

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THE GENERIC NAMES MYRMECOPHAGA AND
TAMANDUA, AND THE SPECIFIC NAMES
OF THE OPOSSUMS OF THE
GENUS DIDELPHIS.

BY J. A. ALLEN.

In the 'American Naturalist' for February, 1901 (pp. 143-145), Mr. Oldfield Thomas refers to recent articles by Mr. Rehn and myself concerning the names *Myrmecophaga* and *Didelphis*. Without going into the matter with sufficient care I assented* to Mr. Rehn's contention† that the Linnæan *Myrmecophaga* was not tenable for the Great Anteater, known as *Myrmecophaga jubata* Linn., but I have to confess that I had not access to Marcgrave, and gave the matter only passing attention, as my special question at the time was the status of the genus *Didelphis*. As Mr. Thomas has shown, *Myrmecophaga* is perfectly tenable for the Great Anteater, and its proper specific name is *tridactyla* Linn. 1758 (*jubata* Linn. 1766). In concluding his notice of *Myrmecophaga*, he says: "As a result I claim that *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* Linn. should be the name for the Great Anteater, *Uroleptes* and *Cyclopes* remaining as before for the other genera of the family."

*Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., XIII, p. 185, Oct., 1900.

†Am. Nat., XXXIV, p. 185, July, 1900.

It appears to me, however, that *Uroleptes* is not the proper name to take the place of *Tamandua* Gray, 1825, where it stands as a *nomen nudum*, becoming only properly habilitated, as shown by Dr. Palmer, by Lesson in 1842. In this case *Uroleptes* has undoubted priority over *Tamandua*, but it appears that F. Cuvier in 1829,* used the same name, slightly varied in orthography, for the same group one year earlier than the publication of *Uroleptes*. Cuvier recognized three genera of his family—"Les Myrmécophages," namely: (1) "Les Tamanoirs, *Myrmecophaga* Linn.," (2) "Les Tamanduas, *Tamanduas*," and (3) "Les Didactyles, *Didactyles*." *Myrmecophaga* included only the Great Anteater, the genus being properly attributed to Linnæus. *Didactyles* is the same as *Cyclopes* Gray, 1821, leaving the second genus, *Tamanduas*, for the other members of family, namely the Tamanduas of naturalists. The name *Tamanduas* is used in as strictly a technical sense as either of the other names adopted by Cuvier for the other members of the family Myrmecophagidae, and I see no reason why the name *Tamanduas* is not tenable from Cuvier, 1829, for the group of Anteaters included in *Uroleptes* by Wagler one year later.

Respecting the name *Didelphis*, I am gratified to find that Mr. Thomas supports my contention† for its tenability. A word, however, respecting the earlier specific names applied to various members of this group. As is well known Linnæus's *D. marsupialis* was a composite group based on references to (1) the Virginia Opossum, (2) the Guiana Opossum, and (3) the large Mexican Opossum, the latter being the Tlacuatzin of Hernandez. It appears to me that the most satisfactory way of dealing with this composite group is to follow the usual method, whether the group be specific or generic, namely, the principle of elimination. The name *marsupialis* must, of course, be retained for some member of the composite group. As the first member to receive a special name was the Guiana Opossum, named *Didelphis karkinophaga* by Zimmermann in 1783, this name should be applied in a specific sense to the large Opossums of northeastern South America. The next member of the original *marsupialis* group to receive a name was the Virginia

*Dict. des Sci. Nat., LIX, p. 501, 1829.

†Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., XIII, pp. 185-188, Oct., 1900.

Opossum, named *D. virginiana* by Kerr in 1792. This leaves of the identifiable forms included under the original *D. marsupialis* Linn. the large Opossum of Mexico, namely the Tlacuatzin of Hernandez, to which the name *marsupialis* must evidently be restricted. As *D. karkinophaga* has obtained some currency for the large Opossums of northeastern South America, and as *D. virginiana* has been currently accepted for the Opossum of the United States, the present ruling very little disturbs the nomenclature of the group. The restriction of *D. marsupialis* to the large Mexican Opossum simply takes the place of *Didelphis californica* of Bennett, which as a specific designation has never had much currency.*

*For a fuller discussion of this case see Allen, Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., XIV, pp. 163, 164, June, 1901.



Allen, J. A. 1901. "The generic names Myrmecophaga and Tamandua, and the specific names of the opossums of the genus Didelphis." *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 14, 91–93.

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