

### 3.0017 On Gender Concord in Binomina

GEORGE C. STEYSKAL<sup>1</sup>

SYSTEMATIC ENTOMOLOGY LABORATORY, ENTOMOLOGY RESEARCH DIVISION, AGR. RES. SERV., USDA

The International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature (Article 11.g.1) require that adjectival species-group names agree in gender with their genus-names. This is a requirement of all present codes of biological nomenclature since their inception. It is a small part of Latin grammar that is firmly imbedded in nomenclature, with hundreds of thousands of names conforming to it. Nowadays many biologists, especially in the United States, become systematists without the benefit of any exposure to Latin grammar. Anyone will admit that gender concord is a nuisance; natural languages are evolving away from it, the Romance languages have discarded the neuter, and English has done away with gender except in pronouns.

But with the tremendous heritage of gender-concordant names we already have, now may we simplify the system? Some believe that retention of the originally proposed form, regardless of the generic combination, is the solution. Another way would be to change the grammar we use from the 3-ending system of Latin to a single-ending system, as has been done in the evolution of many languages. But this would do a certain amount of violence to the million or so names already in use, some for two centuries.

Let us consider the names used in 2 recent works (Kistner, 1969; Butte, 1968a, b, c), as a small sample out of the many now available.

Kistner adds 3 new species to the genus *Schizelythron* Kemner, originally proposed with the sole species *javanicum* for a beetle with split elytra. The genus is correctly of neuter gender. The one adjectival name proposed by Kistner, *sarawakensis*, should therefore be *sarawakense*.

Butte uses the following binomina:

<i>Chalepus bacchus</i> (Newman) ( <i>Hispa</i> )	* <i>Odontota arizonicus</i> (Uhmann)
* <i>C. bellula</i> (Chapuis) ( <i>Odontota</i> )	( <i>Xenochalepus</i> )
<i>C. bicolor</i> (Olivier) ( <i>Hispe</i> )	<i>O. dorsalis</i> (Thunberg) ( <i>Chalepus</i> )
<i>C. hebalus</i> Sanderson	* <i>O. floridanus</i> n. sp.
<i>C. walshii</i> (Crotch) ( <i>Odontota</i> )	<i>O. horni</i> Smith
<i>Xenochalepus ater</i> (Weise)	* <i>O. mundulus</i> (Sanderson)
( <i>Chalepus</i> )	( <i>Xenochalepus</i> )
* <i>X. omogera</i> (Crotch) ( <i>Odontota</i> )	<i>O. notata</i> (Olivier) ( <i>Hispa</i> )
* <i>X. potomaca</i> n. sp.	<i>O. scapularis</i> (Olivier) ( <i>Hispa</i> )
<i>X. robiniae</i> n. sp.	

Those marked with an asterisk should have different endings, *-us* instead of *-a* and vice versa. The names are all in the form originally proposed, regardless of the genus in which they are now placed. Apparently because *C. bellula* and

<sup>1</sup>Mail address, c/o U. S. National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D. C. 20560



*X. omogera* were proposed in the feminine genus *Odontota* they remain feminine in masculine genera; and *O. arizonicus* and *O. mundulus*, proposed in the masculine genus *Xenochalepus*, remain masculine in the feminine genus *Odontota*. Why *Odontota floridanus* is proposed as a new species with a masculine name in a feminine genus, while *Xenochalepus potomaca* is given a feminine name in a masculine genus is hard to understand. If one wishes to use an adjectival name such as *floridanus*, the choice between its 3 gender forms *floridanus*, *floridana*, and *floridanum* must be made on the basis of the gender of the genus-name with which it is combined. Is it any easier to remember or to find the original form than to remember that *Chalepus* and *Xenochalepus* take the forms in *-us*, while *Odontota* takes those in *-a*? It is not hard to remember that names like *Chalepus* and *Xenochalepus* (as well as *Oxychalepus*, *Temnochalepus*, *Anisochalepus*, *Goyachalepus*, *Parachalepus*, *Macrochalepus*, and *Hemichalepus*) are masculine. If the correct form is to be considered as the one originally proposed, the only way to determine it is to consult a catalogue or, preferably, the original description. We cannot obviate the fact that Latin adjectives exist in either 1, 2, or 3 distinct forms according to a definite system. It seems to me that the choice is between rigidified chaos and complex order. If we are dissatisfied with the rules, shall we meanwhile follow them and eventually by orderly action change them, or shall we be militantly dissident and follow our own choice, regardless of how few others may find that choice any better than existing rules? It would also seem to me that when editors of technical journals require authors to conform to their conception of correct English, they should also require authors to conform to the more elementary rules of the grammar of nomenclature.

#### REFERENCES CITED

- BUTTE, J. C. 1968a. The revision of the tribe Chalepini of America north of Mexico. I. Genus *Xenochalepus* Weise (Coleoptera, Chrysomelidae). *Coleopt. Bull.* 22:45-62.  
..... 1968b. *Idem*. II. Genus *Chalepus* Thunberg (Coleoptera, Chrysomelidae). *Jour. N. Y. Ent. Soc.* 76:117-133.  
..... 1968c. *Idem*. III. Genus *Odontota* Chevrolat (Coleoptera, Chrysomelidae). *Coleopt. Bull.* 22:101-124.  
KISTNER, D. H. 1969. Revision of the termitophilous subfamily Trichopseniinae (Coleoptera, Staphylinidae). I. The genus *Schizelythron* Kemner. *Ent. News* 80:44-53.  
DESCRIPTORS: Insecta; Coleoptera; nomenclature; agreement of generic and specific names.



Steyskal, George C. 1970. "On Gender Concord in Binomina." *The Coleopterists' Bulletin* 24(2), 57–58.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/271415>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/372557>

**Holding Institution**

University Library, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

**Sponsored by**

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: The Coleopterists Society

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.