

THRESKIORNITHIDAE RICHMOND, 1917 (AVES):
APPLICATION TO PLACE ON OFFICIAL LIST OF FAMILY-
GROUP NAMES IN ZOOLOGY AND TO GIVE PRECEDENCE
OVER PLATALEINAE BONAPARTE, 1838, AND OTHER
COMPETING FAMILY-GROUP NAMES. Z.N.(S.)2136

By the late E. Eisenmann (*American Museum of Natural History, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.*), E. Mayr (*Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.*), and K. C. Parkes (*Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pa., U.S.A.*)

The family-group name THRESKIORNITHIDAE and the subfamily name THRESKIORNITHINAE for the typical ibises (17 genera and about 27 species) are today in general (almost universal) use for the birds well-known in English as ibises (French: ibis; German: Ibissee). This application is submitted, in accordance with Code Art. 23d(ii), because an earlier family-group name, PLATALEIDAE, based on PLATALEINAE Bonaparte, 1838 (*Geogr. comp. list birds Europe and N. America* p. 48) (type genus *Platalea* Linnaeus, 1758 (*Syst. Nat.* ed. 10, p. 139), type species *Platalea leucorodia* Linnaeus, 1758, (*Syst. Nat.*, ed. 10, p. 139), by subsequent designation (Gray, 1840, *List Gen. Birds*, p. 167)), has technical priority. PLATALEINAE is the accepted name for a small, highly specialised group, the spoonbills (French: spatules; German: Löffler) consisting of 3 genera with 6 species, which group is usually considered a subfamily of the ibises, although formerly it was often treated as a separate family (see Sharpe, 1898, *Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.* vol. 26). Until the adoption of the 1961 Code, priority did not apply to family-group names. A majority of those who included spoonbills and ibises in the same family used the ibis family name.

2. To accept PLATALEIDAE for the ibis family as a whole would [to use the language of Art. 23d(ii)] 'upset general usage', which is now overwhelmingly in favour of THRESKIORNITHIDAE (an unpublished Appendix is held on file in the I.C.Z.N. office). Moreover, extension to all the ibises of the name PLATALEIDAE, which has long been restricted by most ornithologists as the family (or subfamily) name of the small, highly-specialised spoonbill group, might be confusing. The Code itself (Recommendation 64A) recommends that family names be based on genera 'representative of the family'. This is true of THRESKIORNITHIDAE but would not be true of PLATALEIDAE.

3. For a long period, the family name used for the ibises (whether or not the spoonbills were included) was IBIDIDAE (Coues, 1884, *Key N. American Birds*, Ed. 2, pp. ix + 648; Sharpe, 1898, *Cat. Birds. Brit. Mus.*, vol. 26, p. 2), based on the subfamily name IBINAE proposed by Bonaparte (1853, *C.R. Acad. Sci. Paris*, vol. 37, no. 18, p. 643), type genus *Ibis* Cuvier, 1817 [type species, by tautonymy, *Tantalus aethiopicus* Latham].

4. Richmond called to the attention of Mathews (1913, *Auk* vol. 30, p. 93 *et seq.*) that *Ibis* Cuvier, 1817, was preoccupied by an earlier genus *Ibis* (in the family CICONIIDAE) Lacépède, 1799, the type species, by tautonymy, of which was a stork, *Tantalus* [or *Ardea*] *ibis* Linnaeus [currently called *Ibis ibis* or *Mycteria ibis*]. The genus *Ibis* of Cuvier was replaced by its next senior synonym, *Threskiornis* Gray (1842, *Appendix List Gen. Birds*: 13), which had the same type species, *Tantalus aethiopicus* Latham, 1790 (*Indian Orn.*, vol. 2, p. 706, by original designation). In accordance with the then established principle of preserving the same taxonomic concept in family names, Richmond (1917, *Proc. U.S. Natl. Mus.* vol. 53, p. 636) proposed the new family name THRESKIORNITHIDAE. This family name (with the subfamily names THRESKIORNITHINAE and PLATALEINAE) was adopted in the important paper on family classification by Wetmore and Miller (1926, *Auk* vol. 43, p. 341). Eventually, throughout the world almost all ornithologists adopted this nomenclature. Meanwhile, however, Mathews (1913, *op. cit.*) had proposed the name PLEGADIDAE, based on the genus *Plegadis* Kaup, 1829, (*Skizze Ent-Gesch. eur.* Thieno, p. 42), type species by monotypy *Tantalus falcinellus* Linnaeus, 1766 (*Syst. Nat.* ed. 12, p. 241), apparently on the erroneous theory (cf. Code Art. 64) that family names should be based on the oldest included generic name. Actually, there was already in the literature a long unused older family-group name, EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte, 1854 (see para. 9 *infra*).

5. The principle of continuing the taxonomic concept when a family-group name had to be replaced, by basing the new name on the next available generic name for the same taxon when homonymy required the replacement, was recognised in the Code, as originally published in 1961 [Arts. 39a and 39a(i); see also the somewhat analogous Art. 40a]. Under these provisions, THRESKIORNITHIDAE would automatically have become the replacement name and would have taken the date of IBIDIDAE (Bonaparte's IBINAE), which it replaced. For technical reasons (not here relevant), the special provisions as to automatic replacement of family group names based on generic homonyms [Art. 39a and a(i)] were deleted by Code amendment at the 1963 Washington Congress. However, the broad provision designed to preserve 'general usage' as against strict priority in family group names [Art. 23(d)(ii)], remains applicable, but under this article one must resort to the International Commission for decision.

6. That general usage overwhelmingly supports THRESKIORNITHIDAE is indubitable. Wetmore's (1930) classification for birds of the world (which had revised editions in 1934, 1940, 1951 and 1960) had consistently used THRESKIORNITHIDAE (as well as THRESKIORNITHOIDEA and THRESKIORNITHINAE), and is followed nomenclaturally (with some irrelevant modifications, chiefly in regard to the passerine families) by almost all ornithologists currently active. Peters' *Check-List of Birds of the World*, (ed. Mayr & Cottrell, 1979), vol. 1, p. 283,

which has set some nomenclatural standards, adopted THRESKIORNITHIDAE (with THRESKIORNITHINAE and PLATALEINAE as sub-families). The American Ornithologists' Union *Check-List of North American Birds* in its most recent editions (1957 and 1983) adopted the same treatment, and has been followed by the large number of regional books (state and provincial handbooks and check-lists), field-guides, and numerous articles in the United States and Canada that traditionally conform to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list nomenclature. The same family and subfamily names were adopted by Hellmayr and Conover (1948), *Catalogue of Birds of the Americas*, regarded as the standard nomenclatural source for works dealing with neo-tropical birds, and widely followed in the abundant literature on the birds of the West Indies as well as Middle and South America (see also Meyer de Schauensee, 1966, 1970). In Europe, the authoritative Witherby *et al.*, *Handbook of British Birds*, (1939) vol. 3, p. 118; (1941) vol. 5, p. 303) used THRESKIORNITHIDAE (including the spoonbills in the family) and was widely followed. Some authors adopted PLATALEIDAE or even PLEGADIDAE, especially writers on African birds. However, when Ripley's (1961) systematic *Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* and Vaurie's prestigious *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna, Non Passeriformes*, vol. 2, p. 77 (1965) adopted THRESKIORNITHIDAE, a shift to that name occurred even in countries where at one time another family name had been used for the ibises.

7. The Appendix includes a list of current books and other works using THRESKIORNITHIDAE and has been prepared chiefly to indicate the world-wide overwhelming majority usage of this name in recent works. By additional bibliographic effort the number of publications adopting the name could probably be doubled, especially for works on birds of the New World, where usage since 1931 has been almost unanimous. Included in the list are some popular books and field guides, because they affect usage of family names. Scientific names of bird families are widely employed by other zoologists, and the vast army of non-taxonomic bird students—not merely by ornithological systematists. Because of the enormous literature, preserving the stability and universality of such names is of special importance. This was recognised on the adoption of the 1961 Code, which, when it introduced the priority principle for family-group names, created difficult problems not only because it changed previously employed principles but because there were no adequate available synonymies for family-group names, at least in the vertebrate classes with the most abundant literature. For these reasons Art. 23d(ii), and similar provisions, were included to preserve existing general usage (see discussion and references in Mayr, 1969, *Principles of Systematic Zoology*, p. 357). We believe that the inclusion of Art. 23d(ii) was intended to allow the disregard of strict priority in favour of general usage for family-group names without resort to the two-thirds vote needed for exercise of the plenary powers.

8. The present overwhelming use of THRESKIORNITHIDAE by current authors throughout the world was not attained immediately on the

abandonment of IBIDIDAE, but was certainly already the majority usage in 1961. Mathews' name PLEGADIDAE for a time obtained a following in Australian and even in certain African publications, although long since replaced on both continents. PLATALEIDAE of Bonaparte had considerable use by British authors in the 1950's and to some extent on the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. But the current British publications of the British Ornithologists' Union, such as Landsborough Thomson's *New Dictionary of Birds* (1964) and *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1971), (which is the current British Check-list), and the most recent British handbooks, guides, and check-lists, use THRESKIORNITHIDAE. It is of interest that such careful systematists as Voous (1973) (Holarctic) and Serventy (1962) (Australia), who at one time employed PLATALEIDAE, have switched to THRESKIORNITHIDAE to conform with majority usage. One current author who employs PLATALEIDAE (with subfamilies THRESKIORNITHINAE and PLATALEINAE) is Brodkorb (1963, *Catalogue of Fossil Birds* (*Bull. Fla. State Mus.* vol. 7, no. 4, p. 277), on the theory of strict priority, in disregard of Code Art. 23d(ii). Condon (1975, *Check-list of Birds of Australia*, Pt. 1) adopted PLATALEIDAE (with subfamilies PLEGADINAE and PLATALEINAE), stating in a note that THRESKIORNITHIDAE and THRESKIORNITHINAE 'are equally well known'—certainly an understatement. So far as we are aware, Brodkorb has not been followed except to the extent that Condon has done so. Other recent Australian works use THRESKIORNITHIDAE (e.g. Serventy and Whittell, 1962; Frith, 1969; Slater, 1970; Macdonald, 1973).

9. Brodkorb has been of service nomenclaturally in calling attention to long-unused family-group names that must be considered in conserving the names in general use. Among these is EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte, 1854, *Ann. Sci. nat.* (Paris), vol. 38, p. 142, based on the type genus *Eudocimus* Wagler, 1832, *Isis* (Oken), p. 1232 (type species *Scolopax rubra* Linnaeus, 1758, *Syst Nat.* ed. 10, vol. 1, p. 145, by subsequent designation by Reichenow, 1877, *J. Ornithol.* vol. 25, p. 145), a family-group name apparently unused for a century or more. Considering their insistence on priority, it is surprising that Brodkorb and Condon failed to adopt this as the subfamily name for the ibises.

10. A question arises as to how the names EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte and PLEGADIDAE Mathews should be treated, the former not in current use at all, the latter adopted by Condon as a subfamily name. They are subjective senior synonyms of THRESKIORNITHIDAE and THRESKIORNITHINAE, but based on different genera. Conceivably at some future time systematists might wish to erect a tribe for either or both of these ibidid genera and immediate allies. It therefore seems undesirable to totally suppress the names or to place them on the Official Index; it suffices for the Commission to rule that they shall be denied precedence over, and shall not displace, THRESKIORNITHIDAE and derived family-group names (see comment by I. W. B. Nye, *Bull. zool. Nom.*, vol. 30, p. 14).

11. The Commission is therefore requested to use its plenary powers to take the following action:

- (1) that the name THRESKIORNITHIDAE Richmond, 1917 (type genus *Threskiornis* Gray, 1842) with its coordinate family-group names is to be given nomenclatural precedence over PLATALEINAE Bonaparte, 1838 (type genus *Platalea* Linnaeus, 1758), PLEGADIDAE Mathews, 1913 (type genus *Plegadis* Kaup, 1829), EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte, 1854 (type genus *Eudocimus* Wagler, 1832) and their coordinate family-group names, by any zoologist who attributes their respective type genera, or any of them, to the same family-group taxon as *Threskiornis* Gray, 1842;
- (2) to place the name THRESKIORNITHIDAE Richmond, 1917 on the Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology, with an endorsement that it is to be given nomenclatural precedence over the family-group names PLATALEINAE Bonaparte, 1838, EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte, 1854, and PLEGADIDAE Mathews, 1913, by anyone who attributes their respective type genera, or any of them, to the same family-group taxon as *Threskiornis* Gray, 1842;
- (3) to place the names PLATALEINAE Bonaparte, 1838, PLEGADIDAE Mathews, 1913 and EUDOCIMINAE Bonaparte, 1854, on the Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology with endorsements that none of them is to be given priority over THRESKIORNITHIDAE Richmond, 1917 by anyone who considers their respective type genera, or any of them, to belong to the same family-group taxon as *Threskiornis* Gray, 1842.

Editorial Note

Dr Parkes asks for an explanation of the delay in publishing this application, which was first received in 1975. This is mainly due to pressure of work (especially on the third edition of the Code, and in managing the Trust's appeal for funds) and to shortage of staff in the Commission's office. Delays in correspondence beyond the control of the Secretariat and following the death of the late Dr Eisenmann were additional contributory factors.

R.V.M.



Eisenmann, Eugene, Mayr, Ernst, and Parkes, Kenneth C. 1984.
"Threskiornithidae Richmond, 1917 (Aves): application to place on official list of family-group names in zoology and to give precedence over Plataleinae Bonaparte, 1838, and other competing family-group names." *The Bulletin of zoological nomenclature* 41, 240–244.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/44483>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/38025>

Holding Institution

Natural History Museum Library, London

Sponsored by

Natural History Museum Library, London

Copyright & Reuse

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

Rights Holder: International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://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>.