

SEABIRD NOMENCLATURE

Camphuysen & Reid (1999) barely touch the surface of the problems posed by recent proposals to modify seabird taxonomy and nomenclature. Not only are there numerous differences between Dutch and British usage, but also similar ones between that of all the other comparable committees, countries and publications of the world. It should be remembered that this does not affect the

birds, which remain the same whatever is said about them, but is merely an expression of opinion by the parties concerned, who seldom appear to know much about seabirds and problems in dealing with them, and whose views often cancel each other out. The nature of these problems may be illustrated by considering further the three groups of petrels that were discussed.

Not only is there a difference of opinion between Voous (1973), who recognises three races of Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*, and the current Dutch systematic committee (CSNA; Sangster *et al.* 1999), who treat two of them as species Fea's Petrel *P. feae* and Zino's Petrel *P. madeira*. The Irish, who claim to follow Voous (1973), also call the last two Fea's and the Madeiran Soft-plumaged Petrels (Milne & O'Sullivan 1998); it is not clear what they would now call *P. mollis*- could it be "Soft-plumaged Soft-plumaged Petrel"? The Americans also call them the Cape Verde and Madeiran Petrels (Sibley & Monroe 1990), the last name conflicting with its widespread past use (still followed by Birding World) for the Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*. None of them has consulted the first recent author to treat them as species, who preferred their local names (Bourne 1983).

Secondly, it should also be realised that the original English name for *Calonectris diomedea* in the 19th century was Cinereous Shearwater, comparable to the French Puffin Cendré. A past BOU committee then decided to call its races the North Atlantic and Mediterranean Great Shearwaters at the risk of confusion with the unrelated (Tristan) Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. This was condensed by Alexander (1928) into a general name Mediterranean Shearwater for the species in the first and long most-widely-used field guide. Another BOU committee then renamed it Cory's Shearwater in homage to an American who belatedly described the North Atlantic form in order to provide a specific name. A Bulgarian paper in a South African journal still refers to the "Mediterranean Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*" (Nankinov 1996).

Thirdly, in the 19th century the Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and Levantine Shearwater *P. yelkouan* were treated as distinct species and the Balearic Shearwater *P. p. mauretanicus* was added after they were all relegated to subspecies of *P. puffinus* by past BOU committees. When we separated the rather distinct Mediterranean forms again (Bourne *et al.* 1988) it was difficult to decide on a general name, since the obvious Mediterranean Shearwater had formerly been used for *C. diomedea*, so since it seemed inadvisable to adopt a name previously used for a race we coined a new general name Yelkouan Shearwater. The BOU then adopted Mediterranean Shearwater anyway, while after splitting the Mediterranean forms further the Dutch have now applied our general name Yelkouan to what used to be known in English as the Levantine Shearwater. When will Dutchmen stop messing about with English names- we do not interfere with Dutch ones?

The Royal Naval Bird-watching Society decided that since no consistency could be found in other usage it had better prepare a list of seabird names of its own, giving (unlike most other lists) reasons for the debatable ones adopted (Bourne & Casement 1993), although unlike others it does not try to impose it on anyone. In the latest version we suggest that if it is wished to include "Mediterranean" in the names of its shearwaters they be called the Greater and Lesser Mediterranean Shearwaters. Since the name Yellow-legged Gull has traditionally been used for *Larus cachinnans*, it also seems equally arguable it should be kept for that form, and *L. michahellis* and *L. melanocephalus* could then also called the Greater and Lesser Mediterranean Gulls as well.

Personally I have long felt that more attention should be paid to minor forms of geographical variation (Bourne 1993), but it seems doubtful if it is practical to elevate most into species and suppress the rest in the way now fashionable in The Netherlands. This has already caused Porter *et al.* (1997) to overlook the passage of most of the numerous population of intermediate "Scopoli's Shearwater" *Calonectris (diomedea) diomedea* past Cape Verde twice a year (Mougin *et al.* 1988) in their enthusiasm to identify the much rarer Cape Verde Shearwater *C. (d.) edwardsii* there instead. Doubtless soon in addition to referring to "*Pterodroma* sp" instead of petrels we shall also have to refer not only to "*Calonectris* or *Puffinus* sp." instead of shearwaters but also "*Larus* sp." instead of species of gulls as well. Is this progress?

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