

Taxonomic recommendations for British birds†

ALAN G. KNOX,^{1*} MARTIN COLLINSON,² ANDREAS J. HELBIG,³ DAVID T. PARKIN⁴ & GEORGE SANGSTER⁵

¹Historic Collections, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Aberdeen AB24 3SW, UK

²Biomedical Sciences, Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD, UK

³Vogelwarte Hiddensee, Universität Greifswald, D-18565 Kloster, Germany

⁴Institute of Genetics, University of Nottingham, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham NG7 2UH, UK

⁵Stevenshof 17, 2312 GM Leiden, The Netherlands

These recommendations of the Taxonomic Sub-committee of the BOU Records Committee will take effect immediately for the purposes of the British List. A paper outlining the approach of the Sub-committee to species-level decisions has recently been published (Helbig *et al.* 2002. Guidelines for assigning species rank. *Ibis* 144: 518–525).

The position of Anseriformes and Galliformes

A review has been undertaken of 26 phylogenetic studies of the basal clades of birds. This review indicates that the basal subdivisions of living birds are well resolved, and that each of the five hypotheses below is well supported and that these hypotheses are much better supported than any alternative hypothesis.

The best supported alternative hypothesis, supported by four mtDNA sequence studies, suggests that Passeriformes is the sister-group to all other living birds. Jackknife analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences of all orders of living birds have shown that this finding may be an artefactual result of long-branch attraction due to insufficient taxon sampling.

The following hypotheses are accepted:

- The most basal subdivision of living birds is that between Palaeognathae and Neognathae;
- Ratitae and Tinamiformes are sister taxa;
- Galloanserae and Neoaves are sister taxa;
- Anseriformes and Galliformes are sister taxa;
- Neoaves is monophyletic.

Galloanserae will therefore be placed at the start of the British List. Within Galloanserae, Anseriformes will precede Galliformes. The sequence within the families remains unchanged for now. A paper on this proposal has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

*Corresponding author. Email: a.g.knox@abdn.ac.uk

†This paper is an official document of the British Ornithologists' Union.

Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*

Phylogenetic analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences (Nunn *et al.* 1996. *Auk* 113: 784–801; Nunn & Stanley 1998. *Mol. Biol. Evol.* 15: 1360–1371) indicate that the albatrosses comprise four major monophyletic groups, which are best recognized as genera: the North Pacific albatrosses (*Phoebastria*, comprising *P. immutabilis*, *P. nigripes*, *P. irrorata* and *P. albatrus*), the great albatrosses (*Diomedea*, comprising *D. epomophora*, *D. exulans* and *D. amsterdamensis*), the mollymawks (*Thalassarche*, comprising *T. chlororhynchos*, *T. bulleri*, *T. cauta*, *T. chrysostoma* and *T. melanophris*), and the sooty albatrosses (*Phoebetria*, comprising *P. fusca* and *P. palpebrata*). The same studies indicate that the sooty albatrosses are the sister-group of the mollymawks rather than the sister-group to all remaining albatrosses and that the genus *Diomedea*, as traditionally defined, is not monophyletic. We recommend the recognition of the genera *Phoebastria* and *Thalassarche* because this underscores the existence of four major groups of albatrosses and eliminates paraphyly of the traditional genus *Diomedea*.

Black-browed Albatross becomes *Thalassarche melanophris*. A paper on the generic status of albatrosses has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*, Caribbean Flamingo *P. r. ruber* and Chilean Flamingo *P. r. chilensis* are well-marked taxa that show consistent

differences in several functional systems: plumage coloration and pattern, coloration of bill and legs (e.g. van den Berg 1987. *Dutch Birding* 9: 2–7; Treep 1994. *Dutch Birding* 13: 17; Sangster 1997. *Dutch Birding* 19: 193–198), displays and vocalizations (Studer-Thiersch 1964. *Ornithol. Beob.* 61: 99–102; Studer-Thiersch 1974. *Z. Tierpsychol.* 36: 212–266; Studer-Thiersch 1975. In Kear, J. & Duplaix-Hall, N. (eds) *Flamingos*: 150–158. Berkhamsted). These data indicate that Greater Flamingo, Caribbean Flamingo and Chilean Flamingo are best treated as separate species.

- Greater Flamingo *P. roseus* (monotypic);
- Caribbean Flamingo *P. ruber* (monotypic);
- Chilean Flamingo *P. chilensis* (monotypic).

Greater Flamingo is at present included in categories D and E of the British List, and Chilean Flamingo in category E.

A paper on the taxonomy of this group has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*

Studies of courtship behaviour and vocalizations (Gaucher *et al.* 1996. *Ibis* 138: 273–282), mitochondrial DNA (Gaucher *et al.* 1996. *Ibis* 138: 273–282) and nuclear DNA (D'Aloia 2001. *Zool. Middle East* 22: 25–35) have documented consistent differences between *macqueenii* and *undulata*. Together with differences in plumage (*Birds of the Western Palearctic* 2: 649–655; Gaucher *et al.* 1996. *Ibis* 138: 273–282; Sangster 1996. *Dutch Birding* 18: 248–254), these data suggest that *macqueenii* and *undulata* are best treated as distinct species. The Canarian population *C. u. fuertaventurae* is treated as conspecific with *C. undulata* based on lack of diagnostic differences in plumage (*Birds of the Western Palearctic* 2: 649–655), courtship behaviour (Hinz & Heiss 1989. *Bustard Studies* 4: 68–79) and mitochondrial DNA (Gaucher *et al.* 1996. *Ibis* 138: 273–282).

- Houbara Bustard *C. undulata* (polytypic, with subspecies *undulata* and *fuertaventurae*);
- Macqueen's Bustard *C. macqueenii* (monotypic).

Houbara Bustard (*sensu lato*) has occurred five times in Britain. The first four birds (Lincoln 1847, Yorkshire 1892, 1896, Aberdeenshire 1898) were identified as Macqueen's Bustard *C. macqueenii*. The only 20th century occurrence (Suffolk 1962) was not identified to race at the time and the record is being reviewed (for photographs, see *British Birds* 1963, Vol. 56, Plate 61; Payn 1978. *The Birds of Suffolk*, Plate 15).

Houbara Bustard *C. undulata* should be removed from category A of the British List and replaced, on category B, by Macqueen's Bustard *C. macqueenii* (monotypic). A paper on the taxonomy of Houbara Bustards has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

The correct spelling of the scientific name of the Whiskered Tern is *C. hybrida* (David & Gosselin 2002. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 122: 32).

Western Palearctic taxa of *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais*

Following the publication of a number of relevant papers (including Leisler *et al.* 1997. *J. Orn.* 138: 469–496; Helbig *et al.* 1999. *Mol. Phyl. Evol.* 11: 246–260; Shirihai *et al.* 1995. *Dutch Birding* 17: 229–239; Svensson 2001. *Birding World* 14: 192–219), a reappraisal of the taxonomy of *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais* warblers on the British List has been undertaken. Of necessity, the review extended to all the taxa breeding in or visiting the Western Palearctic, and a few from further afield. After consideration, we propose to treat the Western Palearctic taxa as follows:

- Thick-billed Warbler *A. aedon* (polytypic, ssp. *aedon*; extralimital: *stegmanni*);
- Moustached Warbler *A. melanopogon* (polytypic, ssp. *melanopogon*, *albiventris*, *mimica*);
- Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* (monotypic);
- Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus* (monotypic);
- Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* (polytypic, w. Palearctic ssp. *scirpaceus*, *fuscus*; extralimital: *baeticatus*, *avicenniae* and others in the Afrotropical Region);
- Marsh Warbler *A. palustris* (monotypic);
- Blyth's Reed Warbler *A. dumetorum* (monotypic);
- Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola* (monotypic) synonyms: *septima/us*, *capistrata*;
- Basra Reed Warbler *A. griseldis* (monotypic);
- Great Reed Warbler *A. arundinaceus* (polytypic, ssp. *arundinaceus*, *zarudnyi*);
- Oriental Reed Warbler *A. orientalis* (monotypic, extralimital);
- Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus* (polytypic, w. Palearctic ssp. *stentoreus*, *levantina*, *brunnescens*; others in the e. Palearctic & Indomalayan Regions);
- Cape Verde Cane Warbler *A. brevipennis* (monotypic);

- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida* (polytypic, ssp. *reiseri*, *laeneni*, *pallida*, *elaeica*);
- Western Olivaceous Warbler *H. opaca* (monotypic);
- Booted Warbler *H. caligata* (monotypic);
- Sykes's Warbler *H. rama* (monotypic);
- Upcher's Warbler *H. languida* (monotypic);
- Olive-tree Warbler *H. olivetorum* (monotypic);
- Icterine Warbler *H. icterina* (monotypic);
- Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta* (monotypic).

The taxa on the British List should be treated as follows:

- Thick-billed Warbler *A. aedon* (polytypic, the race having occurred in Britain is unlikely to be other than nominate *aedon*);
- Moustached Warbler *A. melanopogon* (polytypic, the race having occurred in Britain is unlikely to be other than nominate *melanopogon*);
- Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* (monotypic);
- Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus* (monotypic);
- Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* (polytypic, ssp. *scirpaceus*);
- Marsh Warbler *A. palustris* (monotypic);
- Blyth's Reed Warbler *A. dumetorum* (monotypic);
- Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola* (monotypic);
- Great Reed Warbler *A. arundinaceus* (polytypic, ssp. *arundinaceus*) sight records do not normally exclude *A. stentoreus*;

- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida* (polytypic, ssp. *elaeica*);
- Western Olivaceous Warbler *H. opaca* (monotypic) the position of this species on the British List is under review;
- Booted Warbler *H. caligata* (monotypic);
- Sykes's Warbler *H. rama* (monotypic);
- Icterine Warbler *H. icterina* (monotypic);
- Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta* (monotypic).

Full details of these proposals will be published elsewhere.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Three recent papers have contributed to our understanding of relationships within the *P. trochiloides* group (Helbig *et al.* 1995. *J. Avian Biol.* 26: 139–153; Irwin 2000. *Evolution* 54: 998–1010; Irwin *et al.* 2001. *Nature* 409: 333–337). There are commentaries on the last by Wake (2001. *Nature* 409: 299–300) and Collinson (2001. *Brit. Birds* 94: 278–283).

The Greenish Warbler occurs from the Baltic

across western Siberia and then south around the Tibetan plateau in a chain of intergrading taxa: *P. t. viridanus*, *ludlowi*, nominate *trochiloides*, *obscuratus* and *plumbeitarsus*, although there is now a distributional break, possibly due to recent habitat loss, between the latter two. Where *viridanus* and *plumbeitarsus* meet in central Siberia they behave as separate species. This group of taxa appears to comprise a ring-species. The (almost) continuous distribution and clinal variation along the chain prevents the constituent taxa being treated as anything other than a single species.

In addition to the subspecies mentioned above, *P. t. nitidus* occurs as an isolated form in south-west Asia. Its characters appear to be quite variable and, although many individuals are clearly identifiable, it is not clear that *nitidus* is fully diagnosable from other races of *trochiloides* (see, e.g., van der Vliet *et al.* 2001. *Dutch Birding* 23: 175–191). On the basis of the present evidence, *nitidus* should be treated as a race of *P. trochiloides*.

These recommendations bring no changes to the present treatment of the various taxa on the British List. A paper on the taxonomy of the Greenish Warbler complex has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Prior to the 5th edition of the British List (BOU 1971. *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*), Arctic Warblers that occurred in Britain were attributed to the nominate race. The authors of *The Status* apparently followed Vaurie (1959. *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna: Passeriformes*) in recognizing the race *talovka*, and suggested that this was the race to which British birds most likely belonged. We propose to follow the recommendation of Williamson (1967. *Identification for Ringers. 2. The Genus Phylloscopus*, revised edition), Svensson (1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*, p. 206) and *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (6: 548), who regard *talovka* as a synonym of nominate *borealis*. The British records should therefore be treated as belonging to the nominate race.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus brehmii*

As originally pointed out by Ticehurst (1937. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 57: 63–64), Von Homeyer's description of *P. brehmii* 'is insufficient and in several vital aspects erroneous' (Svensson 2001. *Bull. Brit. Orn.*

Club 121: 281–296). The correct name for the Iberian Chiffchaff is *Phylloscopus ibericus* Ticehurst 1937.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

The correct spelling of the scientific name of the Firecrest is *R. ignicapilla* (David & Gosselin 2002. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 122: 38).

Carrion (Hooded) Crow *Corvus corone*

Carrion Crows *C. corone corone* and Hooded Crows *C. corone cornix* are diagnosably different in plumage (*Birds of the Western Palearctic* 8: 172–195) and there are slight differences in their vocalizations (Palestrini & Rolando 1996. *Bird Study* 43: 364–370). A striking deficiency of mixed pairs (Saino 1990. *Avocetta* 14: 103–109; Rolando 1993. *Ornis Scand.* 24: 80–83; Risch & Andersen 1998. *J. Ornithol.* 139: 173–177) indicates a strong prezygotic barrier to gene flow that is reinforced by fitness differences of the parental and hybrid phenotypes (Saino & Bolzern 1992. *Boll. Zool.* 59: 407–415; Saino & Villa 1992. *Auk* 109: 543–555).

The black crow *orientalis* from central and eastern Asia overlaps locally with *C. cornix* in Siberia with only limited hybridization, suggesting that they also are separate species. On morphological grounds, *orientalis* is usually combined with *corone* in a single species, *C. corone*, comprising two races. However, there is some evidence that nominate *corone* and *orientalis* may be less closely related to each other than nominate *corone* is to *cornix* (Eck 1984. *Zoo. Abh. Staatl. Mus. Tierkde. Dresden* 39: 71–98). From this, and by analogy with the situation in the Alps and Schleswig-Holstein where non-random mating is found between *corone* and *sharpii/cornix*, it would seem logical to recommend that *C. orientalis* is treated as a third species. Ongoing molecular research in

eastern Asia (Chelomina *et al.* 1995. *Russian J. Genetics* 31: 147–151; Kryukov & Odati 2000. *Russian J. Genetics* 36: 1054–1060; Kryukov & Suzuki 2000. *Russian J. Genetics* 36: 922–929) suggests that the situation is more complex, although the data are limited, and further research is needed before a firm conclusion can be reached about the status of *orientalis*.

It is recommended that *C. corone* (Carrion Crow from W Europe) and *C. cornix* (to include all races of Hooded Crow) be regarded as semispecies and treated as separate species. Both occur on the British List.

- **Carrion Crow *C. corone*** (polytypic, the race which occurs in Britain being *C. c. corone*);
- **Hooded Crow *C. cornix*** (polytypic, the race which occurs in Britain being *C. c. cornix*).

A paper on the taxonomy of crows has been completed and will appear elsewhere.

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*

The correct spelling of the scientific name of the Ovenbird is *S. aurocapilla* (David & Gosselin 2002. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 122: 38).

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephala*

The correct spelling of the scientific name of the Pine Bunting is *E. leucocephalos* (*Birds of the Western Palearctic* 9: 153; David & Gosselin 2002. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 122: 41).

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Two recent reviews (Svensson 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*, p. 322; *Birds of the Western Palearctic* 9: 182) have suggested that the form *nigrostriata* is not recognizable and that the species should be regarded as monotypic. We propose to follow this treatment.