

ON THE QUESTION WHETHER IT IS NECESSARY THAT
THE PLENARY POWERS SHOULD BE USED TO SUPPRESS
THE TRIVIAL NAME "NOVAEHOLLANDIAE" LATHAM,
1790 (AS PUBLISHED IN THE COMBINATION "MUSCI-
CAPA NOVAEHOLLANDIAE") IN ORDER TO MAKE
AVAILABLE THE TRIVIAL NAME "CHRYSOPS" LATHAM,
1801 (AS PUBLISHED IN THE COMBINATION "SYLVIA
CHRYSOPS") (CLASS AVES)

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(Secretary to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature)

(Commission's reference Z.N.(S.)494)

1. When I received the application submitted to the International Commission for the use of the plenary powers to suppress three trivial names published for Australian birds by Forster (J. R.) in 1794, it seemed to me that further clarification was needed as regards the third of the cases submitted, for it was not clear that the action recommended would be sufficient to secure the purpose of the applicants, namely to ensure that the trivial name *chrysops* Latham, 1801 (as published in the binominal combination *Sylvia chrysops*) should be the oldest trivial name available (both objectively and subjectively) for the bird to which it is currently applied. For the applicants pointed out that the nominal species *Sylvia chrysops* Latham, 1801, had been subjectively identified by Iredale not only with the nominal species *Muscicapa chlorotis* Forster, 1794, but also with the older nominal species *Muscicapa novaehollandiae* Latham, 1790. The suppression (as proposed) of the trivial name *chlorotis* Forster, 1794, would, therefore, not suffice to provide availability for the trivial name *chrysops* Latham, 1801.

2. With the approval of Colonel R. Meinertzhagen (through whom this application had been submitted to the Commission), I accordingly decided to raise this question with Dr. Ernst Mayr (American Museum of Natural History, New York), the first of the signatories to the application submitted to the International Commission. When my letter reached New York, Dr. Mayr had left on a visit to Europe. On receiving my letter, he answered direct from Europe and at the same time sent my letter back to Dr. Dean Amadon at the American Museum. A little later Dr. Amadon wrote me a letter quoting the views expressed on this subject by Dr. D. L. Serventy (Nedlands, Western Australia) in a letter to Dr. Mayr and at the same time adding a note of his own views on the question at issue. The views of these specialists are set out in the following paragraphs.

3. *View of Dr. Ernst Mayr (letter dated 7th April, 1951):* Dr. Mayr wrote:—

What a pity your letter did not reach me before I left New York. . . . Most authors considered *novahollandiae* Latham, 1790, up to now as unidentifiable (a *nomen dubium*) and there are indeed some outright contradictions in the description, if the name really applies to *chrysops*. However Serventy wrote me recently that the name was based on some paintings and that these paintings represent *chrysops* undoubtedly. You are therefore entirely correct that it would be wiser to outlaw also the name *novae-hollandiae*. This is indeed what Serventy proposed to me by letter. You have my full authority to act along the line of your suggestion.

4. *View of Dr. D. L. Serventy, expressed in a letter to Dr. Ernst Mayr (communicated by Dr. Dean Amadon in a letter dated 11th April, 1951):* In a letter, dated 11th April, 1951, Dr. Dean Amadon quoted the following passage from a letter previously received by Dr. Ernst Mayr from Dr. D. L. Serventy:—

Your paragraph on the name *Muscicapa novaehollandiae* is strictly logical if one can confine oneself to the written word. Unfortunately, the name is based also on the coloured plate and a textual description in a work by John White "Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales," an extract from which I enclose.

You will see that certain portions of White's original description are omitted by Latham. The plate, which is in colour, is not a very good one but I think it can be accepted to represent the bird we now know as *Meliphaga chrysops*. In the plate the bill is shown as being down-curved and is black at the base and tip. The most striking discrepancy between the plate and the actual bird is the absence of the black lines at the side of the head but this may have been due to the fact that the head on the plate is very dark except for the yellow ear coverts.

My copy of White was bought some years ago from Tom Iredale who told me that it was one of the original copies owned by Mathews. There are several annotations in pencil by Mathews in it and the plate of the Yellow-eared Flycatcher is labelled in Mathews's hand-writing as *M. ornata*. This is the view which Mathews also held in his "Birds of Australia," vol. 2, but in the 1931 list he used *novae-hollandiae* as the prior name for *M. chrysops*.

It is quite impossible that the bird figured by White might have been *M. ornata* which is an inland bird in New South Wales. The only two possibilities are *M. fusca* or *M. chrysops*, and the bird represented to me appears to be the latter.

I think that the only thing to do now is to endeavour to place the name *Muscicapa novaehollandiae* on the list of *nomina rejecta*.

5. *Comment by Dr. Dean Amadon (letter dated 11th April, 1951):* In the letter containing the foregoing extract from the letter from Dr. Serventy quoted in the preceding paragraph, Dr. Amadon added the following comment:

You will see from this that Serventy believes that this name *Muscicapa*

novaeollandiae Latham, 1790, applies to the bird now known as *Meliphaga chrysops* and thinks that the name *novaeollandiae*, as well as *chlorotis*, should be declared *nomina rejecta*. It may be emphasised that there is some doubt still as to whether the name *novaeollandiae* actually does refer to the species in question.

6. Conclusion : It is evident from the foregoing statements that, although there is still room for difference of opinion regarding the identity of the species represented by the name *Muscicapa novaeollandiae* Latham, 1790, the likelihood of the species in question being the same as that represented by the nominal species *Sylvia chrysops* Latham, 1801, is so great that, so long as the first of these names remains available nomenclatorially, it will never be possible to secure the object sought by the applicants, namely that the trivial name *chrysops* Latham shall be unquestionably the oldest available trivial name for the bird now known as *Meliphaga chrysops* (Latham, 1801).



Hemming, Francis. 1952. "On the question whether it is necessary that the plenary powers should be used to suppress the trivial name *novaehollandiae* Latham, 1790 (as published in the combination *Muscicapa novaehollandiae*) in order to make available the trivial name *chrysops* Lath." *The Bulletin of zoological nomenclature* 9, 47–49. <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.10228>.

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