



From the AOU Check-list Committee

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COMMITTEE ON CLASSIFICATION AND NOMENCLATURE OF BIRDS (NORTH AND MIDDLE AMERICA) POLICY ON ENGLISH NAMES OF BIRDS

The AOU's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of Birds (North and Middle America) has received and considered a proposal submitted by The North American Subcommittee (Stephen M. Russell, Chair, Kenn Kaufman, and H. B. (Bud) Tordoff) of the IOC Standing Committee on English Names recommending adoption of the guidelines and spelling rules for the use of one-word or two-word compound English names, including hyphens, published in *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names* by F. Gill and M. Wright (2006, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey). The major effect of adopting this proposal would be to change the English names of 126 species currently in the *Check-list of North American Birds* (7th ed., 1998, American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C., and online) by removing the hyphens in their compound group names (e.g., the present Fulvous Whistling-Duck would become Fulvous Whistling Duck, and Leach's Storm-Petrel would become Leach's Storm Petrel). A few names would be altered by the insertion of a hyphen where there is none at present, and some presently hyphenated group names would become single unhyphenated words.

The AOU Committee's policy on English names of birds was clearly stated in the Foreword to the 6th (1983) edition of the *Check-list* (pp. xxi–xxiii): "With respect to orthography and related matters, we follow Cheesman and Oehser (1937, *Auk*, pp. 333–340) and Parkes (1978, *Auk*, 95, pp. 324–326)." Those guidelines are partly amplified in the paragraphs following that statement, and will not be repeated here. The reader is referred to those references. Additional guidelines were published in the

7th (1998) edition of the *AOU Check-list* (p. xiii). The policies outlined in the IOC guidelines apparently were generated, in the name of worldwide stability, without consideration of those adopted earlier or any other previously stated policies or guidelines. Not surprisingly, the Gill-Wright guidelines differ in many respects from the AOU's and would result in changes of many English names that have been stable for 25 or more years.

Proposals to modify English names are nearly always contentious and involve weighing competing factors to determine whether the changes proposed improve accuracy and clarity sufficiently to outweigh the cost of the instability they would cause. Changes approved in past years have generally been forced by changes in classification or by considerations of conforming to standard usage for species that occur primarily outside the AOU area.

The AOU Committee has unanimously rejected the proposal to adopt the IOC guidelines and spelling rules for English names of North American birds. We will continue to follow the guidelines and policies outlined in the 6th and 7th editions of the *Check-list of North American Birds*. Hyphens in compound group names indicate relationships and separate the members of the groups from less closely related forms (e.g., Whistling-Ducks from other ducks and Storm-Petrels [Hydrobatidae] from petrels in the Procellariidae).

We anticipate additional proposals that would change some North American bird names in other ways in accordance with other Gill-Wright guidelines and will consider them when they are submitted. We are making this announcement at this time, rather than waiting until the next Supplement to the *Check-list*, to make our policy more widely known to others who might be considering changes in English names of North American birds.