainger Hunt	<p>The committee means well, but in the balance of things, those names should be left alone. A common name is an ambiguous placeholder for the actuality of a taxon. Right now, hearing or reading the term “Lewis’s woodpecker” fires unique sets of neurons in the brains of millions of people, and for some of them, those automatic responses evoke images, memories and reflection. This is not something to tamper with. The proposed signal-substitution is not trivial because it necessitates rewiring. We have all experienced the disruption of changed names. Let’s leave well enough alone. Changing all those common names would also complicate what is already an information labyrinth in our field. Consider the added difficulty people will experience decades in the future in having to complicate search criteria for the digital literature, or when struggling to comb through the un-digitized variety. And what about my friend Robert Rosenfield who published “The Cooper’s Hawk” in 2018. Bob’s book has absolutely nothing to do with Mr. Cooper and everything to do with the ecology of a widely known species. I suspect Bob would be mortified if the change goes through, and so would thousands of other people who have put such names in the titles and contents of their books, papers, spreadsheets, field notes, and journals. Changing common names is costly even to casual birdwatchers, especially those who lack the latest publications, burdening them with having to wonder “...what do they call it now?” or “is that the same bird as...?” These and other reasons for not changing common names should be gently explained to everyone concerned.</p>
Response to John Rowlett Essay	David Klauber	<p>Maybe overly technical in terminology, but spot on. Leave things as they are, apply new rules going forward. No unnecessary extra effort and cost</p>
Response to John Rowlett Essay	Marc Gousie	<p>Leave things as they are. Stop making new rules when none are required. Stop making up selfish excuses for making changes just to pump up the egos of “progressive” social justice warriors.</p>

Response to John Rowlett Essay	BRUCE H ANDERSON	<p>Well, while they're at renaming species shall they continue to mislead new birders with descriptive names such as Short-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird (females are not even black, and most populations have reddish wrists, only) ? And, I know how Broad-winged Hawk helps me to identify that particular species! Have these people who desire to promote descriptive names, been to the tropics, overwhelmed with dot-winged, spot-winged, stripe-winged, bar-winged, spur-winged, blue-winged, green-winged, orange-winged, rusty-winged, rufous-winged, etc.?Or, shall our puritanical American birders/ornithologists advocate for "G" names for birds to protect our young birders such as renaming tits, titmouses, woodcocks, boobies, Dickcissels, sapsuckers nuthatches, and by all means, swallows. Or perhaps we will preface these names with parental warnings?And, this group should not ignore this unavoidable issue: if we do away with Audubon's Shearwater, and "Audubon's" Warbler, why isn't Audubon Society offensive, or Wilson Ornithological Society, or Cooper Ornithological Society?????Shall we allow a few to change names that people, who are not living and who cannot speak up, gave to the various bird species? Many of the people honored gave time, risked danger and disease, and/or knew enough to recognize a new species. Why should they not be honored?Who exactly is offended by the first names of wives, sisters, daughters, etc.? Lucy, Grace, and Virginia (oops! we'll need to change that state's name, too). And, doesn't anybody think it's downright unAmerican to change the names of Lewis's Woodpecker and/or Clark's Nutcracker!And, what did Princess Zénaïde Bonaparte, wife of Lucian ("disciple" of Alexander Wilson, one of our American ornithological fathers), ever do to anybody? Not only is her NAME given to the Zenaida Dove, but to the entire dove genus Zenaida, like many other people's names, that even if the "common name" is changed, will still have some form of their name in the binomen (or trinomen)?I find this whole issue determined by only a few who believe they are smart and politically correct more than a little fascist to me! Does anybody recall the AOU (not to be confused with the politically correct AOS) explaining why in the instance of renaming the "Oldsquaw" they caved in to political pressure this one time for the purpose of conservation, and how changing the name to Long-tailed Duck, a name the rest of the world used already for this species, would not set precedence? Then McCown's Longspur raised its cute little head; why I'd bet that McCown was not only a member of the Confederate army, as were millions back then, but likely also a Baptist!</p>
Response to John Rowlett Essay	Gil Peate	<p>Re-inventing the wheel. A 21st century disease! It it ain't broke don't fix it! All that energy, use it for something worthwhile!</p>
Response to John Rowlett Essay	Sheila Bearham	<p>History is history, whether we like it or not. No matter how they might try, you cannot change history, and most people growing up with names of birds are more interested in the bird than why it was named, or even know why it was named, that is how the bird is called.</p>

Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Eric Hutchins	There's an adage borrowed from WW2 bomber pilots, "the flak is always worst when you're directly over the target." When all your opponents have are baseless smears, then rest assured that the reasonable people among us see those attacks for what they are: Proof that the policy positions held by those groups are intellectually bankrupt. If that were not the case, then they would be advocating for their policies on the merits, rather than resorting to childish acts of defamation. Keep up the good work, Rachel, and don't get discouraged by their desperate and unfortunate behavior.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Sheila Bearham	Most people will continue to call birds by the names they know. No one thinks why are the birds called that. They are names. I do not know the origin of bird names, that is why they do not upset me, they are names.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Raman Shah	Civility is not in a good place in America right now, and this happens to any nuanced policy opinion that the entrenched political camps could possibly latch onto. Thanks for taking leadership on this issue anyway. Make sure to stay safe out there and unplug when you've had your fill.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Heather Lauer	You have given a voice to birders who felt shut out of the process. It takes courage to speak truth to power. Thank you for your leadership and for encouraging healthy debate.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Pat Goltz	I won't call you a racist for disagreeing with me. Ad hominem attacks are a sign of a loser. What I will say, though, is that I don't entirely agree with the petition. Common names of birds need to be left strictly alone. And those changed recently need to be reverted. Why? Birders have a database of knowledge in their brains, and this tampers with that, and does grave damage. I do not think that changing eponymous names is anything more than lip service. True equality and diversity involves programs to get people across the spectrum involved in birding. Giving everyone equal opportunity. Reaching out to children in under-represented groups. Reaching out to all children. I know of only one way to end racism: invite someone of another race into your family. That is what we did. We adopted transracially twice. You'd be amazed at what a difference that made in the whole extended family! Everything else is forcing other people to bend to your will, while you sit comfortably in your own bad behavior.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Jeanne Waful	I agree with you. I feel the same way about changing the names of birds and I'm definitely a "lefty." To equate wanting to change the name of birds with a political persuasion is ridiculous.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Marc Gousie	Well said! The mob cannot be appeased.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Robert HUXLEY	We live in interesting times. A stranger can call you a racist, your cause vile, and assume you admire a retired reality show character. Well, a stranger can also say "Keep going! Your cause is just. You are making a difference. People, including me, agree with you. Thank you for taking this stand."
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Joan Glabach	AOS tried to change bird names secretly. That was a big mistake from the start. I am against changing all the bird names.

Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Graeme Dunlop	I have just finished transferring my list of nearly 3,000 species over to the IOU list. Really who do those people at AOS think they are?
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Stephen Brauning	AOS is basically making themselves less relevant. No one has to use their taxonomy. They do not have a monopoly, much less any real "jurisdiction" that they seem to claim. If they go through with this, few and fewer will use their taxonomy. I for one will be moving way from it if they continue to push cultural and political ideology over the Biological Species Concept.
Response to Rachel Kolokoff Hopper Open Letter to the AOS	Shepard Krech, III	am sure you've all heard it ad nauseam
Response to Article about Emilie Snethlage	David Whitacre	Very educational and inspiring...thanks for posting!
Response to Article about Emilie Snethlage	Pat Goltz	So what horrible thing did she allegedly do to prompt AOS to discredit her?
Response to Article about Emilie Snethlage	Kim Bee	<p>What a wonderful account of her life and testament for her love & passion for ornithology! Also very notable account of what's possible when one is determined to succeed & driven despite societal norms-especially with respect to that era. Women were not supposed to be strong willed, opinionated or be vocal with their ideas or thoughts. Thank you for sharing Snethlages's life story with us. I find it very interesting and extremely inspiring:) So much that I am looking for other documents/accounts about her or her great works. This is happening TOO MUCH nowadays! Trying to change or wipe out our history by changing names or tearing down a monument or statue is asinine!! The FACT REMAINS- it's STILL PART OF HISTORY- whether you like it or not. We should not be able to destroy, tear down, alter, defraud or defame ANY HISTORICAL STATUE, MONUMENT or DOCUMENT! Times were different back then- and we probably wouldn't go about issues today, as we would be then... we learn (hopefully) from history and evolve & grow, making life and issues in the world better along the way. Whether one agrees with how these pioneers of their day went about enacting change really is irrelevant now... what's important is they were pioneers of their day- they deserve to have their statues available in their communities for viewing and to be historically honored & recognized. Stop trying to cancel our history just bcuz something makes you "feel uncomfortable....." This is our country's past- men & women died fighting to keep us free and our rights protected. Yes, some monuments are uncomfortable to look at or bring up sad feelings... but they are part of the path that got us where we are today. A much better place for so many people and we're continuing to make progress everyday. Changing the names of birds is ridiculous. WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON DRIVING THIS MONEY & TIME WASTING FIASCO?? For goodness sakes- if it's not broke- leave it alone! Please leave the birds names alone... many are tributes to their wonderful finders or researchers. I humbly ask you to consider cancelling the order to change. Thank you in advance.</p>

Included in this PDF Packet:

Essays and Comments from the following initial supporters of the petition:

- 1) [Paul Lehman-Comments](#)
- 2) [Chris Goodie-Comments](#)
- 3) [Guy McCaskie-Comments](#)
- 4) [Gary Rosenberg-The case for Eponyms - a summary](#)
- 5) [Comments on the eponymous English bird names debate: by Kevin J. Zimmer](#)
- 6) [Steve N G Howell-Comments](#)
- 7) [Comments to AOS Council from J. V. Remsen](#)
- 8) [Changing Eponymous Names by Jon L Dunn](#)
- 9) [An Open Letter to the AOS by David Ascanio](#)
- 10) [Andrew Kratter Letter to the AOS](#)
- 11) [An Open Letter to AOS Leadership by Rachel Kolokoff Hopper](#)
- 12) [Statement to AOS on Blanket Changes to Eponymous English Bird Names by Greg D. Jackson](#)
- 13) [Bird Names and Naming: Some Historical Aspects by John Rowlett](#)
- 14) [Analyzing the “Names change all the time” Argument by Van Remsen](#)
- 15) [Misinformation Posted on Facebook Corrected by Gary Rosenberg](#)
- 16) [What’s in a Name—and Do Birds Themselves Really Care? Steve N. G. Howell](#)
- 17) [Real-life Negative Implications to Ornithologists in Countries outside of the US by Kevin Zimmer](#)

[Back to TOC](#)

Paul Lehman

We all, of course, agree that we need more people interested in birds who then can speak for birds and conservation. Do folks really think that it is the names of birds that is keeping groups of people from becoming birders?? Really?? Making ornithology and birding more welcoming, diverse, and inclusionary means that birders should be welcoming to anyone showing potential interest--and aren't 95% of birders a pretty welcoming lot? If certain groups of people are under-represented, let's look at things like socioeconomics. But that isn't as easy to change as are bird names!! And if you really want to get more diverse folks interested in birding, then go into classrooms and give talks or lead walks, or try directly mentoring one, two, or three individuals. But wait, that actually takes a lot more time and effort than changing a bird name!

It does rub me the wrong way to see folks happy to just change the names of ALL birds with eponyms, many of which were named by the folks who did all the work, effort, and sweat in studying the species, and thus had the honor of naming them how they would like and in some cases for people who were giants in the fields of ornithology and conservation. But we have plenty of folks who haven't contributed much to ornithology, who have little sense of ornithological and birding history, and for whom all birding history and knowledge started with the dawn of eBird, who are now happy to minimize or ignore this past work and a lot of birding history. Perhaps it's the "I know better" syndrome. As others have said, it does smack of dishonor and disrespect.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Chris Gooddie
Norfolk, UK.

Recently I took a little time to really think about the AOS's intention to change a large number of bird names, and to dig into the aims a little. And having done so, I have to say I'm entirely unconvinced. I think it's a bad idea.

I think the AOS's decision is misguided, and for me as a world birder it is decidedly unwelcome. I like to see the positives in everything in life, but I really don't see any benefits here for birds, birders, or future potential birders. I must say that in my birding social circles (mostly though not exclusively non-US) I cannot find ANY supporters for the proposed development. (Sad to say though, I have found a few folks who are nervous about being canceled if they are seen as publicly objecting to the proposals).

Personally, I have tried hard to find positives about how the decision will play out, but I must admit I can't. The decision seems unnecessary, illogical, and confusing for experienced birders and beginners alike- there is already more than enough churn and flux in global bird nomenclature given the huge number of ongoing taxonomic revisions as it is. Just when global taxonomic authorities had finally started to move towards convergence, another body decided to change a bunch more names without any underpinning cohesive strategy...

If species' names were being changed because, for example, historical figures after whom birds were named were associated with e.g. historical slavery or racism, I could understand it more easily and would be likely to support it- but that does not seem to be the case here. Personally, I find the history behind the individuals for whom birds were named interesting. The sales of the multiple books that have been published over the years digging into avian nomenclature suggest many other birders are fascinated by the history too.

The current trend appears to be to try to name as many species as possible following a reductive (not 'descriptive') 'x-y'd-zee' formula e.g. 'White-crowned Sparrow', 'Yellow-billed Cuckoo', 'Boat-tailed Grackle'. Inoffensive all for sure...and uninspired in equal measure. No doubt 'Swainson's Thrush', the current mention of which will instantly excite the majority of British birders, will end up as 'Buff-lored Thrush', 'Olive-backed Thrush' or something equally dry-as-dust, unmemorable and unwieldy. This renaming drive is a reductive development, and hardly likely to pique the imagination of a youngster encountering a bird for the first time.

The aim of the species names' overhaul if I understand correctly is to 'make their names more descriptive'. I imagine though, that what that means in practice is 'more accurate' or 'more related to differential plumage features' as opposed to 'more evocative' or 'more inspiring'. Let's take a very recent (2020) example: however real or perceived the need to change the name of 'McCown's Longspur', was 'Thick-billed Longspur' really the best 'descriptive' alternative that the combined might of the US avian powers-that-be could come up with? 'X-y'd-zee', here we go again...

My objection to change is not that described by Pamela Rasmussen- of people being 'sad to see the names that they've grown up with, or the names that they've learned and used for many years'. (Although you do have to wonder if alienating birders of a certain age along the way was considered as a negative when weighing up the pros and cons). The real crux of the matter is- how much better- 'more descriptive' - will the new names be? I am sure I should not judge ahead of time, but I'm a realist by nature, and based on the last twenty years of 'improvements' I'm expecting to be left disappointed. I guess one upside is that at least the process will only affect US species. Ah no, wait, the AOS has already publicly confirmed that it will begin by 'first focusing on 70-80 species found primarily in the U.S. and Canada.' So, does that mean then that we can look forward to stage two, including Asian vagrants that turn up in the US? Hands off 'our' Pallas's Warblers!

Joking aside, I don't think anyone could object to the AOS's stated rationale: 'The AOS Council fully embraces this opportunity to remove exclusionary barriers to participation in the enjoyment of birds and, through the renaming process, to educate the public about the 'birds themselves, their recent population declines, and their dire need for conservation'. The problem is that the noble sentiment above really does not have ANYTHING to do with what's being proposed, or, more importantly, the likely practical result. It fixes a problem that does not exist and creates a new one. Between us all we do need to devise a strategy that will make birds IRRESISTIBLE to future generations. But this ain't it.

As an afterthought, just imagine what we might all have been able to achieve if only the amount of time effort and money expended on this redundant exercise could instead have been spent on actually dealing with the urgent challenges that our dwindling bird populations are facing. Now there's an idea I could get behind.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Guy McCaskie

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Southern California Regional Editor for North American Birds since 1962

I am very much opposed to the removal of all eponyms as proposed by the AOS. Changing 150 English Bird Names, most for no valid reason, is unacceptable.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

The case for Eponyms - a summary

Gary Rosenberg

The decision to purge all of the eponymous common names of North American birds has created a strong division within the birding and ornithological community. The AOS decided to make this monumental change based on discussions over a few years by the "Bird Names for Birds" (BN4B), and a petition presented by them to the AOS. The AOS created an ad hoc committee to create a "process" of removing all the eponymous bird names, not to decide if this was or was not a good idea. The AOS was faced with a choice of continuing a practice already in place by the North American Checklist Committee of selectively removing the "worst of the worst" names, or, as they ultimately decided, not wanting to play the role of morality police, purging ALL of the eponymous bird names regardless if the name is "offensive to some" or not.

There are several contentious points, in my opinion, which make this decision a very bad idea. First, one of the main stated reasons is that the bird names, which are apparently offensive to some, somehow creates a barrier for minorities to become involved in birding and ornithology. While I do not doubt that there are some people of color who indeed have a valid grievance that minorities have not had the same opportunities within ornithology over the past centuries, the actual cause of this discrimination is very complex, and in the opinion of many, has nothing to do with actual bird names. The history of discrimination in the United States dates back centuries, and there are many factors that have contributed to the participation by minorities (or the lack thereof) in ornithology, and birdwatching in general - and these include issues of economics, culture, and opportunity, just to name a very few. No one disagrees that we would all like an increased diversity of participation in birding by minorities - yet the move to purge all eponymous bird names, in my opinion, actually has a negative impact on this ultimate goal of inclusivity - in the attempt to welcome a more diverse membership, the purge has turned off so many that there will now be more of an imbalance and increased contention within the birding community - not the harmony and inclusiveness the AOS was trying to achieve. That the AOS council was warned that this would be the result, and that they went ahead with their plan anyway, is perplexing at best.

What is the history of eponymous names? Simply put, the historical norm has always been giving the person describing a new bird the honor and right to name the bird whatever they want to - of course the scientific names need to conform to actual international rules of nomenclature - but choosing a common, English name has always been the right of the describer. This tradition and norm go back centuries. The standard method of describing a new species is to publish the descriptions along with the chosen names (both scientific and common, English names, in a peer-reviewed journal. I think a misconception by some (many?) is that the people the birds are named for choose those names themselves - in fact OTHERS have honored them by naming a bird after them. Who these birds were named for were people ranging from ornithologists to military people (doctors), to explorers and settlers of the WEST (Lewis and Clark), to the wives or siblings of ornithologists, and likely many other reasons - many of the North American birds were named in the 1800s during the expansion of white settlement across the country. This is the history whether we like it or not - and changing names will not change that history. Some may choose to not be interested in this history, yet many, many people are! The nagging question for me is what gives the AOS the right to change this long-standing norm of allowing the describers to name the birds? The ad hoc committee believes that allowing the scientists to "still" be able to give new birds scientific names - but they also make the case that common names should belong to the public - not the scientists. The idea is to open this up too public debate, and to form a new committee to make these name changes. This change would be very controversial, and it is an example of arrogance on the part of the AOS, and the ad hoc committee, to believe they have the right to take this honor away from scientists.

One of the stated functions of the North American Checklist Committee (and the AOS) is to maintain a level of stability in bird names (for ease of communication within and between birding communities), and there has been a general trend and movement to merge other governing bodies around the world (like the IOC,

and Handbook of Birds of the World, etc...) and have a more standardized nomenclature worldwide - and the move by the AOS is a blow to this movement - and organizations such as the IOC have already stated that they will NOT follow the lead of the AOS. Furthermore, the South American Checklist Committee has made the decision to disassociate themselves from the AOS, and to join forces with the IOC! The stated goal of stability has been turned upside down!

By removing ALL the eponymous names, those historical ornithologists who were actually revered figures and deserving of having a bird named after them will forever be tainted - being guilty by association! If common names are to be changed, who is going to stop the AOS from going after Latin names next? The idea of canceling such pioneers as Ted Parker or John O'Neill, close friends, and mentors to me personally, is totally unacceptable. I have had the honor of being involved in the description of three new birds to science, and the idea of not being allowed to give the birds a common name - whether they be eponyms or not, is equally unacceptable. All three of the new species I helped describe were named for ornithologists who were our mentors and/or contributed greatly to our research and lives - all three have more descriptive common names - but the idea of having that right to give the birds names taken away and given to the public - or another ad hoc committee is incredibly insulting. The idea that the bird names belong to the birds (or the public) is an arrogant and ignorant notion! What did the public do to receive this honor? Changing the names not only cancels the people who the bird was named after, but it cancels the many, many scientists who put in the work to find and describe the birds in the first place. The birding public reaps the benefit of centuries of hard work and skill by these ornithologists - and the arrogance displayed by a small group who believe THEY know or can do it better is astounding.

Many of the birds that are Neotropical migrants are NOT really North American birds in the first place - a species such as Swainson's Warbler spends 9-10 months of the year on the "wintering grounds" - and are really more "their" birds than "ours"! Who gives the AOS the right to change the name of a bird that spends 10 months of the year in Mexico, or Jamaica, or the Andes? It is not surprising that MANY Latin Americans view this as just another arrogant move by the United States - and this is to increase the idea of "inclusiveness"??? I contend the effect will be the exact opposite and will reek of colonialism.

The outcry against this move by the AOS has been international. The AOS thought, wrongly, that removing eponyms would increase the desire and opportunity of "nonwhite Americans" from Latin America (or elsewhere) to become active in birding or science. As it turns out, "scientists" in Latin America feel very differently. In recent decades, eponyms have been used in the sciences to generate both interest by honoring Latin American scientists by naming organisms after them, or by raising much needed funds to support research, or purchase land for conservation! Just when Latin America is catching up and taking advantage of the eponym game, the AOS wants to take that away from them - which is unfortunately viewed as more colonialism - the EXACT opposite intention of the AOS. I contend that the AOS has no clue what others in Latin America think on this "plan". The SACC which had mostly South Americans on it were essentially unanimous AGAINST the purge, and all supported the case-by-case method!

Much has been said that this is NOT canceling ornithology and its diverse history - we still have the Latin names, and if people are so inclined, they can still learn that history. It has been pointed out that there are several "popular" books on "Eponyms" - which defies some arguments that people really aren't that interested in the history of ornithological figures. Again, I believe EVERYONE will agree that some names might need to go on a case-by-case basis - if the people they are named after are truly horrendous figures. The NACC was willing to do the work in determining which ones might need to be purged - thus NOT dishonoring the true pioneers and having done nothing wrong. Yes, it will be difficult, and the committee will need to judge some people - but by purging all names because they "did not want to become the morality police" the AOS is lumping the good with the bad! I find it incredibly telling that both the NACC and the SACC were essentially unanimous in their opposition to the purge - and their views on the subject were either ignored or dismissed out of hand. The members of both these committees were (are) some of the most experienced scientists globally with respect to taxonomy and nomenclature, and that the AOS did

not trust them to make the right decision here speaks volumes! The ornithological community was not asked or polled, and while some individuals from other organizations may have been involved, their memberships were never asked! There have been statements of just how popular this idea has been (some saying that a majority of birders and scientists agree on this) - I say, show me the data!!! Virtually everyone I know is against it! And people from outside the United States are very against it!!! It is not surprising to me that some 36 countries have signees of this petition! One analogy that comes to mind is while it may be politically correct to remove confederate statues, no one wants to remove all statues everywhere - that would be obviously unfair to the many who might "deserve" a statue? By not wanting to become the morality police, the AOS passes judgment on everyone instead!

The worst aspect of the purge is that it has forced birders and scientists alike to choose sides - some who have been against the purge have been labeled racist, and it has pitted friends against friends and birders against birders, and even family against family! Many are afraid to speak out and be labeled a racist - as abhorrent as this sounds! Remaining silent is in my opinion worse - allowing a Scientific organization to institute such a radical change that will not have any effect on actual science - just to possibly allow some virtue signalers to feel better about themselves? There are many more effective methods to being more inclusive within the ornithological ranks - and many of the answers lie in socio-economic issues - NOT in what we choose to call our birds. Changing bird names will not change history - good or bad - and judging historical figures by today's standards can be inherently unfair and tricky - and in many cases totally hypocritical. This has become a very emotionally charged issue that has divided the birding world. Birding (and science) is an escape from the messed up cultural wars our country (and the world) is experiencing - and the great name purge has introduced a form of these culture wars into our community - unnecessarily - and unfairly! Wouldn't our time be better served devoting an equal amount of energy into the conservation of birds? Or possibly devoting energy and time into actually solving the issue of diversity in the sciences, instead of creating long-lasting divisions over such a foolish issue!

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

**Comments on the eponymous English bird names debate:
by Kevin J. Zimmer**

Something that needs to be made abundantly clear regarding the recent decision by the AOS to purge all eponymous English bird names and our opposition to it: **This, is not, as many purge proponents are painting it, a choice between eliminating offensive eponymous names or retaining offensive eponymous names. Every member of the two classification committees (NACC & SACC) that was opposed to the AOS move, shares the stated AOS goals of advancing ornithology as a science, while also making ornithology and birding more welcoming, diverse and inclusionary as a profession/avocation/community. WE ARE ALL IN FAVOR OF REVIEWING AND REMOVING OFFENSIVE EPONYMS FROM OUR SHARED NOMENCLATURE. However, we strongly disagree in how to implement these objectives.** We are not on board with a complete purge, throwing out the eponyms honoring pioneers and heroes of ornithology, whose work and discoveries laid the foundation on which our science is built, UNLESS there is evidence of offensive, vile behavior that runs counter to our shared goals for social justice. Active participants in promoting slavery, the Confederacy, and campaigns of genocide against Native Americans are low-hanging fruit, and removal of their names should not be controversial. But the AOS position is that it would be too difficult to nitpick our way through the lives of all of these historical figures and make individual character judgements, so it's preferable to just lump the good in with the bad and throw them all out. We disagree. If a reasonably deep dive into the historical record doesn't paint a clear picture of misdeeds, then how can the very existence of the eponym be offensive? Whether or not you agree with the practice of naming birds, other animals, and plants after people, the fact of the matter is, that there are already a bunch of species bearing eponymous names, and that removal of an existing eponym constitutes a dishonoring or staining of that person's name and legacy; to do so without an objective review is to deny due process. We would reserve that dishonoring for those bad actors who deserve it; the AOS position is to throw the baby out with the bathwater, and, in the process, scramble more than 100 years of literature, and deal a real blow to nomenclatural stability in the process.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, I am going to include a distillation (believe it or not!) of the comments that I sent, as a member of the (then AOS-affiliated) South American Classification Committee (SACC) to the AOS Council some months back, when asked to respond to the draft report by the ad hoc English Bird Names Committee's recommendations to purge ALL eponymous bird names:

“For context, let me state that I identify as politically progressive, and whole-heartedly endorse and embrace concepts of diversity, inclusion, and opportunity for under-represented groups, not just in ornithology or science, but for broader aspects of economic, educational, political, and societal opportunity and participation. A diversity of perspectives, voices, backgrounds, and talents makes any country, organization, or field of endeavor more robust in my opinion. Accordingly, there are many things that the AOS as a professional society, and the ABA and other birding organizations can and should be doing that could have a transformative, positive effect in making ornithology, birding, bird conservation and the simple appreciation of birds more inclusive, diverse, and welcoming of marginalized groups. Things that come to mind would include active outreach programs (incorporating programs like optics exchanges) to urban youth communities where socioeconomic realities offer fewer opportunities for communities of color to experience birds and nature; increasing the number of travel scholarships for students and young researchers from Central and South American countries to travel to AOS meetings and present their research, and helping to offset or subsidize publication costs to ensure that research reaches the widest possible audience; making it easier for native speakers to publish papers in Spanish and Portuguese, and, perhaps requiring that native English speakers include an Abstract in the relevant national language when publishing research based in a Spanish/Portuguese/French speaking Central or South American country, to make papers of particular national or regional interest more easily searchable and accessible to non-

English or ESL speakers; greater representation by under-represented groups on AOS and ABA committees; etc., etc. The ABA has long been involved in binocular exchanges that get binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras into the hands of talented local birding guides around the world that could otherwise not afford such equipment – I’ve seen up close what a difference the gift of quality optics can do to open doors of avocational and professional achievement for eager young birders or ornithologists with an abundance of talent and motivation, but who are economically handcuffed. These are just a few of many things that can be done to make AOS, ABA, ornithology, and birding more diverse, more inclusive, more welcoming, and more representative, and which would measurably and positively impact the lives of many, many people.

If I thought, even for a minute, that the wholesale elimination of eponymic English bird names, as originally proposed by the “Bird Names for Birds Initiative”, and as endorsed so enthusiastically by the EBNC in their draft proposal, would have a similar uplifting impact on the lives of historically marginalized communities, and would open the floodgates to greater avocational and professional participation/representation of those groups in birding and ornithology, then I would set aside my misgivings about the broader implications to nomenclatural stability and endorse the change. But this (elimination of eponyms), is “none of the above”. **In my opinion, the changes recommended by the EBNC are a solution desperately in search of a problem.**

It is often said that we (the USA) are a “nation of laws”. One important legal principle limiting participation in lawsuits, is that of “standing” – whether or not the person(s) bringing a lawsuit or defending one, has sufficient cause to “stand” before the court and advocate their position. To have standing, a party must demonstrate an “injury in fact” to their own legal interests. The EBNC report seems to assume that eponymous English bird names are harmful and exclusionary to various “stakeholders”, but nowhere in their draft report, nor elsewhere in the recent literature advocating this approach to eponyms, do I see any concrete demonstration of measurable injury or harm to any stakeholders, named or unnamed, nor do I see any evidence that any EBNC members or proponents of the Bird Names for Birds movement have any “standing” in the legal sense of the word. I would like to see some concrete proof of anyone who was driven out of ornithology or birding, or whose advancement in these fields either professionally or as an avocation was hindered as a result of 4% of the English names of SACC birds being eponymous. Similarly, I would genuinely like to know of anyone who was really interested in taking up birding as a hobby, or ornithology or conservation as a career or field of study, but who ended up being so turned off by the fact that 4% of the birds were named after people, that they ended up leaving the hobby/field. The Bird Names for Birds movement and the EBNC would have us take it as an article of faith that such people not only exist, but that they are legion. I would like to see some proof – show us how anyone is “excluded” by eponymous bird names (in general), or how these are actually “barriers” to participation by anyone. Absent concrete evidence that such a problem is even a thing, this whole crusade against eponymic bird names comes off as paternalistic (“You don’t realize it, but you have been victimized, and we are here to save you!”) and a caricature of virtue signaling run amok. Indeed, following the publication of a widely read Op-Ed piece in the Washington Post (2020) advocating the positions of the Bird Names for Birds Initiative, a number of the many hundreds of on-line responses (more than 3:1 negative) indicated that the respondents had mistaken the Initiative as a satire piece, such as would be published in *The Onion*.

Conversely, there have been some recent publications by authors from the “Global South” not only advocating for the retention of eponymous names (See Jost et al, *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 2023; Pethiyagoda 2023), but also demonstrating the real-life negative implications to ornithologists and other biologists in countries outside of the US if the elimination of eponyms and wholesale renaming of bird species were to take place. In other words, these biologists, the ones that the anti-eponym crowd say they want to empower, actually have demonstrable “standing” in presenting the opposing view. **Jost et al.2023 (a publication with more than 20 co-authors, almost all of them native-born Latin Americans), referring to the anti-eponym movement, state: “They want to erase eponyms assigned to species in the**

past and want scientists to stop naming new species after people. **Both of these proposals would hurt science, and disproportionately hurt science in the Global South – the region that is supposed to be the primary beneficiary of their proposal.**” The authors go on to say – “Naming species after people has always been a powerful tool that biologists have used to thank their patrons, recognize their field assistants, and honor their colleagues or loved ones. This is the highest honor that an individual biologist can bestow on a person....In recent years some biologists have also used the naming of species to raise funds for research and, especially, for conservation...Although it is true that most eponyms assigned have historically honored Europeans, the pace of species discovery in tropical countries is currently high, and in the past few decades local taxonomists (at least in Latin America) are overtaking European scientists in making these discoveries. The power of bestowing eponyms has shifted to these local scientists in the tropical countries where most undiscovered species live...Using eponyms, local scientists can now fund their work, honor local scientists, recognize Indigenous leaders and policymakers, and help save their study organisms from extinction. **It is unfortunate and discriminatory that some members of the scientific community want to take away this tool, just at the moment that non-European biologists are becoming its main beneficiaries.** Rather than eliminating eponyms, causing chaos in the existing nomenclature, and erasing the rich and convoluted personal history of biology, we should instead embrace them enthusiastically and use them to generate and record the next and more diverse chapters of that history.”

Or, consider the perspective of Rohan Pethiyagoda, a scientist/taxonomist who has spent most of his career working in Sri Lanka, laid out in “Policing the scientific lexicon: The new colonialism?” (MEGATAXA 2023): “Cheng *et al.* (2023) seek to redress social problems in the English-speaking world (henceforth, the Anglosphere) and especially North America, by imposing terminological and nomenclatural reforms also on the rest of the world. These reforms would carry the unintended consequence of compelling taxonomists in biodiverse countries – especially developing countries – to direct their attention away from the enormous task of describing Earth’s vanishing biodiversity in order to deal with the challenge of revising biological nomenclature and terminology to address issues that have little meaning outside the Anglosphere – particularly the US context. **I contend that the US would do better to solve its social and political problems rather than renaming them, and especially, rather than exporting them.**” And, this, in rebuttal of Guedes *et al.* (2023): “Guedes *et al.* (2023) argue that “renaming currently valid eponyms would...be good for taxonomy and for conservation”. Really? Their proposed ‘reforms’ would leave taxonomy in chaos; and as for conservation, it is puerile to imagine that species head toward extinction could be saved simply by being called another name. **It is one thing to signal virtue from the armchairs of Western universities; it is another to scrounge for resources to explore biodiversity, and to describe and conserve the biotic riches of post-colonial nations even as they vanish before our eyes.**”

Are there some English names (eponymic or otherwise) out there that are truly objectionable, hurtful, and exclusionary? Yes, and I agree that those should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and eliminated, as was done some years back, when the pejorative and racist “Oldsquaw” was replaced by Long-tailed Duck, or which has been done more recently in the case of renaming “McCown’s Longspur” (after a truly bad actor) for Thick-billed Longspur. There are some other egregious examples of low-hanging fruit – Eskimo Curlew and Scott’s Oriole should probably be dispatched with extreme prejudice – but, again, this can be handled, as it has been in the past, via the existing Proposal System and a 2/3 vote, on a case-by-case basis. **I would argue that the clear majority of eponymous English bird names do not fall into this same category.** Certainly, with a large enough magnifying glass one can find character flaws in almost any historical or present-day figure (after all, we’re all human, and imperfect), particularly when viewing 18th or 19th century behavior through the prism of 21st century societal and ethical standards. The anti-eponym crowd would have us believe that this fact alone is reason enough to do away with eponyms altogether – no one is perfect, and trying to tease apart the biographies of all of the eponymous subjects to

decide which ones are okay and which ones are truly awful is a slippery slope. To my thinking, this is nothing close to the ongoing argument over leaving in place or tearing down Civil War monuments to Confederate officers. The latter individuals are being glorified and memorialized precisely for their bad behavior – fighting a treasonous war against the US in defense of a morally repugnant and indefensible institution. **In the case of eponymous bird names, the people involved, for the most part, are being honored for their contributions to science and ornithology – in spite of any personal/behavioral blemishes, NOT because of them.**

The Colonizer argument and its logical extensions. One of the central tenets of the anti-eponym movement is that it doesn't matter whether any particular eponymic figure was a slave owner, a Confederate officer, a grave robber or a perpetrator of genocidal acts against Indigenous peoples or not, **because virtually all of them are guilty of one thing – they were either “colonizers” or descendants of colonizers, and thus, beneficiaries of the colonial past (a.k.a. “white privilege”), and, because of this, any honorifics associated with them should be expunged.** I've also seen reference to “white discovery mythology” – the idea that Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas knew all of these birds and had their own names for them long before European colonizers came on the scene, and therefore, the “discoveries” and contributions to Western science and exploration that have frequently been commemorated with eponymous names in everything from birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, plants, mountains, rivers, states, countries, etc., represent not only a sham, but acts of piracy. So, what is the proposed solution to expunge the inconvenient and often vile legacy of colonization and westernization on Indigenous and historically marginalized groups? Do we cancel history, throw out all of the structures of Western Science, underpinned after all, by colonialism, expunge all of the names and terminology and start over? Will doing this measurably improve the lives and lot of currently and historically underrepresented and marginalized groups of people? Similar attempts at whitewashing the tawdry historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, and the Civil War & Reconstruction by state legislatures and local school boards in a number of “red” states, have justifiably been met with near universal condemnation by those of us on the left side of our political spectrum. So how is what we are doing here any different?

The idea that “no figure is without sin, so let's cast them all out” (or “some are bad, so all must go”) strikes me as absurd. In 1997, I published a paper showing that what was considered a single species, the Rusty-backed Spinetail, in fact, included a somewhat cryptic (in appearance) second species with a very different voice, that was restricted to successional vegetation on white water river islands, with a distribution that was entirely parapatric to that of the greater population of Rusty-backed Spinetail. This population already had a Latin trinomial (subspecific) name, but it needed a new English name. Lacking any distinctive morphological features that readily lent themselves to a descriptive name, being just one of many sympatric species of river island inhabiting spinetails, and occupying a geographic range completely surrounded by the range of the species from which it was being split, left no obvious choices for an English name. So, given the timing (following the untimely death of Theodore A. Parker III in a plane crash while conducting conservation biology in Ecuador), and the venue of the publication (the AOU Monograph dedicated to the memory of Parker and commemorating his transformative influence on Neotropical Ornithology), I decided to name *Cranioleuca vulpecula* “Parker's Spinetail” as a nod to Parker's role in being among the first to shed light on the unique river island avifauna of Amazonia, and, because my initial recognition of *vulpecula* as representing a distinct biological species came through discrimination of differences in its vocalizations versus those of other populations of “Rusty-backed Spinetails”, a skill in which Parker had few, if any peers. **So, according to the stated philosophy of the Bird Names for Birds movement, and endorsed by the EBNC, Parker's name should be stripped from *Cranioleuca vulpecula* because: 1) Ted was descended from colonizers** [This, conveniently ignoring the fact that the original Theodore A. Parker from whom Ted was a direct descendent, was, in fact, a Unitarian preacher and one of the most important figures of the early American abolitionist movement, and a funder of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. His 1852 sermon “Justice and the Conscience” inspired Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous quote that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” This, is exactly the

fascinating sort of lineal ornithological history that the anti-eponym crowd is threatening to erase.]; **2) Indigenous people may have had their own names for *vulpecula*; 3) the honorific name somehow implies “ownership”, thereby disrespecting not only Indigenous cultures who may have known the bird first, but also disrespecting the bird itself; 4) the names of birds should reflect the “true essence of the bird itself” not, be named after humans; and 5) the application of a name honoring a colonizer or lineal descendent thereof is somehow exclusionary to historically and currently underrepresented groups, and presents a real barrier to their participation in birding, ornithology and conservation.** Furthermore, we are led to believe that the solution to this egregious act of social injustice is not only to expunge the name Parker from *C. vulpecula* (simultaneously casting off the yoke of colonial oppression and restoring the innate dignity and respect to the poor, aggrieved little spinetail – Forgive the sarcasm, but, frankly, it’s difficult to avoid sarcasm when countering these types of arguments.), but to say that I, as the first Western ornithologist to recognize the distinctiveness of *vulpecula* at the species-level, and to bring attention to those differences, quantify them, and publish them, should have no say in what to call it, just because I too, am descended from colonizers and therefore, at least an indirect beneficiary of past colonial transgressions. Instead, the naming process will be turned over to a committee of people who know nothing about *C. vulpecula*, but who will be properly sensitive to all possible conflicts and concerns of every possible “stakeholder” (In the view of the EBNC, apparently, everyone is a stakeholder EXCEPT descendants, particularly male descendants, of Western Europeans), and, who, after appropriate expansive participation and input by the general public (at least 90% of whom probably will have no personal experience with *C. vulpecula*), will then bestow an English name on *C. vulpecula* that is egalitarian, inoffensive, respectful to the bird, and captures its essence in a way that will be helpful to beginning birders.

I would argue that the logical extension of this argument is that we, as descendants of colonizers, and beneficiaries of past American and European colonization, have no business even applying English names to any organisms, mountains, rivers, or other natural features anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. For that matter, we should also do away with any and all French, Spanish and Portuguese names for animals and geographic features – after all, France, Spain and Portugal were big-time colonial powers throughout the Western Hemisphere, and, as such, all of their names are equally offensive in being vestiges of the colonial past as are the English names. Thus, the EBNC, if they really wish to adhere to the true ethos of the Bird Names for Birds movement, should recommend the immediate renunciation of all English, Spanish, French and Portuguese names for Western Hemisphere birds, and then recuse themselves from any further discussion of new names, leaving those decisions entirely to Indigenous groups. So, that really suggests that we need to rename all Western Hemisphere birds, not just ones with eponymic names – after all, Indigenous peoples almost certainly knew of them and had their own names for these species long before the colonizers came along. **The next question would be, how do we decide which Indigenous group has nomenclatural priority?** Because it is a certainty that given the vast array of Indigenous groups that historically occupied the pre-Colonial Americas, and, given that many of these groups were linguistically unique, there would be multiple equally valid Indigenous names for the same birds. Who gets to decide? Surely, it can’t be decided by a committee of “colonizers” because that would fall into the realm of cultural appropriation. When we are done purifying avian taxonomy from the colonial stain of English names, then we should turn our attention to renaming mountains, rivers, states, cities, countries and the like. If nothing else, it will ensure perpetual employment opportunities for the name police.

What’s in a Name, and who is the audience for English names?

Of course, one of the first refutations of my arguments by the EBNC would be that they are concerned only with English names of birds, not the scientific names, upon which our hierarchical system of binomial nomenclature is based, and wherein the vast majority of eponymic names of birds reside. They would argue that scientific names are the realm of scientists, and not used by the general public, so that changing

hundreds of English names would, in no way, destabilize the science of taxonomy, the ability of scientists to honor other scientists, or, in any meaningful way, be disruptive to the science of ornithology. Conversely, they argue that the vast majority of people who use common names are not biologists, that nomenclatural stability is only important when dealing with scientific names, that names should evolve as society evolves and that English names should be chosen so as to maximize their utility to beginning birders and the non-birding general public in terms of helping them learn, identify and remember the birds to which those names are attached.

Addressing the first two points: **While I would agree that the vast majority of the public does not use scientific names, and that these are the realm of scientists, the notion that the reverse is true (i.e. that professional ornithologists do not use English names) is demonstrably false.** Particularly in North America and Europe, ornithologists routinely communicate using the English names of their study subjects, and, in many professional journals, the use of the English name of a species is required, at least upon initial mention, in all manuscripts. **Because scientific names of birds reflect the currently understood taxonomic and phylogenetic relationships within a hierarchical taxonomy, and because our understanding of these relationships is constantly being expanded and revised with each new genetic study, the scientific names of birds, at least over the past few decades, have been much less stable, and therefore, of less communicative value, than the English names.** This is particularly true in biodiverse regions such as the Neotropics, where newly published genetic-based phylogenies are constantly leading to recognition of new genera, resurrection of old genera, and wholesale reallocation of species between genera. So pervasive have the taxonomic changes been, that it is truly difficult for even professional ornithologists with decades of experience to keep up. On more than one occasion, I have searched the marvelous Brazilian online database/photo archive WikiAves for a bird I know well, only to come up empty-handed, simply because the species I've been searching for, using the scientific name, is recognized by the Brazilian classification committee under a different genus from the one used by SACC, or, simply because I've forgotten the name of a newly constructed genus, and I'm searching using the old generic name that I've known for decades. In either case, having a stable English name to fall back on is the only recourse. If hundreds of English names are suddenly changed or "improved", the resulting impact on the efficacy of the last 100+ years of literature (both scientific and popular) will be immense, and the effects will be felt most strongly by communities of birders and scientists for whom English is a 2nd or 3rd language, not spoken at all, or, who lack ready access to the most up-to-date literature.

I agree that Common Names are the "realm of everyone" and are used mainly by the "General (Birding) Public". That having been said, I still don't see the argument for why eponyms are bad for the general/birding public. **Most beginners simply accept what they are told the name of a species is, commit it to memory, and never really question it.** I never hear tour participants or beginning birders complaining about why a Cooper's Hawk or a Cassin's Finch is called by those names. I do, sometimes, field questions from birders along the lines of "Who was Cassin?", reflecting a genuine curiosity regarding the ornithological history surrounding a name. Such names, rather than being "meaningless" or "unhelpful" at best, and "harmful" or "exclusionary" at worst, instead offer learning opportunities about the rich history of science in general and ornithology in particular. **Like any history, the history of ornithology is a tapestry of characters and events, some laudable, others regrettable, but each of them contributing threads to the whole, and offering a foundation from which to build, advance, and learn from previous mistakes. Attempting to expunge, suppress, rewrite, or ignore that history is intellectually dishonest, unscientific, and dooms us to not learn from previous mistakes.**

As a PhD ornithologist turned professional birding guide, who has led hundreds of tours over the past 40 years, and an author of a couple of books and numerous papers in the popular birding literature regarding the identification of North American birds, I believe that I am better positioned than most of my strictly academic ornithological colleagues to assess the way the general birding public views the whole English name controversy. That experience of interaction with birders of all stripes, from rank beginners to expert,

strongly suggests a very different attitude towards English common names than the one projected by the Bird Names for Birds Initiative. *As mentioned above, I never hear birders complaining about eponymous English names being exclusionary, harmful, or difficult to remember. In fact, the only times I hear people complaining about English names is either when a name they've committed to memory gets changed for reasons they don't understand, or, when a supposedly descriptive name doesn't match the bird's appearance as they see it in the field* (e.g. Ring-necked Duck, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Olive Warbler, the first two of which are great names if you are holding them in the hand, but not so intuitive when viewed under most field conditions, and the latter of which is both inexplicable and indefensible.).

No one ever said that a Common Name has to be descriptive. It just needs to be unique, and, hopefully, memorable. Obviously, there are many descriptive names that are a great fit, and because of that, they are, in fact, helpful to beginning birders and the General Public alike. But for every one of those great descriptive names, I can point to another that I would argue is not particularly helpful at best, or downright confusing and misleading at worst, when it comes to beginners and the General Public. Besides the aforementioned examples (Ring-necked Duck, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Olive Warbler), think about all of the sexually dichromatic species, 99% of which are named for the adult male plumage. Setting aside the gender bias issue, think of how perplexed John Q Public or Betty Beginning Birder would be if they encountered their first Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, etc., and it happened to be a female of the species. These are all great descriptive names for 50% of the population of each species, but not at all helpful for the other 50%. Or what about attempts at "helpful" descriptive names in groups such as *Empidonax*, *Elaenia*, *Scytalopus*? I would argue that nitpicking subtle plumage details or morphological characters and using those to form Common Names is more confusing than helpful, particularly in biodiverse tropical areas harboring speciose groups with many look-alike species. "Salvadori's Antwren" tells you nothing about how to identify *Myrmotherula minor*, but I still bet it would be more memorable and therefore meaningful to beginning birders than if we were to swap it out for one more "50 Shades of Gray" name that does absolutely nothing to separate it out from all of the other small gray antbirds. And speaking of antbirds, how user-friendly are such supposedly user-friendly common names as Ashy, Ash-colored, Mouse-colored, Gray, Grayish, Leaden, Plumbeous, Slaty, Slate-colored, Cinereous, Saturnine, Black, Blackish, Dusky, Blackish-gray, Bluish-slate, Sooty, and Jet, especially when they are all used for different predominantly gray or black species in the same family? Those kinds of Common Names often trip me up (Is that bird's name "White-capped", "White-crowned" or "White-crested"???), so I can't imagine the general birding population finds them particularly memorable or helpful.

Geography-based or habitat-based Common Names can be both informative and memorable and are probably much more helpful to all users when dealing with speciose groups with many look-alike species. Eponyms can at least impart some historical perspective, and, I would argue, are more memorable, and therefore, more user-friendly than a lot of attempts at descriptive names. Even completely non-descriptive, uninformative names can be more memorable, and thus, more helpful to beginning birders than some overly nuanced attempt at a descriptive name. Imaginative names such as Chowchilla, Pilotbird, Jacky Winter and Willie Wagtail in Australia, or Firewood-Gatherer in South America, don't really tell you much about the birds, but once learned, those names are easily recalled by beginning birders and non-birders alike. We don't typically use descriptive names in naming ourselves, and, in most cases, a name is just a name, without any other meaning other than to identify the person attached to it. Pelé, Elvis, Madonna – none of these describe in any way the people involved, but merely say the name, without even adding the surname, and people around the world know instantly who you are referencing.

The ideas echoed in the EBNC report that "names of species should reflect their natural essence"; that eponyms "reflect human legacies, and thus devalue, or conceal, attributes of the birds"; that "species have their own worth and stories, which can be reflected in their names ... and that "Wildlife does not belong to anyone and should not be named as if it does"; as well as the comments made in the AOS Public Forum

(2021) that could be summarized as saying that “use of eponymic names comes down to a matter of disrespecting marginalized groups of people and the birds themselves”; strike me as unrealistic and misguided at best. I challenge anyone to come up with 10,000+ unique English names for birds, each one of which “reflects the essence” of the species with which it is associated. The idea that applying an eponym to the English name of a bird is somehow disrespectful to the bird because it is reflecting an association with a person and not an attribute of the bird itself is a classic “straw man” argument. **All names are human constructs, be they eponyms, or descriptive names, or names that “reflect the essence” of the bird involved. The descriptive names, essence-capturing names, vocalization-based names, behavioral-based names and so on, merely reflect how we, as humans perceive the birds. The birds themselves do not care what we choose to call them – they do not feel disrespect or take offense.** If they were capable of feeling disrespected or offended by what they are called, I suspect that the English names that would inflame their sense of outrage the most, would not be the eponyms, but rather, many of our attempts at so-called descriptive or essence-capturing names – anthropomorphizing myself into a bird’s figurative shoes, I’m pretty certain I would take offense at names such as Least Sandpiper, Least Auklet, Least Flycatcher, Least Grebe, Lesser Yellowlegs, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Lesser Flamingo, Paltry Tyrannulet, Plain Chachalaca, Plain Tyrannulet, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Mouse-colored Antshrike, Red-necked Grebe, Red-necked Phalarope, anything with the modifier Common, anything called a Cuckoo, anything called a Coot, any male bird of any species referred to as a “Hen” (think Purple Swamphen) and any female bird of any species referred to as a “Cock” (think American Woodcock), anything called Tapaculo (obscenity alert!), Parasitic Jaeger, Ancient (age discrimination!) Murrelet, anything called a Puffin (“fat-shaming”), anything called a Loon, Flightless Cormorant (mocking birds with perceived disabilities), etc., etc. The list is endless. **Of course, the foregoing is fundamentally absurd, but then so is the whole argument about disrespecting birds through poorly chosen names.** As soon as you start applying human sensibilities of disrespect and feelings to birds, and couple that with the seemingly bottomless capacity that people have for taking offense, we quickly run out of available names. **Names for birds are entirely human constructs, designed to allow people to communicate about birds with other people. English names of birds are about English-speaking people and their ability to communicate about birds with other English-speaking people.** Saying that English/Spanish/Portuguese/French names of birds should not be bestowed by colonizers, but by Indigenous groups misses the entire point of an English/Spanish/Portuguese/French name.

When you get right down to it, the vast majority of people I encounter, are comfortable with, and prefer whatever English name they first learned for a given bird and are used to using, regardless of whether it’s an eponym, a morphologically descriptive name, or a geographic-based name. That, in a nutshell, is the case for stability in Common names. Case in point, is my wife, who would never label herself a “birder”, but who does pay attention to the birds in our yard and can readily identify all of the regulars. When this whole “Bird Names for Birds” movement first came to the forefront, and I told her to brace herself for new descriptive names for our beloved backyard Steller’s Jay, Bewick’s Wren, Cooper’s Hawk, Wilson’s Warbler, Bullock’s Oriole, Townsend’s Warbler, and Lawrence’s Goldfinch, her comment was simply “I don’t care what they do, I’m still going to call them by their old names!” And that’s pretty much how I would bet most of the people out there feel. For people starting with a completely clean slate, I could see how renaming *some species* might be helpful. But I don’t see how a major disruption in hundreds of long-established names is helpful or user-friendly to the vast majority of people, be they non-birders, beginning birders, experienced birders, or professional ornithologists. So, let’s stop pretending that the movement to eliminate eponyms is meant to better reflect the wishes and needs of the general public, because the general public has not been consulted in any systematic way, and, as far as I can tell, is not having it.

The General Public, the silent majority, and “selective” advocacy of diversity.

So much of the emphasis of the Bird Names for Birds folks, the EBNC, the AOS-hosted Community Congress on English Bird Names and the like, has focused the debate over English bird names on social justice issues, greater participation by the general public and birding/ornithological community, diversity, equity and inclusion, while dismissing concerns of science, nomenclatural stability and conservation. I'm not sure when those became the overriding concerns of what is, ostensibly, a scientific organization, but clearly, those concerns seem to be the ones steering the ship. **Given this emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, I find it both strange and alarming that AOS has taken a seemingly selective approach to diversity and inclusion in this debate. If inclusion is a primary goal, then why not poll the entire membership of AOS and ABA and open the debate over expunging or retaining eponyms to the entire ornithological and birding community? Why not hear from the entirety of the community – all of the “stakeholders”? Could it be because the Bird Names for Birds leaders and the EBNC are afraid of hearing what the majority of the membership really thinks about all of this?** Because what I'm hearing, from much of the birding public and professional colleagues alike, are prevailing opinions that the whole anti-eponym movement is largely about virtue-signaling, that changing a bunch of bird names won't have any measurable positive impact on people's lives, nor will it usher in a new, more diverse and inclusive ornithological and birding community, not to mention **shared worries that the time wasted on this issue will detract time, attention and resources away from urgently needed conservation measures and research, as well as fueling right wing narratives that progressive and social justice issues are trivial and not to be taken seriously. At a time when things like voting rights, civil rights, educational/political/economic opportunity, justice and empowerment for minority communities and women in this country are under renewed attack, it strikes me, and most others that I've discussed these issues with, that the elimination of eponymic bird names represents a dubious hill to die on.**

You don't have to take my word on this. In the only data-driven attempt that I've seen to quantify public opinion over these issues, Winker (2023 prepublication MS) used sentiment analysis to quantify public reaction to a couple of op-ed pieces (Foley and Rutter, August 4, 2020; Fears 2021), both published in the left-leaning Washington Post. The Foley and Rutter piece detailed a proposal to eliminate all eponymous English bird names, and the Fears piece reported that a racist and colonialist history was perpetuated in some English bird names, especially eponyms, and that a social justice movement was working to change those names. Those articles generated hundreds of online comments, which Winker scored to quantify public response. **Among the more than 800 combined responses to the two articles, Winker reported that responses were, “on average, resoundingly negative, with fewer than ¼ to 1/3 respondents in favor”, and that, “in voting terms, this level of opposition is in supermajority territory.”** Winker also noted that these results likely underestimate overall public negativity to the proposals, given that the Washington Post is a left-leaning newspaper. Indeed, not only did the responses conform to and harden predictable left-right culture war divisiveness and polarization, but also revealed the divisive nature of the topic even within self-identified left-leaning respondents. Winker concluded that there was “considerable risk that broadly de-commemorating eponymous bird names will create more negative than positive outcomes, and posed the following questions: “Does excluding people who do not share our views achieve our objective of inclusiveness?, and “When is it acceptable to take away someone's hard-won knowledge by changing key terms in our shared biodiversity linguistic infrastructure?” These are serious questions that Winker poses, and they deserve serious answers. Despite the obvious problem that Sentiment Analysis is not synonymous with a scientifically-based poll, and has inherent biases in terms of who submits comments, his data-based analysis mirrors the anecdotal feedback that I am receiving, both from professional peers, and from the general birding public, all of which suggest that there will be a substantial backlash directed toward the AOS if the Council decides to adopt the recommendation of the EBNC.

I believe that the AOS has grossly underestimated the extent of this backlash, at least partly because many ornithologists who are in opposition to the Bird Names for Birds Initiative and the recommendations of the EBNC, are loathe to express their opposition publicly, for fear of being branded as racist or opposed to social justice, when, in fact, they are committed to progressive values. The feature article in the recent

Skeptical Inquirer (Volume 47, No. 4) by Coyne and Maroja, entitled **“The Ideological Subversion of Biology”** details the ways in which **Biology, having regularly faced threats from the political right in the past (particularly as regards debates over Evolution versus Creationism, vaccine skepticism, public health mandates, etc.), now faces a “grave threat from “progressive” politics** that are changing the way our work is done, delimiting areas of biology that are taboo and will not be funded by the government or published in scientific journals, stipulating what words biologists must avoid in their writing, **and decreeing how biology is taught to students and communicated to other scientists and the public through the technical and popular press (boldface emphasis mine)**...The science that has brought us so much progress ...is endangered by political dogma strangling our essential tradition of open research and scientific communication. And because much of what we discuss occurs within academic science, **where many scientists are too cowed to speak their minds**, the public is largely unfamiliar with these issues.” They go on to discuss how the change in political climate and the rapid rise of identity politics, has caused scientists on the Left to “use their own fields to signal ideological virtue and membership in a political “tribe”, and **that many researchers and teachers end up self-censoring for fear of professional damage.**

One additional point:

1. In the **“Background context”** section of the draft report, the EBNC emphasizes that one of the five **“main goals”** of the AOS is to **“promote avian conservation science”** and goes on to state that: **“In line with these goals, education and outreach to the general public, and access to ornithological science regarding bird conservation to diverse communities, are critical in a time of biodiversity loss. Recent studies have shown not only significant losses but also continued declines of birds over the past 50 years in most breeding habitats with the exception of wetlands. Few of the causes of these declines are abating. Increasing the perceived value of natural systems through engagement, action, and advocacy is one of the most powerful grassroots ways to counter and reverse losses.”** I take no issue with any of the foregoing as stated. However, the implication that follows, is that wholesale elimination of eponyms and setting up a multi-tiered process of choosing appropriately expansive and diverse groups of stakeholders to participate in winnowing down a list of potential replacement names generated through public forums to create a **“short list”** of names that will then be voted on by the EBNC, is somehow vital to getting sufficient numbers of people on board to conserve bird populations. **THIS, I take issue with.** The extinction threat/crisis is real, it’s here, and it’s happening faster than many realize – for many species and some whole ecosystems, we may already have passed critical tipping points. In the biodiverse tropics, native-born biologists are racing to describe species, determine their distributions, and learn enough of their natural history and ecology in order to formulate conservation strategies before those species are bulldozed into extinction (again, see Pethiyagoda 2023). Given that, the EBNC recommendations that we devote the next several years (decades?) to creating a multi-tiered, large and appropriately diverse set of committees (in the case of some species, e.g. Sabine’s Gull, with a global distribution, requiring global input) informed by extensive opinion canvassing of the general public, just to come up with new, acceptable to everyone & offensive to no one (the ultimate Unicorn) English names for species whose English names have already been stable in the popular and scientific literature for 100-200 years, strikes me as the ultimate case of **“fiddling while Rome burns”** or **“rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic”**.

Summation:

In summation, **I will reiterate my position that I am perfectly happy as a voting member of SACC to continue to entertain, on a case-by-case basis, proposals to change individual eponymic English bird**

names, on the basis that some of them will be shown to be clearly offensive. I would also support professionally designed and executed polling of the entire AOS membership (along with that of the American Birding Association membership) as a way to democratize decisions of how to proceed in this debate. However, I strongly oppose the recommendations of the EBNC as spelled out in the draft report and would regard either the blanket elimination of eponymic bird names, or, the stripping of NACC and SACC of the authority for English bird names and giving said oversight over to the EBNC as the proverbial “bridge too far”.

In closing, I would like to highlight the comments of one respondent to the previously cited Fears (2021) Washington Post article, as presented in Winker (2023). This commenter was offering his/her/their negative vision of a future in which broadscale name changes as perceived remedies for social justice issues are pursued:

“First, they came for the common names and it didn’t worry me, because when I cross the road the people on that side of the road will have a different name for the bird, or butterfly, or beetle or whatever. But then they came for the scientific names, and it really became a mess. For every new generation found the past generation to have such execrable foibles and sins that all achievements in that period were erased. The Linnaean system of giving scientific names was abandoned, for Linnaeus himself had performed a classification of humans into different races. **As a result, every new generation of naturalists spent half of its time renaming every organism and the other half arguing over which of the new namers were pure enough to deserve being listened to.**” (Fears comments: line 4275).

This is where, I fear, the Bird Names for Birds Initiative and the EBNC Proposals are taking us.”

Respectfully,

Kevin J. Zimmer, PhD.
AOS member since 1980
Elective Member AOS
SACC member (23 years)
International Birding Tour Leader (40 years)

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Comments

Steve N G Howell

As is so often the case with divisive issues—and yes, English bird names have become such an issue—it is too easy to fall into a knee-jerk reaction one way or the other. So, let's take a moment and think about this rationally, something the name change proponents seem not to have done.

On 1 November 2023, the American Ornithological Society (<https://americanornithology.org/about/english-bird-names-project/>) stated “in an effort to address past wrongs and engage far more people in the enjoyment, protection, and study of birds, it [AOS] will change all English bird names currently named after people within its geographic jurisdiction.” AOS President Colleen Handel goes on to say ““Everyone who loves and cares about birds should be able to enjoy and study them freely—and birds need our help now more than ever.”

I sincerely hope that all of us who watch, and study birds want these avocations and professions to be equally open to anyone, anywhere; and we would also agree that birds need our help now more than ever. But the question here is: *Are English bird names a real barrier to this goal?* (In this regard, check out an eloquent blog post about genuine barriers: <https://legallyblindbirding.net/2023/11/08/bird-names-and-barriers/>.)

Will all of the disruption caused to stability and communication—in everyday birding, not to mention conservation and science—by changing the names of more than 10% of North American birds actually help birds? Might the time, energy, and funds spent mass debating this issue not be better spent protecting and studying the actual birds themselves? Might the proposal to remove eponyms be simply a self-serving, virtue-signaling gimmick by people who wish to leave their own mark (some would say stain) on history and who don't see, or choose not to see, the bigger picture?

I have to admit, it is difficult for me to believe that the AOS council really, truly believes that somebody would notice a bright yellow and green bird in their yard and say: “Ooh, that's pretty, I wonder what it's called?” They look in a field guide and: “Oh, it's called a Townsend's Warbler, neat, I see the dark cheek patch that's distinctive.” Then: “I wonder who Townsend was, maybe I'll look that up... Oh, he was a racist bigot [I'm not suggesting he was, by the way] so because of that I'm not going to look at any more birds, ever.”

Why is an apple called an apple or a dog called a dog? And how about Pink Ladies and Granny Smiths? Or King Charles Spaniels and Dobermans? If people wish to find offense, they can find it anywhere they choose. But offense can only be taken, not given—if you choose to take offense and manufacture (often vicarious) outrage, then that's your own choice. Bird names are simply handles, license plates if you will, that serve the purposes of recognition and communication. And, as Tom Lehrer once said: “If a person can't communicate, the very least they can do is to shut up.” We are all victims of history and there is no such thing as an innocent bystander, so perhaps we can move forward rather than become mired in things that happened long in the past, things we cannot change. As a T-shirt I saw recently said: “When you're perfect, then judge me.”

It is also rather surprising to hear the AOS sentiment about bird names as a putative exclusionary barrier being voiced from an AOS council that appears to be predominantly of women. Why? Well, think Scarlet Tanager, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black Scoter, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Redhead, Red Crossbill, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Cardinal, and countless others—all named for the male of the species. Yet somehow female birders and ornithologists have overcome this 'nomenclatural barrier.'

Indeed, at least among birdwatchers and field biologists in North America, females often represent the majority (excepting perhaps a relatively small subset of younger birders who are obsessive listers). Thus, is it not patronizing to suggest that eponyms are a barrier to people of color and other minorities given that females have overcome an equally daunting hurdle? (Not to mention that many scientific names honor past humans, yet the AOS implicitly considers that the minorities they wish to bring into the fold are so ignorant they won't realize this—so I won't mention it...)

Looking at this from another angle, if the AOS council wants to mix politics with science, then let's apply their one-size-fits-all 'logic' to some similar situations. Cornell University was named after Ezra Cornell, a Republican businessman. Therefore, by extension, all Republican businessmen are supportive of birds, intellectual study, and the environment—people such as Donald Trump, for example, another Republican businessman... One doesn't need to be a mental giant to appreciate that this might be a flawed premise. Yet everyone for whom a bird was named is now by default deemed 'bad' by AOS and must be extinguished from history?

Cornell (still named for a dead white male as far as I know) also has the Macaulay Library, named after a rich white American woman who gave them a lot of money. But to name a small bird 'Godman's Euphonia' in honor of a rich Englishman who funded and co-created *the greatest natural history treatise ever produced for the New World* (the legendary *Biologia Centrali-Americana*, a 63-volume encyclopedia on the flora and fauna of Mexico and Central America)—oh no, I'm sorry, that can't be allowed.

Let's face it, it is human nature to honor persons who have made contributions to a field: think, for example, of the *Peterson Field Guides* (named in honor of a dead white male, and thus clearly in need of rebranding); or of the *Kaufman Field Guides* or the *Sibley Guides*. These books were all written by white males, and presumably, by AOS logic, this very fact has discouraged countless minority persons from buying these books and embracing an interest in birds and other aspects of nature. Really?

If birdwatchers, biologists, and others can't see the sheer, abundant hypocrisy of the parties embracing the AOS name change directive, then there really is no hope for both humanity or for birds. As *The Jam* once sang: "The public wants what the public gets." And who suffers in the end? Well, just the birds and the environment—which myopic humans also live in, by the way.

Meanwhile, actual real-world problems that genuinely do affect birds—primarily human overpopulation, the elephant in the room—are being conveniently ignored. And while birders argue over important stuff like English bird names, other inconsequential things continue—such as the Arctic Wildlife Refuge being opened to drilling or the oceans being used as a universal dumping ground, and last time I checked the global climate was not getting any cooler. Hmm, does the phrase 'misplaced priorities' ring a bell?

Lastly, and ignoring the fact that rewriting history (as attempted by such luminaries as Chairman Mao and Joseph Stalin) is generally a poor idea, and that trying to whitewash our human past erases the memory of mistakes from which we might learn, the sweeping, wholesale nature of this proclamation (or as some would say, pogrom—the systematic massacre of historical figures) should be a red flag to any thinking, reasonable person.

If one reads—and I mean reads carefully—the recent petition to AOS (<https://chnng.it/gWbfBg4ZLK>) then I fail to see how any sentient person can object to it. And yet, many supposedly rational biologists and birders I know in California seem too afraid to sign this petition in case they are viewed as racists or get 'canceled.' (This fear, or peer pressure, was also touched upon in Chris Gooddie's comments from the UK; <https://shorturl.at/bjU34>). As the famous quote goes: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" (attributed to Edmund Burke).

So, if you prefer to do nothing, don't complain of the chaos that may follow, while bird populations continue to plummet even more quickly, helped merrily along by the AOS council's sanctimonious and divisive diversion of time, energy, and funds away from true conservation measures. You too can be part of the AOS council's virtue-signaling drive to promote biopaucity. Or you can take a moment, think rationally, and accept some responsibility for breathing oxygen.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Comments to AOS Council from J. V. Remsen (Chair and founder, South American Classification Committee, and member since 1984 of North American Classification Committee)

- Diversity and inclusion. The English Bird Names Committee report is antithetical to the AOS mission with respect to diversity and inclusion. AOS includes many people who either like eponyms for their own sake or would rather not meddle with them for the sake of stability. These members have had little opportunity to express their views. Currently, only 4.2 % of SACC English names are eponyms. Many supporters of this tiny “market share” are afraid to speak out for fear of being called racists (as has already happened to Kevin Winker when he published his paper analyzing eponym comments in a Washington Post article.) To anyone who saw that recent AOS-sponsored “symposium” (actually a hybrid pep rally X fundamentalist big-tent revival meeting) on bird names, it was clear that contrary views were not welcomed.
- Broader impacts. I am acutely conscious of my White Privilege status that has helped me get where I am. However, censoring all eponyms smacks of an attempt to erase the cultural heritage and scientific accomplishment of “Western” culture in the Western Hemisphere. Extremists on the political right will be grateful to the AOS for providing beautiful propaganda for their agenda.
- Financial impacts: Because AOS names are used by federal agencies, the cost to *taxpayers* of those name changes needs assessment. USFWS, USDA, NPS, etc. all use standardized AOS names, and this has a trickle-down impact on state and local agencies. They already have to deal with some instability due to changes in species limits, but 150 immediate changes represent a new level of change. Just in the bird world, think about 4-letter banding codes: 150 would have to be changed and 150 would become obsolete.
- Trivialization of AOS. A typical reaction to the controversy from the general public and scientists in other fields is (to paraphrase colleagues and friends outside the bird community) “of all the problems in need of solutions, the AOS is focusing on THIS!” It’s a bad look for AOS¹.
- Negative impact. The EBNC report ignores the potential impact that their recommendations will have on countries outside the Global North. If AOS adopts the proposal, it will be seen as a heavy-handed edict from the Global North without consideration of negative impacts. I have provided to President Handel a list of eponyms derived from past or present widely respected members of the ornithological culture of many South American countries, most of them citizens of those countries.
- Global South. If everyone on SACC thought that canceling all eponyms would be an effective way to promote interest in or conservation of birds or remove obstacles to inclusion of under-represented groups, then we would be in favor of it. There is no direct evidence for any tangible, positive effect, other than to appease the BN4B people. In fact, I predict that the fallout will have the opposite effect on many in South America; see Pethiyagoda (2023)² and Jost et al. (2023)^{3,4}. I like to think we as a scientific society (AOS) base our policy changes on evidence, not rhetoric.
- Justice. All but one SACC members are in favor of a case-by-case analysis to remove eponymous English for which continued use of that eponym is harmful to people or bird conservation⁵. The argument that the simplest thing to do is delete all of them ignores the counterpoint that the simplest solution of all is to *not* remove any of them. Yes, the process will be messy for many reasons, but we have a sample size of 1 (i.e. McCown) that suggests that it can work, that NACC is open to that process, and that name changes are possible through NACC (and SACC) protocols. If all accusations of “criminal” activity were easy Y/N decisions, then democracies would not need their complex judiciary systems. To do otherwise is eerily reminiscent of historical purges by fascist, communist, and extreme religious groups.

- Bird names for birds. The ENBC report takes it as a given that its new names will help people learn bird identification. I regard this a classic False Premise and will provide a separate document on this. The bottom line is that birds names aren't for birds – they are for people.
- Shared vision. This entire controversy saddens me. If there were a way to quantify the moral/political views of NACC and SACC members in some sort of 3D multivariate space, I suspect that resulting cloud of points would be statistically indistinguishable from those of the EBNC or even BN4B. We would be on the same side of virtually any other issue. But here we are, tearing each other apart over English bird names⁶.
- Personal Considerations. If AOU Council adopts EBNC recommendations, then I will resign from AOS and NACC, and remove SACC from AOS. This could be interpreted as a threat to leverage the decision but is intended only as a full disclosure FYI. I cannot be a part of issuing an edict from the Global North to the Global South. At a strictly personal, emotional level, I cannot be a part of cancelling Ted Parker, John O'Neill, Gary Stiles, and others, or several personal heroes Charles Darwin, Emilie Snethlage, Helmut Sick, and others.
- Trying to end on a positive note. The good effect of the EBNC report is that it has stimulated all of us to think more aggressively of concrete ways to improve diversity and inclusion in AOS, particularly from the SACC side (see suggestions from SACC members) in terms of South Americans.⁷

Footnotes added Dec. 2023:

¹ Public ridicule happened almost immediately. See the final minutes of Jimmy Kimmel's monologue:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ0nVxD2Nck>

² Pethiyagoda 2023:
https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C19&q=pethiyagoda+names&btnG=

³ Jost et al. 2023:
<https://www.kerwa.ucr.ac.cr/bitstream/handle/10669/89547/Jost%20et%20al%20Eponyms%20%281%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴ Neither Pethiyagoda nor Jost et al. were cited in the final EBNC report.

⁵ The one SACC member in favor of a blanket purge, Alvaro Jaramillo, was also an author on the EBNC reports and did not represent SACC in any official way. NACC members voted unanimously 12-0 to remove harmful names but do it on a case-by-case basis.

⁶ The AOS Council's decision to remove all eponyms has, in fact, produced the largest schism in history in the ornithological and birding communities at a time when unity is critical in facing the loss of 3 billion birds, etc. Despite repeated pleas to AOS leadership to conduct a poll of the 2800 members who elected them to gauge what affects this might have, those requests were denied. So much for AOS concerns for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

⁷ SACC and NACC members submitted a number of concrete suggestions for expanding diversity and inclusion in AOS. No response received from AOS leadership.

Changing Eponymous Names

Jon L Dunn

The decision by the AOS Council, effectively their board of directors, on 1 November was deeply disturbing on many levels. As a member of NACC (since 2000) we had seen this coming, but the breadth of the decision was still stunning. In part, and at the request of the AOS, we had been working on a gradual overview of historical figures for which birds had been named after. It was a "go slow" approach as should any prosecution and defense of any figure being evaluated for cancellation. Other objectionable names for species names such as Inca Dove were being reviewed.

The decision to purge all eponymous names from the AOS area ended our review. Two NACC members promptly resigned, one within minutes of the decision; he had served for a number of decades on NACC and was the senior member of the committee. The contributions of the two were substantial, invaluable, and they will be sorely missed. They are in my opinion, not replaceable.

The AOS has dictated the purge will start with species that are well known for Canada and the U.S., basically the area that has been part of the AOU/AOS area since its inception in 1883. Responsibilities for taxonomy and nomenclature fell to their Check-list Committee and was the policy up until now.

It appears now that the nomenclature part, at least the English nomenclature, will no longer be part of NACC's responsibility and a newly created committee in the future will take on that task. While I firmly oppose what happened, the AOS Council did have the right to do what they did. Keep in mind they did no public polling to see how ornithologists and the birding public felt about this despite the fact that in 2020 the Council had decided to do public polling. This was never done. Nor was the AOS's membership asked for their opinion, including their Elective Members and their Fellows. Since they weren't asked for their opinion, many are delivering that opinion now, an activity that is both useful and fully warranted.

Still, in my opinion the purge will soon start for the 89 (my count) eponymously named species that are found most regularly in the U.S. and Canada. An additional 26 species are found south of the U.S. border, or in the Caribbean. These regions along with Hawaii were added to the AOU area in 1983 with the publication of the 6th edition of the Checklist. Regular non-breeding visitors to North America number 8 species while rare, casual, and accidental species number 10, 9 and 12 species respectively. While the majority (58%) are so called "our birds" 42% aren't.

The AOS will do outreach to individuals and organizations in Latin America to see how they feel about the changing of the English names and how to go about it. What happens if they say, "no thank you?" Many of those species that are of rare to accidental occurrence have well-established English names. What right do we have to change those names? The very thing that the movement to replace English names decries against ("colonialism"). Forcing new English names seems like more examples of "American Imperialism,

The battle to save the 89 may be lost, but there are 65 more that can and should be politely, but vigorously, debated. Regarding those eponymously named species from Middle America and the West Indies, these include the replacement of Zeledon's Antbird, the father of Costan Rican ornithology and for which their ornithological journal (Zeledonia) is named, and Gundlach's Hawk being replaced from Cuba. Gundlach is worshiped by Cuban ornithologists and is certainly the father of Cuban ornithology. He arrived from Germany in the middle of the 19th century and made Cuba his home. His contributions to ornithology and other fields were invaluable.

But, of all of these individuals, the replacement of Zino's Petrel, seems to be to be the most unforgivable. Paul Zino, with the assistance of others, rediscovered this resident petrel that now bears his name. Not only did he rediscover it, but he and his son Frank have dedicated their lives to saving this critically endangered species. It breeds at the highest elevations on the island of Madeira in the eastern Atlantic. By

the AOS mandate, the reason for a name replacement is that it is on the list of North American species, and the 1 November announcement said that all eponymous names would be changed. Keep in mind that Zino's Petrel has occurred only once in the AOS area, a bird photographed and identified later off Hatteras, North Carolina in September 1995. I'm sure Europeans will appreciate our need to rename this most endangered species based on its single occurrence in our area.

The AOS intended to go after changing the eponymous names for South American birds too, over 100 which are eponyms. The South American Check-list Committee within weeks voted to withdraw their association with AOS so this probably will not happen, unless a new committee of eponym opposed collaborators is formed.

If there is one useful thing about the name changes, it is that maybe birders might concentrate on scientific names, the name in italics next to the English name. Nearly two thirds of the English names which are eponymous also have eponymous scientific names. If one is so offended by the eponymous English names, how will they live with the scientific names remaining? The reason they will have to live with it for now is that scientific names can't be changed on a whim as they are governed by the ICZN (The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature), founded in 1895. I very much doubt they will offer any support for those wanting to cancel eponymous scientific names, although who knows?

I never expected events to have proceeded to the point where we are now. Learning scientific names are helpful to birders in all sorts of ways, not to mention that for most, the eponymous names will live on in the specific epithets (the 2nd part of the binomial name) at which point one has to wonder what this entire exercise has accomplished.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

An Open Letter to the AOS by David Ascanio

Yesterday, in response to a post by Gary Rosenberg in Facebook regarding the AOS decision to change all English-language bird names after people in their jurisdiction, I posted my opinion.

As someone that has spent great part of his life supporting education, conservation and assisting research to protect the birds of Venezuela, I feel entitled to give an opinion, respecting the opinion of others.

To my great surprise, one of the supporters of the council decision called me irresponsibly (on reading my opinion) “an entitled white boy”.

That is a front that I have never faced, less so being a non-academic, non-white and less so privileged Latin American citizen.

There you are: a decision that you have called “to stop harmful and exclusionary names associated with the past” seems to entitle your supporters to offend anyone that has an opinion that differs to your decision.

For the above reason, I am perceiving your decision as harmful and destructive. Who you are to dishonor or offend those that oppose rightfully to your decision?

Yes, I have had to deal in my life with supremacists (not only white), with offensive people (not only white) and still never thought that offensive comments would come from supporters of the AOS council decision.

I pledge you to review your actions that are creating more conflicts and pain that what was already created in the past. In fact, my opinion is that changing bird names won't change a horrendous past associated with few ornithologists. What will change that past is more opportunities for the future of several potential students of countries with less access to academic education. And that is exactly what people like Gary Rosenberg and Van Remsen (to mention two giants of neotropical ornithology) have already been doing for decades.

As of today, I was the target of an offensive comment from one of your supporters given a written respectful opinion. That had never happened to me before.

To my eyes, the council is promoting exactly what was supposed to fight: offensive and exclusionary positions to those that have a different way of thinking.

A very sad day to me. An organization that should be looking forward to a more inclusive world has opened a box of offenses to those with different opinions. I leave it here. I am speechless and sad for the return of offensive language in the academic and bird conservation fields, triggered by a supporter of the AOS decisions.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Andrew Kratter
Letter to the AOS

Like all members of the AOS-NACC and SACC, I was given the opportunity to present my opinions to the AOS Council on the proposal from the ad hoc English Bird Names Committee to remove all eponymous names. My letter was short, as other members of both Committees had already laid out the problems with the proposal. What I most wanted was to warn the Council that accepting such a proposal was harmful to the Society and to birds. Here is the letter:

I will keep this brief because I am out of the office on vacation, and many of my colleagues on the NACC and SACC have eloquently stated most of the major points I would cover. I am a long-standing member of the NACC (20+ years) and have watched the Committee transition from literally a “bunch of old white guys” in the late 1990s, operating in near secrecy, to the much more diverse and transparent Committee found today. The AOU/AOS likewise has made many necessary strides to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, as we have continued to expand our ornithological reach globally. I am also heavily involved in the birding world: I have served several terms on the American Birding Association’s Checklist Committee and 15+ years on the Florida Ornithological Society’s Records Committee. The EBN Committee recommendation to drop all eponyms from English bird names could have deep negative impacts to the AOS and to the English-speaking birding community in general. Such a change would likely unleash a torrent of negative coverage across major media and fracture our organization. This is an incredibly divisive issue, and the AOS should tread carefully. At the very least, a professional survey of all AOS members is critical to establish the baseline of support for this recommendation. I recognize that some eponyms need to change (and a few already have), and the NACC was being slowly responsive. The process, however flawed, was being worked out in the NACC before the moratorium on name changes was enacted. The NACC had recently coined two new English names (for what are now known as Thick-billed Longspur and Chihuahuan Meadowlark). The process was slow and laborious, underscoring the difficulties that such undertakings endeavor. We found engaging the public was a major critical step in coming up with names that would best suit the species and be met with wide acceptance. Despite this initial progress by the NACC, I think we need changes in the processes by which we decide the eponymous names that need to be changed and to coin new English names. I recognize that a new English-names Committee, separate from the core NACC/SACC and representing the diverse AOS community, may be necessary. I think that the NACC and SACC members should be a part of this Committee, as they have the requisite experience in how to navigate through the competing opinions, seek public input, and arrive at the most appropriate English name. In sum, I feel that the EBN Committee’s recommendation to drop all eponyms from English bird names has not been adequately vetted within the AOS and will result in major damage to our credibility. This intense focus on a divisive and unpopular move would come at a time when bird populations worldwide are declining, and their conservation is in the utmost need of an organization like the AOS to provide scientific rationale and solutions. Much of what we can best contribute would be lost in a maelstrom of negative media coverage and a splintering within our own ranks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Andy Kratter

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

An Open Letter to AOS Leadership **by Rachel Kolokoff Hopper**

As the author of this petition, I have recently been attacked on a state listserv, being called a “trumper” and a “racist” with “vile ideology”. I have also been attacked on Facebook with the same racism allegations.

Most of you do not know me, but you can be assured that these allegations could not be further from the truth. My values that include equality, inclusivity, and tolerance, are the cornerstones of how I was taught to live my life, and how I live my life to this day.

Let’s be clear. I wrote the petition because I disagreed with the AOS decision to change ALL eponymous names. I totally agree with changing eponyms that are harmful, exclusionary, or divisive, and the petition makes that clear. The petition also says I am totally opposed to the process the AOS has chosen to change all of them.

The very first sentence in the petition says: “We the undersigned strongly support diversity and inclusion in the birding community.” And this is true to my very core.

But because I support a moderate approach to changing eponymous names, and agree with changing names such as McCown’s and Oldsquaw, and also agree that there are others that should be reviewed and changed, but do not agree that “all eponyms have to go,” somehow, this makes me a racist?

You may disagree with my position, but I am not sure how anything I have written or said can be construed as racist or right winged or “vile ideology.”

Where is the moderate approach in this matter? What is the divide that is so great that we cannot come together and agree on a compromise? How has this issue become all or nothing? How has this become a discussion about personal values?

Friends are unfriending friends on FB, colleagues are no longer talking with each other, people are branding others with harmful and derogatory labels. Supporters of this petition have had their employment threatened after going public with their opinions.

AOS leadership was warned ahead of time that this decision would result in this deep divide. AOS leadership was asked to listen to more voices on this matter. AOS leadership was told that there were better ways to embrace inclusivity in birding.

But AOS leadership did not listen to a diversity of voices. They did not poll their membership. They did not ask birders how they felt about this decision. They listened to an ad hoc committee made up of 11 people and ignored their own committee’s recommendations (the NACC) to continue their own established process of evaluating eponymous names on a case-by-case basis.

AOS leadership needs to be made eminently aware of how this decision has affected the birding community and ornithology in general. What once was a peaceful activity we could engage in together is now a hotbed of slurs and slander and cancel culture wars.

AOS leadership, you have the power to step in and calm things down. Where are you?

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Statement to AOS on Blanket Changes to Eponymous English Bird Names

Greg D. Jackson

Member, American Ornithological Society

It is encouraging that the decision to remove all eponymous bird names now can be rationally challenged, at least in a small way. The American Ornithological Society and others have steamrolled this concept despite knowing there was significant opposition to the idea. This concept was promoted so aggressively that it quickly became almost sacrilegious to utter a word against it, lest one be labeled as oblivious about race matters or worse. I applaud the courage of Dr. Remsen and others in publicly pushing back on this matter.

I strongly oppose the blanket removal of all eponymous English bird names. Suddenly changing 150 names in North America is both unnecessary and disruptive. This decision smacks of AOS seeking to appear inclusive more than being so, a nod to diversity more than true problem solving. I am not questioning the desire of AOS leadership to include a more diverse group in ornithology, but rather the methodology of doing so. They should not have rammed through this proposal over the objections of not only the committees normally tasked with this topic but also the membership.

Where is the evidence that changing all these names will suddenly cause a mass rush of people of color to ornithology and birding? Though I have seen comments from a few birders from minority groups that they dislike the idea of birds named for historical white men, I seriously doubt that changing these names will have a significant impact on inclusivity. I completely agree with the need for a more diverse group of birders and ornithologists, as this has been mostly a white realm. There is nothing to be gained by excluding anyone who sincerely wishes to enjoy birds and nature, and both we and the birds will benefit by increasing the number of people interested in nature. But the root causes of a marked white predominance in bird study have little to do with English bird names. The sources of lack of diversity in this field stem more from economic and educational disparities, lack of access to parks and other natural settings for many populations, decreased freedom of mobility, insufficient outreach, and the slow progression of cultural norms. Eliminating the names of historical white men from English bird names might be temporarily satisfying to a few, but I believe will have little impact on diversity without real change in other factors.

I have heard the argument that we can change all the eponymous English names and replace them with names which better describe the bird. However, that is hypocritical (or at best incomplete) as there are many poor non-eponymous English names for which there seems to be little clamor for replacement. Monikers like Sharp-shinned Hawk, Nashville Warbler, and Palm Warbler are prime examples of names generated years ago from specimens or first collection locations/habitats but having little utility in identifying or finding the species.

Stripping all eponymous names without cause disrespects the many prominent ornithologists who devoted their lives to this field and are pillars of the bird study movement. While I agree there may be times when the name of a particularly egregious person should be removed, this should be done case by case if significant evidence is produced to compel such change. This should not be a witch hunt or a type of bird-name McCarthyism. It is very difficult to search into the lives of anyone and not find fault; I suspect the AOS leadership would not wish to have their lives examined with a fine-toothed comb, nor would most people. It is especially difficult to delve deeply into the lives of people from long-ago generations and cultures and not find something unappealing in a modern sense. This does not excuse true misconduct, but there should be rationality in this process. Eliminating the names of all who have come before us is an attempt to bury history and their significant contributions. What is next? Will we now have to change the names of half of the municipalities in North America? Should we strip the old white men from our money? Should all history we dislike not be taught or displayed, just swept under the rug?

Let us not all jump on this fast-moving train and take a step back to discuss this rationally and democratically. Too many voices are being ignored behind a facade of change which will likely have little real impact on the problem but will cause division and ill-feeling within the birding community. Do not casually dishonor the years of sacrifice and work of the stalwarts of ornithology without specific cause.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Bird Names and Naming: Some Historical Aspects by John Rowlett

The Enlightenment convention of giving a scientific and (later) a common name to a taxon when described to science has a history. Avian names change for scientific reasons—splits and lumps, for example—but they don't disappear since they live in the historical records of ornithology. Whereas naming avian taxa has an evolving scientific basis, the act of naming is every bit as cultural as scientific.

The long-standing tradition of paying tribute to a human being for some worthy public or private reason has resulted in countless scientific names, as well as numerous vernacular names. Recent disagreements over the names for birds have centered on contemporary ethical concerns having to do with the American Ornithological Society's decision to vacate all English eponyms of North American avifauna due to the objectionable cultural implications of some of those honored. If this thinking is modeled on the removal of post-Civil War memorials celebrating Confederate figures and principles, the model is misleading because the removal of those statues is in response to a pseudo-historical political movement—originating at the turn of the twentieth century, and even extant today—that is conspicuously different from the non-ideological act characteristic of naming birds, whatever the cultural implications of the eponyms.

Historically contextualizing and judging those who have been honored with eponymous names by consulting the biographies and bird dictionaries is simply inadequate for many. Birders who are striving to negotiate living in the present with an enhanced ethical consciousness, yet who continue to use the eponyms of personages now found offensive or reprehensible, are opposed both to retaining the objectionable eponyms and to using the possessive case on the grounds that birds are not owned by people. Grammatically speaking, the genitive case of a scientific eponym need not imply ownership and often simply implies association; when scientific eponyms become English eponyms, the case loses its sense of association and becomes possessive. Ethically speaking, the sensitivity of these birders and the AOS Council is commendable, but the leadership's proposed resolution is undesirable because it's ahistorical.

The proposed vacating of eponymous English names confuses the *historicity* of naming with the *regulations* guiding acts of naming. Discarding all English eponyms represses the messiness of ornithological history rather than relying on the research of conscientious biographers to expose it. Regulation of naming is what guarantees stability of nomenclature. Establishing regulations, or changing them for the future, should replace disruptively erasing the names of the past. But who regulates? It is unclear wherein the authority on English nomenclature resides: Is it with the scientist who names the new taxon when describing it; with the journal which accepts and publishes the description of the taxon as valid; or with an ad hoc committee of an ornithological institution like the AOS?

If it is the contention of the AOS Council that the newly formed English Bird Names Committee (EBNC) would set and authorize a change in protocol, let the ceding of this authority result in a protocol regulating the future of English naming rather than a destabilizing effort at purification. If the Code of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) is unlikely to change in response to cultural issues, let us consider that it is the changing protocol for English naming, complete with the specified cultural rationales, that is more likely to achieve consensus among the diversity of ornithologists and birders within the AOS realm of authority than any whitewashing of the past through an eradication of eponyms, thereby separating birding from its historical associations rather than correcting the history by redirecting it.

Scientific naming is regulated by rather complicated rules, so nomenclatural norms are more likely to guide any alteration in the naming practice of ornithologists than any change of code. Besides, the desire to pay tribute to another by bestowing their name on a non-human creature has a venerable history in the descriptive sciences and is a pleasure many scientists continue to valorize, even when that pleasure is

expressed wittily or parodically. Many ornithologists/birders find the vacating of English eponyms every bit as offensive as those who find their currency shameful. Yet most are satisfied to let future eponyms reside exclusively in the taxon's technical name.

Obviously, a describing ornithologist is implicated in the choice of any eponymous designee(s). Just as obviously, the retention of English eponyms does not imply endorsement of the character for whom any bird was named. And an argument for the retention of eponyms should in no way be understood as failing to recognize the need for an increasingly diverse and inclusive community of birders/ornithologists, necessarily united in the cause of increasing, throughout the Americas, our common efforts at conservation and the retarding of avian extinction.

Explaining contemporary reasons for the AOS finding eponymous English names unacceptable, thenceforth, would demonstrate an ethical consciousness without suppressing history; indeed, it would be an act of historicity itself. The ethical rationale for a change would become part of the history of avian naming, along with those values being elevated and discarded. Such a welcome change in nomenclatural practice would require that the reasons for abandoning the controversial convention be as widely publicized as the erasure of eponyms is now being made public by the AOS, if to a different end. Exposure of a person's ignoble character and disgraceful acts is certainly justified but need not result in the expungement of eponyms.

To the objection that such a regulatory shift amounts to naught because most birds are already named, recall that many ornithologists, based on increasingly sophisticated methods of analysis, estimate that there may exist roughly twice as many species of Aves as now recognized. A good portion of those 10,000 species reside unnamed throughout the Americas, the projected purview of the EBNC—likely well more than the 250 or so species currently bearing eponyms.

Ornithologist Eugene Eisenmann (1906-1981), a member of the ICZN, argued that the scientific naming of birds should be descriptive, calling attention to a bird's appearance, voice, behavior, habitat, food, or geographic particularity. This “descriptive principle” has been seized upon by those who wish to expunge English eponyms. Here there is consensus. Eisenmann's principle should serve as a constructive guideline for regulating all English names going forward. In fact, this principle, though seldom invoked as such, appears to be the normative default now followed by most ornithologists.

My remarks propose following a procedure that reveals the unethical aspects of personages for whom birds have been named without erasing them. Perhaps the coining of scientific eponyms might be reconsidered as well, lest we forget the principal purpose of naming taxa in the first place: to enhance knowledge, not to commemorate. Let commemoration live in the descriptive text; let the lofty honor of naming a new taxon reflect on the describing ornithologist(s); and let inquisitive birders learn the fascinating history of avian naming by consulting reliable sources that expose ornithology's inescapably checkered past.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Analyzing the “Names change all the time” Argument by Van Remsen

Concerning the proposed purge of all eponymous bird names a frequent claim by the pro-purge people is that it’s no big deal to change the ca. 80 names of the regular birds in the USA and Canada because “names change all the time”. On the surface, that is technically correct. However, it has the same degree of substance as the Climate Deniers who chant that “climate changes all the time”, as if that also means that climate change is no big deal. The similarity is kind of eerie.

It’s all about how you define “all the time.” It’s about the rate of change. So, here are some data on that rate.

I analyzed changes in English names between the 1998 hard copy “AOU Checklist, 7th edition” and 2023. That’s ca. 25-year timespan. I sampled 785 species of regular occurrence in the USA and Canada, i.e. no vagrants, even those as regular as Ruff. I also excluded almost all introduced species, including all those in Hawaii. Where to draw the line was subjective in some cases, but I don’t think it biased the results.

So, here are the results: out of these 785 species, only 25 (3%) have changed names in 25 years, i.e. 1/year. Of those 25, 17 (68%) of the changes were required by changes in species limits (e.g. Sage Grouse, Blue Grouse, Common Snipe, etc.). Four more were changed to conform to global usage (Rock Pigeon to Rock Dove, Greater Shearwater to Great Shearwater, Blue-throated Hummingbird to Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Clay-colored Robin to Clay-colored Thrush); in all four cases, a direct connection was retained to the original name to minimize confusion.

That leaves 4 of 785 names changed for other reasons. McCown’s Longspur (canceled), Gray Jay (to Canada Jay; actually, correcting a mistake in AOU procedure made sometime in the 1950s), and removing the “Sharp-tailed” group name from Nelson’s and Saltmarsh sparrow but retaining the connection between old and new).

So, when you encounter the chant “names change all the time”, keep in mind the contrast between about 1 per year over the last 25 years versus 80 or whatever within whatever time span the new EBNC acts.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Misinformation Posted on Facebook Corrected **by Gary Rosenberg**

There has been a lot of spirited discussion on Facebook recently regarding the AOS decision to change the English bird names of 150+ species that are named after people (Eponyms). I find it astounding that there is so much misinformation, and so many misconceptions that are repeated over and over - like "Alternative Facts" - Here are a few in no particular order (I am sure I am missing some):

- 1) Most (or sometimes all) of the people who had birds named after them were slave owners, grave robbers, or otherwise horrible people. Not true. Very few out of the more than 100 fall into this category. Most were actually ornithologists, naturalists, explorers, soldiers, etc., and several were actually founders of the AOS, or received prestigious awards, or worked in museums, and were responsible for an incredible wealth of information furthering the understanding of birds in North America and around the world.
- 2) Similarly, the people who had birds named after them did not do anything to deserve this honor. I find this one particularly mis-informed and subjective. See above, but also consider ornithologists such as Wilson, Baird, Ridgway, Bendire, Cassin - all ornithological giants - and responsible for so many discoveries, as well as sorting out the mess that North American bird taxonomy was in at the time.
- 3) People have no right naming birds after themselves. This suggests that this is a thing - which it is NOT. None of the eponymous bird names were actually named by the person. This shows a misunderstanding of how birds got their English names. Most were created long after the birds were described to science - most given by ornithologists working in museums. The idea that the birds are "owned" by the people is incorrect - yes there is the use of an apostrophe, but in this case it just means that the person is honored.
- 4) Birds will appreciate the new names. David Sibley said this in his video supporting the AOS decision. Perhaps he didn't REALLY mean this (giving him the benefit of the doubt) - but it is repeated. Needless to say, birds do not know their names, and this is purely anthropomorphic.
- 5) Most people are in favor of this decision. Well, that is an opinion not really supported by fact. Thousands of birders and ornithologists have signed a counter petition, so I would say the jury is out on that one. Furthermore, of those who signed our counter petition, they have produced (cumulatively) MORE THAN 20,000 SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS!!!
- 6) Those of us who like eponyms are insensitive and/or racist. Not true. Everyone who has signed our petition is all for inclusiveness and in big favor of increasing diversity within birding and ornithology (or all sciences). Many many many of us have worked our entire careers promoting birding around the world, either through sponsoring students, or through ecotourism in developing countries, or any number of other endeavors. To be labeled a racist because we like ornithological history is sad indeed.
- 7) There are many eponyms. I think it is important to point out that only 150+ species on the North American list are eponymous. That is 5% - which means that 95% of the birds are NOT eponym, yet the proponents of changing all of them seem to be intolerant to the views of thousands - supposedly in the name of promoting inclusiveness. Seems pretty exclusionary to me.
- 8) It is too difficult to evaluate the people on a case-by-case basis. This is what the North American Checklist Committee was doing - and wanted to continue - and all members voted to maintain this methodology. Their views were ignored or dismissed (semantics) - and the process of coming up with English names was totally taken away from the committee and given to a newly formed committee - the English Bird Names Committee. This prompted the resignation of some members of the NACC.
- 9) Some people were upset at the renaming (both the process and the actual name) of McCown's Longspur as Thick-billed Longspur. The entire process is available to read online - including the justification for naming it Thick-billed Longspur - which, ironically, is exactly the type of descriptive bird name that so many are desiring. The idea that the NACC was not anything but professional during the entire process is not true - and totally insulting to the members of the committee. That some don't like the name is pure evidence

that any new bird name is not going to have unanimous approval.

10) The International Ornithologists Union (the IOU, or IOC) who maintain a list of English bird names for all the birds in the world will follow the AOS decision. Not true. They are not in favor of removing eponyms, and this has prompted the South American Checklist Committee - whom all but one member were against the AOS decision - to disassociate themselves from the AOS and move to be associated with the IOC. There are thousands of eponymous bird names - represented by English names, genera, species, or subspecies around the world - and no one has any intention of changing them.

11) The AOS is changing the names of our birds. Of the 150+ species slated to have their names changed, only about 89 actually breed in the United States or Canada - and many of those are neotropical migrants that spend 8-9 months of the year on wintering grounds in other countries. The remaining 60 or so are either birds that are mainly found in other countries and occur in the U.S. or Canada as rarities or are actually species found exclusively in countries in Latin America or the Caribbean. The idea that the AOS can just change the English names of these species without consultation of ornithological bodies in the other countries is audacious.

12) Changing the English names will create more inclusiveness for birders and ornithologists from Latin America. Where is the proof of this? Many Latin Americans have signed onto the counter petition and feel that "Americans" dictating this type of radical change is another form of Colonialism.

13) People don't like the change in English Bird names because we don't like "change" or will find it too difficult to relearn new bird names. Please! I don't think I really need to explain the absurdity of this notion.

14) Changing the English names is NOT cancelling anyone. Not true. I have seen the argument that the scientific names will not change, so the people are not really canceled. I believe the removal of all eponymous bird names will associate the good with the bad - even though a very small percentage of people will fall into the category of deserving to have their name removed, all the others will be guilty by association. Once the English eponyms are removed, what is to stop the movement of continuing on to scientific names (other than the international rules that govern this process)?

15) Eponyms are exclusionary to minorities in birding. Some names may be offensive to some - and everyone is willing to compromise and change the truly offensive ones - yet show me proof that ANYONE refused to become a birder or go into ornithology purely on the basis that there were some offensive bird names.

16) Choosing eponyms is common today. Not true. Virtually all of the species with eponyms were described in the 1700s and 1800s - but many of the English names were given much later by ornithologists in museums - often using the English name to correspond with the scientific name. Very few new species (relatively) are described today - yet there are lumps and splits where "new" English names are occasionally needed - sometimes a form already had a name (when originally described) - yet the general practice TODAY is to give birds descriptive names, relating to either plumage, habitat, range, vocalizations etc. So, the practice of giving birds new eponyms is NOT widespread today - this was mostly a historical practice.

17) Descriptive names are better. English names are for communication purposes - solely! Whether one learns the name "Yellow-throated Warbler", or Wilson's Warbler, it is just memorization - and the use is purely communicative. No one seems to mind the more than 100 North American species that have non-eponymous names yet are NOT at all descriptive - there are many that fall into this category. A few examples are Palm Warbler (not found in palms), Prairie Warbler (not found in the prairies), Connecticut Warbler (very rare in Connecticut), and odd names like Verdin, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia, or Sharp-shinned Hawk - and on and on. Humans can learn these names just as easily as more descriptive names - and eponyms are the same. When one learns Cooper's Hawk - the name Cooper's is easily distinguished from the name Sharp-shinned - neither of which is descriptive - of course actually identifying the birds correctly is a different matter :-)

18) Bird names change all the time. This is a very common argument in favor of changing English names - as if it just isn't a big deal. Yes, taxonomy is always changing - this is the nature of the science (also poorly understood by the lay person) - new genetic techniques are always leading to lumps and splits - and new names. Most of these changes involve reassignment to a different genus - or elevation to a new genus or species - YET the English name is the stable name - and often used by scientists in publications - so over the years, everyone will KNOW what form is being referred to - even if the scientific name changes. Bird name stability is one of the objectives mentioned by the AOS - especially when it comes to the NACC. At no time in history has such a large number of names been changed at the same time - with will be very destabilizing to say the least.

19) Cost of the change is not appreciated. No one even mentions what the monetary cost of such a wholesale change in bird names will be. Government agencies will need to reproduce all their materials, and places like national parks and wildlife refuges will need to change all their interpretive signage - or just keep "outdated" names (which many people say they will do anyway). I suspect there will be a very large unintended and unrealized monetary cost - not to mention perhaps the need to purchase new field guides. Plus think of the sheer number of existing books - and all the ornithological literature - that will become outdated or obsolete. Yes - some will actually profit from this endeavor - such as those who produce the new field guides.

20) Birds should not be named after people. Eponyms are part of our everyday life and lexicon. Everywhere we look they are used. Obvious ones are in names of cities and states - are we going to really change the name of Washington D.C. because Washington had slaves. A very large African American population lives in D.C. - are they advocating for the change of the name? Is this preventing anyone from moving there? Eponyms are everywhere in our language - in temperature, weights and measure, electricity, roads, buildings, monuments, airports, EVERYWHERE. If there is a very offensive name, we change it, but we don't remove ALL of them because we say it is too hard to figure out the bad ones.

21) Finally, just a word about inclusiveness. The AOS decisions are the opposite of inclusiveness. I realize that their intent may have been noble, and by removing eponyms, they thought they were moving in the direction of inclusiveness and increased diversity, but they misjudged how important eponyms and ornithological history is to so many. This decision has truly divided the birding community - and now it is almost impossible to have a rational discussion, as everyone seems dug into their positions. This was so unnecessary, and although the "Ad Hoc" committee claims to have thought all this through, I really don't think they anticipated such a backlash. People like me like eponyms. They remind me of ornithological history - and the giants in ornithology who built what birding is today. This is important and can't just be swept under the rug or canceled. That is how we view this decision - and it is unfair to the thousands (countless) of us who view this as important.

In conclusion, passions run deep in this discussion. It is my opinion that the AOS could please almost everyone (NOTHING pleases everyone) by sticking to their **case-by-case** methodology that had already been **established and** remove the truly offensive eponyms if necessary. In this way, ornithological giants - many of whom were founders of the AOS - **will** not be dishonored by "guilt by association" - and the public could have an input on any new bird name that needs to be devised.

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

WHAT'S IN A NAME— AND DO BIRDS THEMSELVES REALLY CARE?

Steve N. G. Howell

Following almost four months of observing the debate about ridding English bird names of eponyms*, I would like to add this commentary to the mix to perhaps provide some perspective.



We really don't care what you humans call us in your language—we just want somewhere to live!

Within a subset of the current political climate of a single country—the so-called United States of America, one among almost 200 countries on our planet today—two main arguments are presently being offered for doing away with eponymous English bird names. One is that names honoring some humans reflect aspects of history that by today's very different standards are viewed unfavorably. The second is that bird names that include people's names aren't overly helpful or descriptive. While I can appreciate the abstract and idealistic bases for these two arguments, I find them myopic at best—and certainly unconvincing as rationale for rewriting and whitewashing history. Moreover, the practical, real-world disruptions that would accompany such changes do not come close to outweighing any perceived benefits offered by the proponents of change. Here I examine the two arguments and suggest why it might be better for all of us to move on from this mass debate—if, that is, we all really care about birds and their conservation in this fast-changing modern world. My writings have sometimes been described as provocative, and here I hope that they provoke you to think, to pause and consider the bigger picture.

**An eponym refers to a person's name when used to honor that person; for example, as in Wilson's Warbler, honoring Alexander Wilson, one of the fathers of North American ornithology.*

ARGUMENT 1: Some eponyms reflect unsavory aspects of human history and so all eponyms should be erased to accommodate viewpoints prevalent today in some subsets of Western society

This argument has been championed by *Bird Names for Birds* (BN4B), a minority movement claiming that names honoring humans reflect times of colonialism, times when slavery and racism in the US were more blatant than they are today, and times when White males dominated science. For better or worse, though, we can't change the past, but perhaps we can learn from it.

The clearly stated goal of BN4B is to “Remove *all* [emphasis mine] eponymous English common bird names.”

Remove them all? That seems like an extremist, poorly considered, and undeniably parochial view, but it doesn't stop there. Other statements made by BN4B include: "we should make decisions about who and what we honor *based on our own values* [emphasis mine], values that create a more equitable world for all." This is more than a little naive. So-called values change, sometimes even on a daily basis and certainly between generations; they also vary among different members of society and among different cultures and countries.

For example, anyone reading this would probably agree that views held about numerous subjects in some parts of the US differ from those held in other parts of the US—if you don't believe me, just watch the comedic farce that passes for politics during presidential elections. But, is one party 'right' or 'wrong' in such cases? I suggest there is good and bad on both sides, and the same is true for arguments over English bird names, which are simply words.

Moreover, viewpoints widely held even ten or fifteen years ago can differ from those held today—and many viewpoints will surely be different ten years from now in ways we cannot imagine. Consequently, following the BN4B so-called logic to its logical conclusion, a vote should be taken every few years to see if people like the English bird names being used at that point in history, and then decide on whether or not some should be changed. Where does it all stop? Perhaps—if we really, truly want to be respectful and inclusive of human diversity—we should have different English names for birds in different states or different regions of the US to accommodate and acknowledge that different people have different values and viewpoints? Or should we simply project our own transitory values onto others and tell them what they should think, and what they should be offended by?

I'm not saying the present system concerning English bird names in North America is perfect—indeed, the idea of a separate committee being in charge of English names instead of having that task given to a science-based, taxonomic committee is not a bad one. You only have to look at unhelpful, gringo-centric names like the recently coined Chihuahuan Meadowlark (which occurs throughout much of Mexico, far from the state of Chihuahua) to appreciate this fact. Despite all this, though, standardized English bird names have functioned for many decades, and a long history of communication has been built upon them. Linked to a shared linguistic agreement on what is defined as a Kirtland's Warbler, or an American Robin (a name 'offensive' on so many levels, should one choose to take offense), a legacy of scientific and popular literature exists, as does a body of legal documents aimed at conservation, along with any number of other things that reflect and reinforce the value of standardized English bird names. Would the thousands of dollars and countless person-hours involved in changing all of the literature about just a single species—say, Kirtland's Warbler—really help that species? This is not a purely academic question. Real-world budgets for conservation are decidedly finite, and I suspect that the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars that would be spent changing eponymous birds names, with all the trickle-down effects, could be used to far, far better effect—that is, if studying and conserving birds are what people really care about.

In wanting to impose their present-day views on the whole world of English-speaking society, the BN4B folks also seem oblivious to their impressive level of sheer hypocrisy and zealotry, which alone should be a red flag. I fail to see how the BN4B approach ("You should do what we, as a minority, say you should do") is any different, or better, than the present system. As *The Who* sang: "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss." Democracy is not a biological condition, it is a human ideal.

Even more bewildering is that the Council of the American Ornithologists' Society (AOS), a supposedly scientific organization—mixing science and politics rarely ends well—has bought into the BN4B manifesto. Thus, in November 2023, the AOS Council (against the advice of its own taxonomic committees) announced in a semantically garbled, unilateral proclamation that "in an effort to address past wrongs and engage far more people in the enjoyment, protection, and study of birds, it [= AOS] will change *all* [emphasis mine] English bird names currently named after people within its geographic jurisdiction." AOS president Colleen Handel went on to say "*some* [emphasis mine] English bird names have associations with the past that continue to be exclusionary and harmful today."

But are eponyms really exclusionary? Are they genuine barriers to minorities? Is there any solid evidence for this? And let's be honest, who genuinely knows who these historical figures really were and what they truly thought? Especially when we choose to judge them by very different standards prevailing today. No single person is wholly good or wholly bad, although as Julian Barnes noted: "History is that *certainly* [emphasis mine] produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation."

Even Kenn Kaufman, who advocates ridding English bird names of eponyms, has written (<http://www.kaufman-fieldguides.com/kenn-on-the-issues/eponymous-bird-names-and-the-history-of-ornithology>): "If we were to poll the ornithologists and serious birders of North America, I suspect that not one in a thousand would know who Botteri was (of Botteri's Sparrow) or who Williamson was (of Williamson's Sapsucker)." So, if nobody actually knows who these people were, then how can their names be a barrier to an interest in birds?

Moreover, as some people have pointed out (e.g., <https://shorturl.at/cilBZ>), eponyms of recent decades tend to honor national and international heroes in the fields of bird and habitat conservation. For example, the internationally accepted English name of a critically endangered oceanic bird, *Pterodroma madeira*, is Zino's Petrel, named in honor of the family who rediscovered the bird and have devoted their lives to helping prevent the species from going extinct.

To rename this bird, say, Madeira Petrel—for the island where it breeds—would instead 'honor' the person who named the island for all the trees (madeira means wood) that God put there, which allowed people to build even more ships to go off and exploit the New World, thus promoting further colonialism and slavery. A bit ironic, to say the least. But, given that Zino's Petrel has occurred—albeit only once, as a rare vagrant—in North American waters, the AOS mandate would extend to renaming this decidedly non-North American species.

And ask yourself this: Given that recently coined eponyms honor people—and not just White males—who are trying to save birds and protect habitats around the world, does a small, self-elected US-based committee really want to come down against this in the tradition of the imperial hegemony they wish to erase from their own history? Isn't that rather hypocritical and really just a new form of colonialism, as pointed out in an insightful essay by Rohan Pethiyagoda (<https://doi.org/10.11646/megatata.10.1.4>)?

In the meantime, the anti-environmentalist movement must be applauding the instigators of BN4B (and might even have nicknamed them 'Wokes for Trump') and are laughing themselves all the way to the bank. Rather than spend more time here pointing out further flaws of the BN4B campaign (criticisms that, of course, BN4B will ignore as part of their stated policy to embrace diversity and inclusion...) you can read informed and rational arguments, couched in various degrees of tolerance and understandable sarcasm (people are only human, after all), in the following links from a petition to AOS, asking that they reconsider their decision to undergo a blanket purge of all eponyms (a petition signed by far more people—including from all 50 US states and some 45 countries worldwide—than signed the original BN4B petition prompting the controversial AOS decision): <https://shorturl.at/lpxMQ>; <https://shorturl.at/cfgi9>; <https://shorturl.at/fjOU0>; <https://shorturl.at/AG078>; and <https://shorturl.at/bjU34>.

OK, so how about the second argument for doing away with eponyms?

ARGUMENT 2: Eponyms aren't descriptive or helpful to birders

This argument posits that having a person's name in an English bird name is not helpful and that names should tell you something about the bird itself. While not a bad idea, and certainly one to take on board moving forward, the argument to go back and rename species because their names are not descriptive, or helpful, is also rather naive. I mean, how many English bird names truly are descriptive or helpful? OK, so Yellow-headed Blackbird or Eurasian Blackbird work pretty well for the males of the species, but such names are exceptions. And what of female and immature birds?

Given a few minutes, I could likely come up with tens, hundreds even, of English bird names that don't make

sense or that convey nothing helpful and which clearly could be improved upon. Any bird with ‘common’ in the name usually means ‘common where some White people live, or lived’ so how offensive or exclusionary is that? But these names serve their purpose of communication, life goes on, and the planet continues to spin on its axis. The same is true for countless other non-bird words in the English language that we all use daily without a second thought—why pick on birds?

But let’s see, how about Song Sparrow? *Really, other sparrows don’t sing?* Common Tern? *The only common terns where I live are Elegant Tern and Caspian Tern, whereas Common Terns are very rare.* Blue Jay? *Well, actually, it’s blue-and-white; try showing a non-birder a picture with Blue Jay, Steller’s Jay, and Pinyon Jay together and ask them which of these jays is ‘blue.’* Red-tailed Hawk? *The tail is rusty orange, not really red, and only adults have this feature.*

The Bird Name Book (2022), by Susan Myers, a native English speaker (albeit an Australian, not an ‘American’) traces the origins of all English bird group names, such as avocet, duck, and wren, along with Gadwall, Malia, Secretarybird, and so on. While these are names that we as birders have learned—and consequently they carry meaning—many are inherently meaningless to most English speakers. But, while the names Gadwall or Puaiohi are completely uninformative to non-birders, the name Swainson’s Hawk would at least tell them it’s a hawk.

Let’s face it, only a fraction of English bird names are, in fact, accurately descriptive and remotely helpful (especially if one considers all plumages and all seasons). For example, a Northern Waterthrush spends most of its life in tropical mangroves and is a warbler, not a thrush. And most if not all New World warblers do not actually warble, depending on how one defines warble...

OK, OK, please stop, I get the message! Yet some people would rather derail a working system of communication and replace one imperfect English bird name with another. Other than being a fun and whimsical subject to bring up over a beer or two—“*Hey, what’s a better name for Anna’s Hummingbird? How about Magenta-helmeted Chaparral-star?*”—is this something that should be taken seriously, to the extent of disrupting communication, science, and conservation at a time in history when birds more than ever need all the help they can get? Are the advocates of such change genuinely serving the birds?

Plus, from a purely practical, linguistic perspective—and I speak here from considerable personal experience—there are only so many ‘useful’ or descriptive names one can come up with for the multiple cryptic, virtually identical-appearing species of, say, storm-petrel or swift or tyrant-flycatcher. Some people have suggested naming storm-petrels after the islands where they breed, but that would only go so far since—you’ve guessed it—many of the islands are also named after European explorers or in honor of their kings, queens, and other historical patrons. Hmm, bummer.

CONCLUSION

If a minority of people burdened by White guilt and a lack of identity choose to take vicarious offense about things they had nothing to do with, then surely that’s their choice. But imposing that view on the rest of the English-speaking world while claiming it will make birding more inclusive and help birds is—even if proposed with good intentions—frankly, more than a little naive in the real world where, for better or worse, we all live. There are far easier, less disruptive, and less financially costly ways to work towards those very worthy goals.

It is admirable to be idealistic, but sooner or later most people grow to realize that the real world is a complicated place—there are good reasons why countries don’t have teenage presidents and prime ministers. If you choose, you can take offense at the preceding sentence as being condescending, ageist even—yet offense cannot be given, it can only be taken *if you choose to take it*. Taking offense is a choice, a luxury even.

Do the hundreds of thousands of other species of organism that supposedly ‘share’ the planet with our own single species, *Homo sapiens* (sapiens, by the way, mean wise, so we might need to reconsider that name...), have a ‘choice’ when humans tear down a forest or drain a marsh to address what is perceived as a ‘housing shortage’

but is in fact a people surplus? If they could, I suspect most other species on the planet would mount an 'End Human Supremacy' campaign in a heartbeat, which would become a deafening, never-ending, worldwide chant that might even drown-out the sound of chainsaws. Arguing over English bird names in the US is like fiddling while Rome burns—the planet needs our help, not our dissent. So please, if it's not broken, don't try to fix it by manufacturing problems that don't really exist. Whether or not we like to acknowledge it, we all embrace hypocrisy daily, so can't we just agree to disagree and—most importantly, for the sake of birds—embrace a sense of perspective? Sure, things could always be better—but inevitably my 'better' is different from your 'better' and, well, clearly mine is better... ;-)

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

Real-life Negative Implications to Ornithologists in Countries outside of the US

by Kevin Zimmer

There have been some recent publications by authors from the “Global South” not only advocating for the retention of eponymous names (See Jost et al, Nature Ecology & Evolution 2023; Pethiyagoda 2023), but also demonstrating the real-life negative implications to ornithologists and other biologists in countries outside of the US if the elimination of eponyms and wholesale renaming of bird species were to take place. Jost et al.2023 (a publication with more than 20 co-authors, almost all of them native-born Latin Americans), referring to the anti-eponym movement, state: “They want to erase eponyms assigned to species in the past and want scientists to stop naming new species after people. Both of these proposals would hurt science, and disproportionately hurt science in the Global South – the region that is supposed to be the primary beneficiary of their proposal.” The authors go on to say – “Naming species after people has always been a powerful tool that biologists have used to thank their patrons, recognize their field assistants, and honor their colleagues or loved ones. This is the highest honor that an individual biologist can bestow on a person. In recent years some biologists have also used the naming of species to raise funds for research and, especially, for conservation.

Although it is true that most eponyms assigned have historically honored Europeans, the pace of species discovery in tropical countries is currently high, and in the past few decades local taxonomists (at least in Latin America) are overtaking European scientists in making these discoveries. The power of bestowing eponyms has shifted to these local scientists in the tropical countries where most undiscovered species live.

Using eponyms, local scientists can now fund their work, honor local scientists, recognize Indigenous leaders and policymakers, and help save their study organisms from extinction. It is unfortunate and discriminatory that some members of the scientific community want to take away this tool, just at the moment that non-European biologists are becoming its main beneficiaries. Rather than eliminating eponyms, causing chaos in the existing nomenclature, and erasing the rich and convoluted personal history of biology, we should instead embrace them enthusiastically and use them to generate and record the next and more diverse chapters of that history.”

[Back to Essay TOC](#)

[Back to TOC](#)

Published Papers

- Policing the scientific lexicon: The new colonialism?
ROHAN PETHIYAGODA
- The inordinate unpopularity of changing all eponymous bird and other organismal names
Kevin Winker



Policing the scientific lexicon: The new colonialism?

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Several recent authors have called for the revision of the common and scientific names associated with taxa, as well as scientific terms, that may be construed as offensive (e.g., Hammer & Thiele, 2021; Cheng *et al.*, 2023) or inappropriate (e.g., Gillman & Wright, 2020; Guedes *et al.*, 2023). These proposals have been met with resistance, for example by Palma & Heath (2021—indigenous names), Mosyakin (2022—botany), Slabin (2023—philosophy of science) and all 26 commissioners of the International Commission for Zoological Nomenclature (Ceriaco *et al.*, 2023).

Here, writing from the perspective of a scientist who has spent most of his career working in Sri Lanka, a biodiverse developing country, I contend that undoing the perceived harm that inappropriate names and terms can cause people who belong to oppressed communities in the developed world (the West) may harm the greater part of the global scientific community whose native language is not English.

Cheng *et al.* (2023) seek to redress social problems in the English-speaking world (henceforth, the Anglosphere) and especially North America, by imposing terminological and nomenclatural reforms also on the rest of the world. These reforms would carry the unintended consequence of compelling taxonomists in biodiverse countries—especially developing countries—to direct their attention away from the enormous task of describing Earth’s vanishing biodiversity in order to deal with the challenge of revising biological nomenclature and terminology to address issues that have little meaning outside the Anglosphere—particularly the US context. I contend that the US would do better to *solve* its social and political problems rather than renaming them, and especially, rather than exporting them.

Inclusive Terminology

Cheng *et al.* (2023) called for reforms in scientific terminology to make the disciplines of ecology and evolutionary biology more inclusive for marginalized communities. Arguing that much of Western science is rooted in colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, which power structures continue to permeate contemporary scientific culture, they called for terminological revisions that would redress the ongoing marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and people of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, and asexual communities; and disabled communities, among others.

One of their authors trained in the USA recalled: ‘how tired I was as an undergrad hearing how invasive species from other countries decimate pristine US ecosystems. It reminds me of when people tell me or other people of color to “go back to where we came from”’. They decried ‘exclusionary terms that describe species, such as ‘invasive’ and ‘alien’’. Also deemed worthy of censure was ‘citizen science’ (because ‘citizen’ can frame science in terms of national belonging).

Alien invasive. As Cheng *et al.* (2023) acknowledge, English is the dominant language in scientific work. While native speakers of English are privileged in understanding the subtleties of the language, non-native speakers would struggle to appreciate why a species that is invasive and alien can no longer be called an invasive alien species and must find itself an euphemism.

The word *alien* has a long history of meaning ‘foreign’ or belonging to or originating in another place. However, stemming presumably from the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the application of this term to foreign nationals by the US Government, especially in the combination *illegal alien*, has led to it being perceived as pejorative in North America. Elsewhere, *alien* and its derivatives, such as *alienation*, continue to be used (though not in reference to people) without causing offence. It is worth remembering that while *native*, an antonym of *alien*, is now widely and innocuously used in conservation biology, it was during the colonial era widely applied as a pejorative to non-white people by British colonists. That meaning now persists only in humor, as in “The natives are friendly” or “Going native”, without protest in former colonies. Meanwhile, *Caucasian* (racial code for white-skinned), another misnomer beloved of the US government, shows little sign of disappearing (40,000 hits on Google Scholar in 2022). The world may have learned to move on, but has the US?

Cheng *et al.*’s (2023) objection to *invasive* is founded on an even weaker premise: it is problematic for the author not because the word itself has pejorative associations but because it evokes negative sentiments. But this word occurs not just in ecology but also in medicine, as in ‘invasive carcinoma’ (200,000 hits on Google Scholar) and ‘invasive [surgical] procedure’ (292,000 hits). If it is as hurtful as Cheng *et al.* (2023) claim, should it be expunged in medicine too? Further, are these negative sentiments not evoked when these authors encounter derivations such as *invasion* and

invader? It is, after all, impossible to read a newspaper nowadays without encountering them.

In any event, the online translation services that non-native speakers of English rely on will, given that ‘invasive alien species’ yields 52,000 hits on Google Scholar, long continue to translate these terms into English literally, notwithstanding the euphemisms Cheng *et al.* (2023) propose to replace them with.

Sneaky. Cheng *et al.* (2023) argue that the term ‘sneaky mating strategy’ is liable to ‘normalize problematic male sexual behavior’. Behaviors in animals are often and usefully denoted, at least in shorthand, by terms originally applied to humans: e.g., cannibal (Fouilloux, 2019), groom (Freymann, 2023), and homosexual (Bagemihl, 1999). The term ‘sneaky mating’, frequently encountered in the ethological literature, is little different. The criticism that it normalizes sneaky (i.e., sly or furtive) sexual behavior invokes the Naturalistic Fallacy—the fact that a behavior occurs in nature does not make it good or right. In grass mites of the genus *Pediculopsis*, for example, ‘the young become sexually mature and mate before they are born, ensuring brother-sister mating’ (Berry, 1977)—but does this normalize incest in humans? Likewise, coercive mating (to which the shorthand ‘rape’ has been widely applied in ethology) is common in animals such as scorpionflies (Soszyńska-Maj *et al.*, 2022), but this does not normalize coercive mating in humans.

Citizen science. Cooper *et al.* (2021) argue that because its participants are overwhelmingly white adults, above median income, with a college degree, citizen science is typically not truly an egalitarian variant of science, open and available to all members of society, particularly those underrepresented in the scientific enterprise. They acknowledge, however, that the problem with this term is largely American, where ‘many people contest the term because they perceive it to exclude, or even convey hostility toward, those without citizenship status within a given nation’.

While the perceptions of Cooper *et al.* (2021) may indeed apply to America, *citizen science* is a term now widely and innocuously established worldwide (~20 million Google hits). The term is used in almost 1000 Clarivate-indexed papers—in the title in 25 of them—in which at least one author is based in India and, hence, unlikely to be white. Additionally, citizen-science platforms such as iNaturalist connect not just ‘white adults’ but people of all ages and colors across the world: 200,000 active users and more than 140 million observations (www.inaturalist.org/stats). To those of us non-Americans who consider ourselves citizen scientists, the word *citizen* denotes lay, non-specialist status, not our state of naturalization or nativity in the United States.

The names of species. Cheng *et al.* (2023) recommend that scientific terminology be reconsidered in the light of the etymologies of terms: whether their origins celebrate dominant narratives or oppressive norms, commemorate violence, or perpetuate prejudicial stereotypes. They urge scientists to consider how members of marginalized communities might have different or negative experiences with a term, irrespective of the intentions of those using the term. They also applaud ongoing initiatives to revise species’ common names that are ‘offensive, derogatory, exclusionary, and/or dehumanizing’.

There can be no doubt that a substantial proportion of species names are inappropriate. As in the case of the spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*), the common name of which previously included a derogatory descriptor applied to the Romani people, offensive common names, of course, ought to be changed. Indeed, in many cases they change almost without conscious attention. *Pethia nigrofasciata*, a freshwater fish endemic to Sri Lanka and popular among ornamental-fish hobbyists, for example, used to have a common name that referenced the now universally decried N-word. Despite an absence of overt demands, it came instead to be called the Black Ruby Barb. By the yardstick of Cheng *et al.* (2023), however, even that name is potentially offensive given that black references pigmentation and hence race, and rubies symbolize wealth and hence class divisions. If one digs deep enough into etymologies, there are few adjectives in any language that lack potentially objectionable connotations.

A cursory glance at IUCN’s Red List of Threatened Species for Sri Lanka yields a host of common names which have been used in pejorative or discriminatory contexts in English: e.g., Asian, blue-eyed, clam, cockroach, duffer, dwarf, emigrant, emperor (reminiscent of empire), Eurasian (pejorative for mixed-race), fairy, leatherback, migrant, Mormon, pansy, parasite, pigmy, redneck, sudda (literally, ‘whitey’, a racial pejorative), tiger (as in Tamil Tiger terrorists), tramp, transvestite, unicorn, and weaver (associated with a social caste). While species’ common names may be relatively easy to revise (because they arise purely from usage, they are not regulated in biological nomenclature), such words embedded in Latinized scientific names are, as the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature now stands, impossible to expunge (Ceriaco *et al.*, 2023). The Code simply recommends that “Authors should exercise reasonable care and consideration in forming new names to ensure that they are chosen with their subsequent users in mind and that, as far as possible, they are appropriate, compact, euphonious, memorable, and do not cause offence.”

Scientific names. Hammer & Thiele (2021) called for the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature to be amended to allow for the rejection of culturally offensive and inappropriate scientific names. They cite, for example, a proposal by Smith & Figueiredo (2021) to ‘permanently and retroactively eliminate epithets with the root *caf[e]r-* or *caff[e]r-* from the nomenclature of algae, fungi and plants’. Knapp *et al.* (2020) note that the species epithet “*caffra*” is derived from a derogatory term for black Africans that has been considered extremely offensive since the mid-20th century and is now illegal to use in South Africa. They argue that ‘Rejecting such names that are in common use would be a useful step in the de-colonisation of taxonomy more broadly.’ In that case, should the 323 plant species names that carry the prefix *nigro-* and the 135 that carry the prefix *rhodes-* (the reviled Cecil Rhodes: see Mosyakin, 2022) be similarly rejected? Should Nigeria, Niger and Montenegro be required to change their names? After all, it is undeniable that they evoke the N-word.

It is noteworthy that the species epithet *caffra* is arguably a derivative of the ethnic slur, which itself is derived from the Arabic *kaffir*, meaning infidel. This term is by no means universally pejorative. Sri Lanka, for example, has an ethnic

community who self-identify as Kaffirs despite having a different local-language name: they are derived from African slaves brought to the island by the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries. Their folk dance, the kaffrinha, has been celebrated for its synthesis of Portuguese, African and Asian traditions (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2020). While the descriptor kaffir has been applied to numerous plant products of African origin, it is by no means confined to Africa. Kaffir lime (*Citrus hystrix*), for example, is native to Asia. Its local name in Sri Lanka, ‘kapiiri dehi’ has long been in use and may be semantically linked to the Anglicized ‘kaffir’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). It is also worth remembering that Kaffer/Käffer are surnames in current use. Thus, while kaffir is particularly offensive in the South African context, it may not be so in other contexts. Similarly, offence may arise when a so-called colored person is addressed as ‘boy’ by a white person in the American or South African contexts, but this does not justify eliminating this word from, for example, pediatrics.

The fauna and flora of most formerly colonized nations are replete with taxon names which some might find objectionable. For example, taxon names that reference color (*nigro-*, *alba-*), ethnicity (*Dravidia*), and venerated deities (*Rama*, *Matsya*, *Shiva*, *Ishvara*). Expunging innumerable such names from biological nomenclature is clearly impractical, as Ceriaco *et al.* (2023) point out: it will result in nomenclatural chaos. Besides, who will judge what is and what is not appropriate?

Gillman & Wright (2020) call for indigenous names to replace established scientific taxon names. While Palma & Heath (2021) present a robust case against this proposal, it is important also to note that taxonomy has hitherto been largely a Western enterprise, and that Latin is the language of biological nomenclature: as such, most taxon names are composed of Latin descriptors. Even assuming that these could be set aside and replaced by indigenous names, the exercise is fraught with difficulty, not least in accurate transliteration. The 26-letter Latin alphabet is simply too restricted phonetically, as is clear from myriad potentially offensive historical transliterations such as *ceylonensis* [from Saheelan, a Persian name for the island: Imam, 1990], *maderaspatensis* [from Madrasan], and *bombayensis* [from Mumbai]. People in these countries know that these epithets are semantically flawed, but I have encountered no one who says their feelings are hurt by these historical errors. Pethiyagoda (2007: 56), for example, lists 17 names of plant genera based on Sinhala (a language of Sri Lanka) names, the transliterations of which are grotesquely unrecognizable—e.g., the Hindu god Ishvara transliterated as *Ixora*.

Added to that is the problem of *which* indigenous language to choose. What might work for Gillman & Wright in New Zealand, which has only a single extant indigenous language (te reo Māori), may not work so well elsewhere. Sri Lanka, for example, has two languages, together with a third aboriginal dialect. India has dozens. A further layer of complexity is added when taxa—including almost all marine taxa—transgress political or linguistic borders. Applying the proposal of Gillman & Wright (2020) beyond special cases like New Zealand would be too politically inflammatory to contemplate.

Authors of scientific names. At the next level are the authors of scientific names, especially those of former centuries, whom Cheng *et al.* (2023) may have had in mind when they stated that ‘Much of Western science is rooted in colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy’. Few among them are without sin, starting with the great Carl Linnaeus himself. In the 10th edition of *Systema naturae* (1758), the founder-work in zoological nomenclature, for example, Linnaeus divided *Homo sapiens* into six taxa (‘varieties’), four of which had geographical associations: Americanus (red, choleric, straight), Europaeus (white, sanguine, muscular), Asiaticus (sallow, melancholic, stiff), and Africanus (black, phlegmatic, lazy). By any of the yardsticks by which racism is measured today, these characterizations would make Linnaeus a racist. Does this mean that his works should be cancelled? Or that the wildflower genus *Linnaea* should be suppressed?

The question of whether taxa named by authors suspected of unethical behavior should be renamed continues to vex science. Pethiyagoda (2021) highlighted 15 taxonomic papers published since 2018, involving a total of more than 3500 specimens belonging to some 80 species, all illegally collected and smuggled out of Sri Lanka. Should these publications be retracted? Should the new taxa described be invalidated? Perhaps they should, but the principal consequence of such actions would be the destabilization of biological nomenclature.

Names we inherit from history are often problematic but like history itself, they are not easily or productively erased. Even Indians and Sri Lankans who are aware of the origins of the Alphonso mango, named after the barbaric Portuguese colonizer Afonso de Albuquerque, relish this fruit without protest. Meanwhile, Singaporeans celebrate the name of Stamford Raffles, the city-state’s founder, through numerous place names and even what is arguably its best-known hotel. Yet Raffles not only segregated the city by race, but was also associated with slavery (Wright, 1960; Pearson, 1969; Alatas, 2020). Even in post-handover Hong Kong, despite fierce Chinese nationalism, colonial place names such as Queen Victoria Street, Oxford Road and Baker Street have been retained. The conquered seem not as anxious as their conquerors to erase the odious heritage of colonialism.

Should we choose to mine the scientific lexicon layer by layer in search of words and connotations that are offensive or exclusionary, the list would be endless and, because language evolves, transient. The word *gay*, for example, went from meaning joyful to meaning homosexual, and even then, evolved in usage first as a euphemism, then a pejoration, and finally a celebration: it illustrates how words and meanings evolve rapidly through time.

Eponyms. Guedes *et al.* (2023) argue that ‘naming species in honour of [people] is unjustifiable’ and call for all eponyms to be ‘removed’ from biological taxonomy ‘as many of those honoured are strongly associated with the social ills and negative legacy of imperialism, racism and slavery’. They maintain that such ‘name revisions would not alter scientific history, as the historical name would remain as a synonym [correctly, not a synonym but a ‘suppressed name’] and the identity of the individuals who initially described the species would remain unaltered.’

What then is the point? After all, most species—*e.g.*, all birds and butterflies—have unique common names already: there is no impediment to these being revised. But rather than engage in the actual work of doing so, in a flourish of generosity, Guedes *et al.* (2023) grant that ‘the task of renaming eponyms could be *given* [my emphasis] to taxonomists from the biogeographical region of the candidate species.’ Who are they to *give* this demanding and complex task so condescendingly to us who never asked for it? These authors seem oblivious of the Taxonomic Impediment (Engel *et al.*, 2021). ‘Post-colonial’ taxonomists have their hands full as it is, racing to describe their nations’ species before they become extinct, rather than being distracted by a time-wasting mission to investigate hundreds of thousands of eponyms and replace them just to assuage these authors’ new-found guilt.

Further, given that authorship is attached to biological taxon names, especially in botany, who would the authors of these revised names be: the original describer (who, after all, discovered the novelty) or the recent name-changer? What about eponyms created by native, in-country taxonomists and those which honor national heroes: should they be defenestrated too? Nor do the authors trouble to explain by whom species that transgress political and linguistic boundaries will be renamed. And now, it is to us taxonomists that they hand this poisoned chalice. They graciously opine that ‘researchers from former colonies’—that is, people like me—should do the heavy lifting.

Interestingly, even as Guedes *et al.* (2023) dictate major reforms in taxonomy and nomenclature, none of them, at least according to their ORCID records, appears to have lead-authored a taxonomic paper. In a sublime twist of irony, one of them (Webala) was recently a co-author of Monadjem *et al.* (2021), which describes *Pseudoromicia kityoi*, an eponym. These authors also claim that *Anophthalmus hitleri*, which honours the infamous Nazi leader, ‘has not been renamed by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature because the name has not been deemed sufficiently offensive’. A search of the Commission’s own Bulletin shows that this statement is manifestly false: the Commission has never been petitioned to make such a ruling. Instead, the authors cite Berenbaum (2010), who makes no such assertion.

In the absurd logic of Guedes *et al.* (2023), we must now rename physical units such as the Ampere, Celsius, Fahrenheit, Hertz, Joule, Kelvin, Newton, Volt and Watt; well-known minerals such as Alexandrite and Dolomite; popular garden plants such as *Albizia*, *Banksia*, *Begonia*, *Bougainvillea*, *Camellia*, *Dahlia*, *Gardenia*, *Magnolia*, *Poinsettia* and *Wisteria*; medically important organisms such as *Escherichia*, *Klebsiella*, *Rickettsia* and *Salmonella*; medical eponyms such as Alzheimer’s, Asperger’s, Hodgkin’s, Parkinson’s, Rorschach and Heimlich; geographic features such as Mount Everest and the Mariana Trench; and words in common use such as sandwich, diesel and pasteurize. Lurking among the eponymous progenitors of these words would be people whose values were abhorrent by the yardstick of our time. Theodore ‘Teddy’ Roosevelt, for example, was an imperialist and a racist, and he slew hundreds of endangered African large mammals (Bradley, 2009). But it would be ridiculous to rename the teddy bear for these reasons.

Guedes *et al.* (2023) argue that “renaming currently valid eponyms would... be good for taxonomy and for conservation”. Really? Their proposed ‘reforms’ would leave taxonomy in chaos; and as for conservation, it is puerile to imagine that species heading toward extinction could be saved simply by being called by another name. It is one thing to signal virtue from the armchairs of Western universities; it is another to scrounge for resources to explore biodiversity, and to describe and conserve the biotic riches of post-colonial nations even as they vanish before our eyes.

Western Angst

Something that appears to have eluded the consciousness of the authors of the proposals I criticize here is their regional bias, as declared in their affiliations:

Work	Author Country (N)
Cheng <i>et al.</i> (2023)	12 USA, 3 Canada
Guedes <i>et al.</i> (2023)	7 EU, 1 UK, 1 Kenya, 1 Nigeria, 1 Israel
Hammer & Thiele (2021)	2 Australia
Smith & Figueiredo (2021)	2 South Africa
Gillman & Wright (2020)	2 New Zealand
Knapp <i>et al.</i> (2020)	2 UK, 1 EU

In the United States, ‘waves of anti-Black violence’ (in the words of Cheng *et al.*, 2023) are, perhaps, a commonplace, as are also the politics of identity. Given the brutal colonization of the New World by the European powers in the course of the past five centuries, and its history of slavery and oppression during almost the entirety of that time, I sympathize with the angst of Cheng *et al.* However, the reforms they advocate—principally the interpretation of semantic nuance in North American English—may find limited resonance in other parts of the world, especially the biodiversity-rich developing world which, perforce, must publish science in English, a foreign language.

Perhaps understandably given their North American bias, Cheng *et al.* (2023) see the language of science through the prism of American realities. They seek to redress the problems of marginalized communities within their own society and should be lauded for that. But it is in the Anglosphere—especially the USA—that the semantic problems they highlight need to be addressed, for example by urging the US Government to desist from applying the term *alien* to migrants and foreign nationals. Almost all the authors I criticize here seek to regulate language in order to control thought, evidently oblivious of the possibility that in seeking redress for their perceived victimhood, they stand to victimize others—the oppressed become the oppressors. Yet there exists a world in which science is framed not in terms of the grievances of groups but in terms of the flourishing of humanity. The concept of ‘suspect classification’ they implicitly apply to defining victimhood may be self-evident to Americans (Pollvogt, 2013), but it is alien to the rest of the world, especially the postcolonial world. Local problems do not demand global solutions.

Of course, it is true that North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, given their history as colonizers, slave

traders, slave owners, and exterminators of native peoples, have guilt about their past, as do white South Africans. The Anglosphere has much to feel guilty about. But all that is past. Today it welcomes migrants and refugees. It upholds the rule of law. It celebrates diversity, liberty, inclusiveness, tolerance and human rights. It promotes democracy and liberal values. And its taxpayers fork out billions of dollars in aid and cheap credit to the less fortunate world. The Anglosphere has become a force for good, and it is laudable that scientists such as Cheng *et al.* (2023) wish to make it better. But even as erstwhile colonizers wring their hands for wrongs past and seek to redress these to salve their guilt, they must take care not to harm those harmed already: the victims of the colonial enterprise.

Western guilt stemming from the expropriation of indigenous knowledge and genetic resources from erstwhile colonies led to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As well-intentioned as the CBD might have been, it had the unintended consequence of stifling taxonomic research in much of the developing world (Pethiyagoda, 2004; Prathapan *et al.*, 2018). We would do well to consider also the potential for unintended consequences of the English-centric terminological reforms proposed by the authors cited here.

I have in the course of my half-century career worked alongside colleagues from every continent. I have heard not just the exclusionary terms Cheng *et al.* (2023) mention but also potentially racist microaggressions praising my ‘Mediterranean tan’ and arguably backhanded, condescending compliments on my ‘Asian intelligence’ and surprise at my correct emphasis of the antepenultimate syllable in pronouncing *megalomaniacal*. And yes, white strangers have addressed me as ‘boy’, as in ‘Where are you boys from?’, which in my perception is unambiguously a racist aggression. Grounds for offence are everywhere, not least in the field of scientific publication (Liu *et al.*, 2023). But those of us who belong to ‘marginalized groups’ would do well to confront such aggressions when we encounter them, rather than seeking shelter and protection from them. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.

Cheng *et al.* (2023) call for terms that they perceive to be exclusionary to be expunged from scientific—and presumably everyday—usage because ‘such harmful terms can counter conservation education goals’. Of course, we have a duty to eliminate obviously hurtful and discriminatory words from the scientific lexicon. But we also have a duty to educate young people to be resilient to environments that may not always be to their liking, and to urge ‘marginalized groups’ to find dignity in themselves and to rise yet above those who seek to diminish them using words, however offensive. I suspect that people whose feelings are wounded when they encounter words such as ‘alien’, ‘invasive’ or ‘sneaky’ will find much else that gives offense in the world around them. They cannot possibly be shielded from every arrow. We must find it in ourselves to rise above our perceived tormentors, to not melt when the temperature rises, and to not become fragile victims of our identities. There is grandeur in overcoming victimhood.

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1 The inordinate unpopularity of changing all eponymous bird and other organismal names

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6 7 Abstract

8
9 A proposal by Foley and Rutter (2020) to eliminate all eponymous English bird names was
10 published in the *Washington Post*, a Washington, D.C. newspaper. Fears (2021) reported in this same
11 newspaper that a racist and colonialist history is perpetuated in some English bird names, especially
12 eponyms, and that a social movement is working to change those names. These articles generated
13 hundreds of online comments. I used sentiment analysis on these comments to quantify public
14 reaction to this proposal and topic. Among the 340 scored comments to Foley and Rutter (2020),
15 negative opinions outnumbered positive ones by 3.36:1. Scoring comments by relative magnitude of
16 their sentiment (-3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3) yielded an average score of -1.18. These results indicate this
17 proposed action is very unpopular and causes pronounced divisiveness. The 570 scored comments
18 to the Fears (2021) article were also negatively skewed (2.3:1), though less so (average score -0.58).
19 Politicization and the left-right nature of the issue were rampant in the comments on both articles,
20 indicating that the subject was immediately brought into the culture wars. The divisive nature of the
21 topic was also evident within self-identified left-leaning respondents. These results likely
22 underestimate public negativity to this proposal, because the *Washington Post* is a left-leaning
23 newspaper. Similarly, Guedes et al. (2023) called for eliminating all eponymous organismal names,
24 and a sentiment analysis of comments about that article was even more starkly negative, showing
25 95% of commenters opposed. More data like these are needed. There is considerable risk that
26 broadly de-commemorating eponymous organismal names will create more negative than positive
27 outcomes (e.g., through asymmetric polarization and the culture wars). We must also ask: Does
28 excluding people who do not share our views achieve our objective of inclusiveness? When is it
29 acceptable to take away someone's hard-won knowledge by changing key terms in our shared
30 biodiversity linguistic infrastructure? There are more constructive ways to address diversity, equity,
31 and inclusion.

32
33 Keywords: nomenclature, organismal names, public opinion, sentiment analysis, zoology.

34

35 **Introduction**

36 Eponymous bird names, those named after people, places, or things, have been popularly
37 applied and used in avian nomenclature since at least the time of Linnaeus (Westwood 1836).
38 Eponymous names are also popular in broader society (Azaryahu 2021). Beolens et al. (2014)
39 documented over 4,000 eponymous avian names associated with people, including both English and
40 scientific names. These bird names recognize individuals for various reasons, but often for their
41 contributions to the discipline or to society.

42 The past decade has seen rapid growth in efforts in North America and Europe (at least) to
43 improve our collective lot by leveling the playing field for all. The 2016 election in the USA of
44 President Donald Trump and the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police highlighted current and
45 historic inequities and spurred increased efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Among these
46 efforts arose a call for changing bird names that recognize people, largely because those names
47 reflect an historic past that many now consider irredeemably flawed (Foley and Rutter 2020, Fears
48 2021).

49 Foley and Rutter (2020) wrote an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* proposing that because
50 of the association of eponymous English bird names with historical colonialism and racism, they
51 need to be changed. They put it thus: “We must remove all eponymous names. The stench of
52 colonialism has saturated each of its participants, and the honor inherent within their names must be
53 revoked.” (Foley and Rutter 2020). Fears (2021) reported in this same newspaper that a racist and
54 colonialist history is perpetuated in some English bird names (especially eponyms) and about a social
55 movement—and some of the associated people—working to change those names. In ornithology in
56 English, we use a tightly coupled nomenclature, in which vernacular names are capitalized proper
57 names (like cities, rivers, etc.) and are used more commonly than their latinized scientific names
58 (Winker 2023). This raises the importance of vernacular names in ornithology above that which
59 occurs in many other biological disciplines, in which scientific names are standardized and more
60 heavily used. In the context of nomenclature, then, these articles focus on a very important part of
61 our ornithological naming systems. They are echoed, however, by others calling for similar changes
62 to scientific names (e.g., Guedes et al. 2023), so assessing reactions to these articles is likely to be
63 informative to many people with an interest in organisms and their names.

64 The *Washington Post* is a widely respected newspaper, founded in 1877; it has won more than

65 Pulitzer prizes. In a comparison with other U.S. news sources, it is considered to skew left (bias -
66 8.80) and be generally reliable (reliability 38.42; ad fontes media 2023). These characteristics suggest
67 a somewhat leftward-leaning, discriminating audience, and only subscribers can make comments in
68 the *Washington Post's* online, moderated forum.

69 Here I examine the extensive comments that the Foley and Rutter (2020) and Fears (2021)
70 articles received online. My goal was to better understand how such English bird name proposals are
71 received by an interested public. As a contrast to these datasets, I also examined online comments
72 associated with a proposal to eliminate eponyms from organismal scientific names (Guedes et al.
73 2023). Together, these online responses comprise a rare type of survey and can provide useful data
74 for managing our organismal naming systems. My approach was to quantify the sentiment expressed
75 to determine both the amounts and degrees of agreement and disagreement.

76

77 **Methods**

78 Sentiment analysis, also called opinion mining, assesses text and then labels it as either
79 positive or negative, and it can also be used to rate the magnitude of those sentiments (Cambria et
80 al. 2017, Stine 2019). These analyses are commonly used to assess opinions in order to guide
81 subsequent actions. For example, in business sentiment analysis is used to understand the attributes
82 of online customer reactions to products (Cambria et al. 2017, Stine 2019, Lighthart et al. 2021).
83 Sentiment analysis has become strongly oriented toward use of machine learning and artificial
84 intelligence (AI) language models, but its accuracy has been a perennial challenge, often being just
85 ~70-80% (Cambria et al. 2017, Stine 2019, Alharthi et al. 2021). There are numerous software
86 products available to apply sentiment analysis. I tried two of them but found that their level of
87 inaccuracy on a small set of trial texts was not acceptable (results not shown). This is likely due to
88 inadequate training datasets on this topic for this software and the presence of sarcasm, two
89 fundamental problems with computer-based sentiment analysis (Stine 2019). Therefore, I performed
90 the scoring myself. Although this involved a degree of subjectivity, it also ensured more accurate
91 results, given the lack of software trained on appropriate language datasets. This manual approach
92 was also the foundation of the discipline, and it is still used to produce gold-standard datasets for
93 checking and refining methods in the field (Stine 2019).

94 I categorized responses to these two articles as neutral, positive, or negative, and when using
95 the latter two I scored them as being one of three possible magnitude categories, small, medium, or

96 large. Individual comments could thus receive any one of seven possible scores: -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, or
97 3. This scoring is somewhat subjective, but that is unavoidable in datasets of this type. For example,
98 categorizing an article's focus as silly, absurd, or unimportant was scored as -2 or -3, whereas terms
99 like good or excellent generally ranked a 3, depending on context (see Supplementary Materials for
100 examples). Polarity is likely to be accurately determined; degree of opinion will be less so. Comments
101 clearly off topic or aimed at other commenters without providing interpretable views on the subject
102 were generally scored as neutral (being usually not directly on topic). Neutral scores are not
103 considered in my analyses because they provide no reliable perspective on the subject.

104 Because *Washington Post* comments were unavailable to me as a non-subscriber after a
105 relatively short period of time, I copied the comments on each of these articles during the first
106 several days after the articles were published (F&R, 3 d; Fears, 6 d). Copying was done by cutting
107 and pasting the comments in their entirety directly from the web site into a text document. My
108 intent was to keep them available for reading later. With the passage of time, however, I had not
109 read them, but realized that these archives represented rare data that could help inform our
110 management of formal bird names. The cut-and-paste archiving process removes the associated
111 formatting. This makes some of the comments disaggregated (e.g., multiple lines from one
112 commenter might be construed as being from two, and it is not possible to separate multiple
113 comments from a single user). It can also cause some uncertainty about whether a comment is
114 directly about the article or in response to another comment. These latter types of comments can be
115 aimed simultaneously at another responder and at the article, too. (On the positive side, the
116 comments are also depersonalized because user names are not copied using these methods, making
117 it possible to create an open-access dataset for this study; see Supplementary Materials.) So there is
118 some uncertainty in the datasets' precision both in the absolute numbers of comments and in the
119 number and exact nature of replies to comments. I don't think that either of these sources of
120 uncertainty had a large effect on the outcomes of the sentiment analyses, but I have archived the
121 datasets and my scorings of them so others can do similar analyses in the future (and perhaps obtain
122 some repeatability analysis results; see Supplementary Materials).

123 As a check or contrast to these data, I used similar methods to analyze responses to Guedes
124 et al. (2023) on ResearchGate
125 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369203561_Eponyms_have_no_place_in_21st-](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369203561_Eponyms_have_no_place_in_21st-century_biological_nomenclature)
126 [century biological nomenclature](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369203561_Eponyms_have_no_place_in_21st-century_biological_nomenclature)). Although Guedes et al. (2023) focused on the elimination of

127 eponyms in scientific names, the parallel to the same concept with English bird names is obvious
128 and informative. ResearchGate is a social network site for scientists, and those making comments
129 need to be registered users. Registration is free and only requires an email address at an academic
130 institution or evidence that one is a published researcher. This, therefore, is an audience of scientists.
131 Cutting and pasting comments from 16 March to 19 July 2023 did not anonymize the posters, so I
132 did that manually. I also used this information to score the views of each commenter only once,
133 regardless of how many times they commented (see Supplementary Materials).

134

135 **Results**

136 Negative responses outnumbered positive responses by considerable margins to both
137 *Washington Post* articles and to Guedes et al. (2023) (Table 1). Among the 340 scored comments to
138 Foley and Rutter (2020), negative opinions outnumbered positive ones by 3.36:1 and had an average
139 magnitude score of -1.18. The 570 scored comments to the Fears (2021) article were also negatively
140 skewed (2.3:1), though less so (average score -0.58; Table 1, Figure 1). There was also a suggestion of
141 asymmetric polarization in the responses to Foley and Rutter (2020), with the negatives being more
142 strongly negative in magnitude than the positives were positive, but this difference was not
143 significant (Table 1; $p > 0.10$). This tendency did not appear in responses to the Fears (2021) article
144 (Table 1). In contrast, responses to Guedes et al. (2023) were much more negative. Among the 168
145 scored comments, negative reactions outnumbered positive ones by a stunning 9.5:1. Polarization
146 was also extreme, with the highest negativity (-2.43) and positivity (2.19) averages observed in this
147 study (Table 1; Figure 1).

148 An overarching result apparent in the comments to both *Washington Post* articles was intense
149 and frequent politicization of the topic. Objective discussion was rare. A common view among
150 commenters was that this topic takes attention away from directly addressing the many more
151 pressing issues of today that foster racism and inequality. Also common was the idea that dwelling
152 on issues deemed by many to be trivial and silly was giving fodder to the conservative right-wing
153 foes of liberals and ‘woke.’ In short, the topic of changing eponymous names because many are
154 associated with historically colonialist and racist societies was immediately brought into the culture
155 wars in the comments for both articles.

156 The divisiveness of the subject did not occur only along familiar political lines (i.e., likely
157 conservatives and likely progressives). Many commenters declared their positions to generally be

158 liberal or Democratic (or even from historically oppressed groups), and yet they still felt negatively
159 toward the articles' advocacy for something they disagreed with.

160 In contrast, comments and discussions on ResearchGate about Guedes et al. (2023) achieved
161 a higher level of engagement and erudite thought, despite their overwhelming negativity toward the
162 proposal. Commenters here were also more global in distribution (as indicated by multiple
163 languages) and thus in their thinking.

164

165 **Discussion**

166 The proposals in the *Washington Post* to undertake large-scale changing of eponymous
167 English bird names because they are deemed to represent a colonialist and racist history (Foley and
168 Rutter 2020, Fears 2021) were not well received by subscribers to that left-leaning newspaper.
169 Responses were, on average, resoundingly negative, with fewer than 1/4 to 1/3 of responders in
170 favor (Table 1, Figure 1). In voting terms, this level of opposition is in supermajority territory.
171 Overall, objective discussion was uncommon, and in general people were not kind to each other.
172 Judging by the audience of this left-leaning newspaper, decommemorating eponymous bird names is
173 divisive and very unpopular. This does not bode well for eponymous bird name changes helping us
174 to work productively and inclusively with each other to solve the world's problems.

175 Numerous commenters remarked that Foley and Rutter's (2020) piece was taken as satire, or
176 that it was like an article in *The Onion* (a publishing venue for satire). In other words, they felt it was
177 difficult to take the proposal seriously. This suggests that bringing this proposed action to fruition
178 would be widely viewed similarly, further eroding public confidence in science, already a grave
179 concern (Burakoff 2023). In addition, there are concerns over the negative effects of the
180 politicization of science (e.g., Krylov 2021).

181 Neither article attempted to provide a balanced overview of the topic by providing equal
182 time to opposing views. This was not their purpose. Given this, and given the results of my analyses,
183 some remarks from the opposers are cogent (line numbers refer to Supplementary Materials):

184 "My God this is so stupid. All of the problems we have in the world and these people care
185 about friggig bird names." (F&R comments: line 93).

186 "Do you realize how insane you people sound?" (F&R comments: line 219)

187 "Stuff like this is a distraction from real problems that are hurting real people today." (F&R
188 comments: line 1949).

189 “You are making more enemies than friends.” (Fears comments: line 3944).

190 “I am tired of being scolded for something I didn't do.” (Fears comments: line 3855).

191 “There are many more problems with systemic racism than bird names. When discussions
192 about systemic racism focus on the trivial, it causes the argument that systemic racism occurred to
193 be trivialized.” (Fears comments: line 4608)

194 One commenter gave a negative vision of a future in which such name-changing urges were
195 followed: “First they came for the common names and it didn’t worry me, because cross the road
196 and the people on that side of the road will have a different name for the bird, or butterfly, or beetle
197 or whatever. But then they came for the scientific names and it really became a mess. For every new
198 generation found the past generation to have such execrable foibles and sins that all achievements in
199 that period were erased. The Linnaean system of giving scientific names was abandoned, for
200 Linnaeus himself had performed a classification of humans into different races. As a result, every
201 new generation of naturalists spent half of its time renaming every organism and the other half
202 arguing over which of the new namers were pure enough to deserve being listened to.” (Fears
203 comments: line 4275).

204 Substantial numbers of those opposed to changing eponymous names self-identified as
205 liberals or members of historically oppressed groups. This indicates that the divisiveness of the
206 subject extends to within the group that would *a priori* be considered most likely to support the
207 proposed changes. In this respect, the venue, the *Washington Post*, can be seen as a good testing
208 ground for the name-change proposal. Such an unfavorable result in a presumably favorable venue
209 is very enlightening. As Mosyakin (2022) noted, and this study supports, the issue of changing names
210 based on social values is divisive (see also Goska 2021).

211 The comments to the *Washington Post* articles revealed a lot of misinformation about how
212 frequently major name changes occur. Setting aside necessary changes due to our increases in
213 knowledge about avian relationships and species limits, substantive name changes in North America
214 occur infrequently. White (2006) found that major English bird name changes from the first to the
215 seventh editions of the American Ornithologists’ Union’s *Check-list of North American Birds* occurred
216 just 93 times in 112 years (e.g., changes with more than just a qualifier added or removed, or a
217 hyphenation, possessive, or spelling changed). This is a rate of fewer than one substantive change
218 per year.

219 Another aspect of the issue that appeared in the *Washington Post* comments was an openness

220 to change some eponyms when the person commemorated is deemed today to be especially
221 egregious even by the standards of that era. This is already being done in some cases (e.g., Driver
222 and Bond 2021, Chesser et al. 2021). This view was also represented among comments on Guedes et
223 al. (2023), although changes of this sort to scientific names are at present not possible.

224 The difference in skewness in reactions to the two *Washington Post* articles (Table 1) might be
225 due to the fact that Foley and Rutter (2020) was purely a manifesto to change eponymous names,
226 whereas Fears (2021) was reporting on this movement.

227 Although the trend toward asymmetric polarization in the Foley and Rutter (2020)
228 comments was not significant, it bears consideration, especially when we lack a similar set of
229 comments from a right-leaning venue. Asymmetric polarization, when one side retreats from a
230 central position to a larger degree than the other, is rampant in U.S. politics today (Hacker and
231 Pierson 2015). “Prescriptions that ignore or downplay this reality are very likely to be ineffective and
232 may even make the real problems worse.” (Hacker and Pierson 2015:59). It is risky to assume that
233 asymmetric polarization is absent here, particularly given the politicization and aspects of the culture
234 wars evident in the comments. This hypothesis warrants stress testing so we understand the full
235 nature of this landscape (Hacker and Pierson 2015). Such a test might be to publish an equivalent
236 article in a more right-leaning outlet, where exposure to contemporary political asymmetries would
237 be assured. In current media rankings, this would be in an outlet somewhere between the *Wall Street*
238 *Journal* (reliability 43.5, bias 4.3) and *Fox News* (reliability 36.3, bias 11.6; ad fontes media 2023). (As
239 opposed to the *Washington Post*’s values of reliability 38.4 and bias -8.8). In more right-leaning venues
240 we could anticipate that the reactions would trend toward even greater unfavorability, and we would
241 learn whether asymmetric polarization of this topic exists among a broader public audience.

242 The blistering rejection of Guedes et al.’s (2023) anti-eponym stance by fellow scientists is
243 especially noteworthy. With 95% of commenters opposed to eliminating eponyms, and with a large
244 number of these people being taxonomists, we can predict that eponymous names in biology are
245 here to stay.

246 Biases exist of course, in the articles themselves (strongly favoring eponym changes), in the
247 venues (left-leaning, scientific), and in online responses in general. But at present, these are the best
248 data available on the subject. This type of data does not lack value. After all, we use data and
249 methods like these every day when we evaluate a possible online purchase or choose a new
250 restaurant. We do, however, need new data on eponymous names obtained through carefully

251 designed surveys with unbiased questions (e.g., Pew 2023).

252 Finding that the suggestion to eliminate eponymous English bird names and scientific
253 organismal names is divisive and polarizing should be no surprise. After all, such elimination runs
254 directly counter to popular usage in organismal names for over two centuries and in society for
255 many other purposes today. Debates like these over eponymous names are common throughout the
256 history of our organismal naming systems (Winker 2023), but only now with the presence of social
257 media do we have a means of quantifying broader reactions. In this respect, the data considered here
258 are an important new development (Table 1, Supplementary Material).

259

260 *Gateway effects*

261 Although the perceived or purported weaknesses of eponyms as barriers are loudly
262 proclaimed in calls for their elimination from scientific nomenclature, their strengths are rarely
263 discussed. Three strengths seem particularly important. First, many people like them. Use of
264 eponyms in science has continued to increase, and indeed when neurologists have a choice between
265 using an eponym or a non-eponymous alternative name, they prefer the eponymous name by 2:1
266 (Becker et al. 2021). Although this level of preference in neurology has decreased from a preference
267 level of ~3:1 that lasted for four decades, the continued popularity and growth of eponym usage is
268 strong (e.g., Thomas 2016, Zheng and Gold 2020, Becker et al. 2021). Aronson (2014) provided a
269 more comprehensive summary of the arguments for and against medical eponyms.

270 Secondly, eponymous names can help people learn and thus serve an important role as a
271 gateway into a field of study. Two ways in which eponymous names serve as gateways are by
272 providing a simple mnemonic term for an organism, condition, or process, and by promoting an
273 interest in the people and history of a field (e.g., Aronson 2014, Lysanets and Bieliaieva 2023).
274 Govindarajan and Rao (1993) and Slabin (2023) considered the educational value of eponyms, and
275 both tied their use directly to U.S. science standards, which encourage the humanization of science.
276 Slabin (2023) also cited evidence in chemistry and medicine that students have improved retention
277 and often preferences for eponyms.

278 One of the responses to Guedes et al. (2023) spoke effectively to this issue: "Naming genera
279 or species after a person, or after a specific geographical location, or a specific history, has always
280 inspired me! I always go deeper and deeper in my research to understand things and know the
281 person behind a name. Science is not only descriptions, names or numbers, its history, inspiration

282 and acknowledgement!" (Guedes et al. comments: P148; Supplementary Materials).

283 Third, English bird names have been more stable than scientific names (AOU 1931, White
284 2006), meaning both that they are a more effective means of communication about birds and that
285 elimination of those that are eponymous closes a particularly important gateway into ornithology
286 through its vast literature. A useful example of this, considered in terms of usage through time using
287 Google n-grams, is Swainson's Warbler, *Limnothlypis swainsonii* (Audubon 1834), relative to its
288 scientific names (changing among three genera; Figure 2). Closing such a gateway would immediately
289 create a considerable linguistic barrier to the access of historical information about this species.

290 The medical field has progressed farther on the eponym debate in recent decades than we
291 have in ornithology, and there it seems that eponyms will stay (e.g., Zheng and Gold 2020). For
292 cases of eponyms deemed unacceptable because they commemorate people whose actions were
293 reprehensible in their time, medicine shows a nomenclatural response of curtailing usage of
294 eponymous names associated with the worst of these (i.e., Nazi atrocities), while overall use of
295 eponyms continues to increase (Thomas 2016).

296

297 ***Going forward***

298 An unpopular action might nevertheless be the right course to take. Is eliminating eponyms
299 and replacing them with other names one of those? Probably not. Negative responses like those
300 from the *Washington Post* and ResearchGate comments sections are also appearing in published works
301 as these proposals receive more widespread pushback. Goska (2021) viewed the situation thus:
302 "Elite birders are obsessed with punishing whites, not with empowering blacks. Their obsession is
303 narcissistic, white-focused, Woke virtue signaling." Pethiyagoda (2023) considered such retrospective
304 nomenclatural policing to be a new form of colonialism, unduly harming the huge number of global
305 scientists whose first language is not English. His suggestion is blunt: "I contend that the US would
306 do better to *solve* its social and political problems rather than renaming them, and especially, rather
307 than exporting them."

308 There are now numerous ways in which the idea of large-scale eponym canceling is being
309 cast as morally and ethically questionable: from discriminating against individuals because of the
310 groups they belong to (Goska 2020, Winker 2023); to being a new form of colonialism (Pethiyagoda
311 2023); enhancing international disparities (Orr et al. 2023); being discriminatory and harmful to
312 biologists in the global south (Jost et al. 2023, Orr et al. 2023); diverting scarce resources from

313 making direct progress on more important challenges (Supplementary Materials, Antonelli et al.
314 2023); being moral imperialism (Winker 2023); and virtue signaling (Goska 2021, Pethiyagoda 2023,
315 Thiele 2023). Alternative proposals that are far less divisive exist to enhance inclusion through
316 organismal nomenclature (e.g., Palma and Heath 2021, Jost et al. 2023, Winker 2023).

317 A case of an anti-eponym success story is informative. Duque et al. (2018) reported that
318 medical anatomists succeeded in a top-down effort to standardize their terminology *without*
319 eponymous names—and that the approved terminology has still not been accepted twenty years
320 later. The lesson here and in Table 1 is clear: authoritative elimination of eponyms is not well
321 received.

322 The perceived benefits of large-scale eponym name changing are largely aspirational: we lack
323 evidence that inclusion will be demonstrably enhanced. On the contrary, the divisiveness and
324 polarization of the idea of making these changes are very real (Table 1, Figure 1, Supplementary
325 Material). Thus, the risk of exclusion or reduced engagement is considerable. Cynically, one way to
326 increase proportional participation by underrepresented groups is to get members of the
327 overrepresented groups to stop participating or to do so less enthusiastically. Given this study's
328 results showing considerable divisiveness and unpopularity, large-scale changing of eponymous
329 names could have that effect (Figure 1).

330

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333 American Classification Committee.

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337 member. I also thank the many online respondents whose comments informed and elevated the
338 tone of the discussions.

339

340 **Supplementary Materials.**

341 Data are archived at FigShare: DOI 10.6084/m9.figshare.23787219.

342 [https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Winker_Supp_Matl_for_ms_on_the_unpopularity_of_changi](https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Winker_Supp_Matl_for_ms_on_the_unpopularity_of_changing_eponymous_bird_and_other_organismal_names_26_July_2023/23787219)
343 [ng_eponymous_bird_and_other_organismal_names_26_July_2023/23787219](https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Winker_Supp_Matl_for_ms_on_the_unpopularity_of_changing_eponymous_bird_and_other_organismal_names_26_July_2023/23787219)

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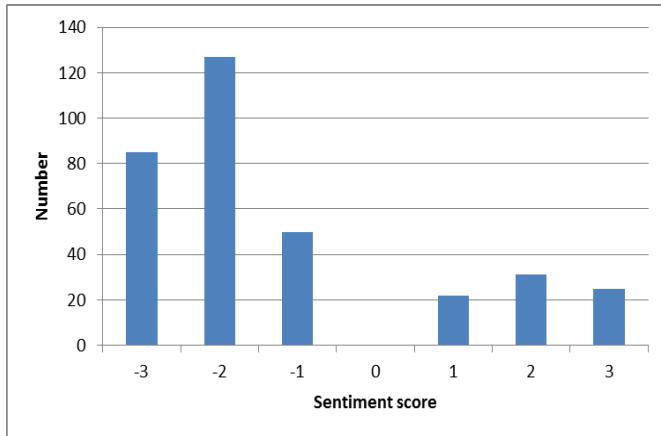
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Table. Summary of sentiment analysis scoring of the polarity and magnitude of responses to two articles promoting changes to eponymous English bird names and organismal scientific names.

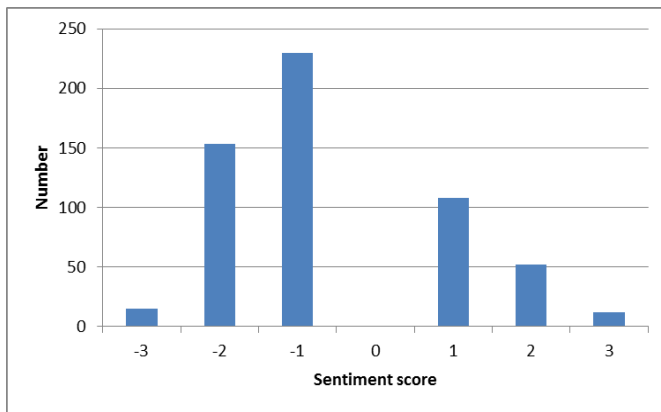
Article	Negative	Positive	Ratio -:+	Average	Avg. neg.	Avg. pos.
F&R (2020)	262	78	3.36	-1.18	-2.13	2.04
Fears (2021)	398	172	2.31	-0.28	-1.46	1.44
Guedes et al. (2023)	152	16	9.50	-1.99	-2.43	2.19

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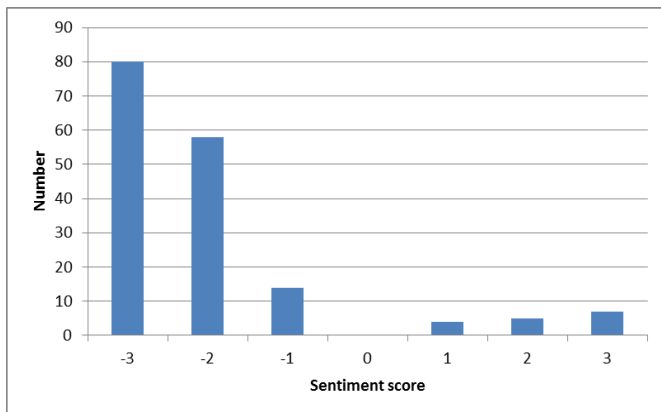
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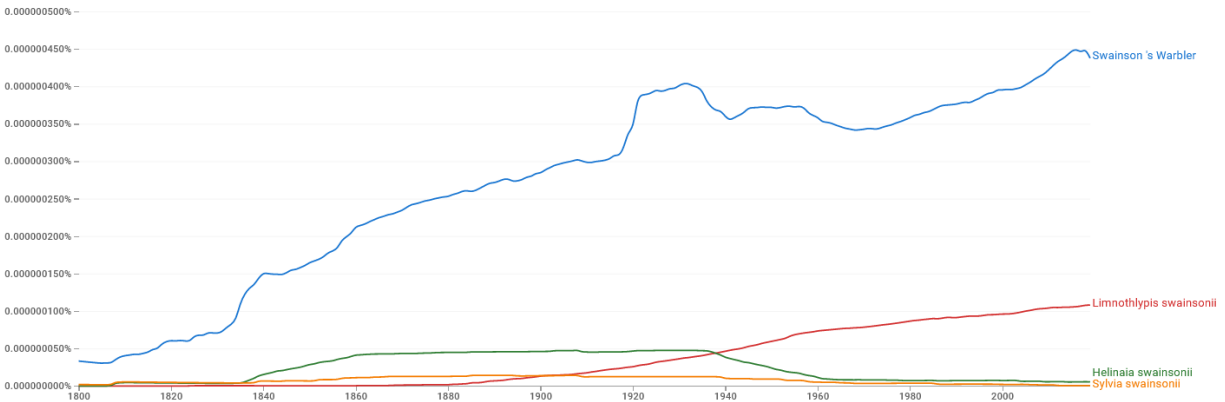
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472 Figure 1. Summary of sentiment analysis scores showing polarity and magnitude of responses to Foley
473 and Rutter (2020; top panel), Fears (2021; middle panel), and Guedes et al. (2023; bottom panel).

474 Neutral scores are not considered (see Methods).

475

476



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478

479 Figure 2. An historic overview of the use of Swainson's Warbler (blue) as an English bird name relative to
480 the three scientific names the species (as now recognized) has borne from 1800 through 2019, *Sylvia*
481 *swainsonii* , Audubon 1834 (golden), *Helinaia swainsonii* (green), and *Limnothlypis swainsonii* (red),
482 using Google Books Ngram Viewer.

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[Back to TOC](#)