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COMMENT ON THE PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE GENDER OF NAMES
ENDING IN *-OPS*. Z.N.(S.) 1572
(see volume 21, pages 212–221)

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In view of the forthcoming Declaration of change in the Code (Article 30(a)i) on the matter of the gender of generic names ending in *-ops*, we should like to call to the Commission's attention a single case (and there are certainly others) where the proposed all-encompassing rule making all genera with this ending of masculine gender would unnecessarily affect long-standing and correct usage. We refer to the avian genus *Rynchops* Linnaeus 1758 treated as feminine by Linnaeus and everyone else.

Rynchops, although ending in *-ops*, is not derived from the Greek root $\omega\psi$, *ōps*, eye, face, or $\omicron\psi$ *ōps*, face, voice. The *-ops* in *Rynchops* is derived from the Greek $\kappa\omicron\pi\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$, *koptein*, to cut. The first syllable is from the Greek $\rho\acute{\upsilon}\chi\chi\omicron\varsigma$, *rhynchos* (or *rhygchos*), a bill.

The genus *Rynchops* includes *Rynchops nigra* Linnaeus 1758 as the type species of the genus. The species of *Rynchops* (now usually called skimmers in English) habitually forage for small fish by flying over water with the bill wide open and the mandible, longer than the maxilla by approximately one-third its length, cutting the water surface. Because of this food-catching technique, unique among birds, *Rynchops nigra* had been called Cut Water by Catesby in 1731 and *Rynchopsalia* (or *Rygchopsalia*) by Barrere in 1745—the only names cited by Linnaeus in 1758. Barrere's name was derived from *rhynchos*, a bill, and $\psi\alpha\lambda\iota\varsigma$, *psalis*, to shear or cut with scissors.

Pennant (1781) states that *Rynchops* as used by Linnaeus derives from *koptein*, to cut, although it is not clear whether Linnaeus intended the name as “*rhynchos* + *koptein*”, i.e., cutting bill, or as a shortened version of “*rhynchos* + *psalis*”, i.e., shearing bill. In any event, Linnaeus called the species *Rynchops nigra* from and after the 10th Edition of the *Systema Naturae*, and later authors have never deviated from the feminine gender.

We favour the adoption of a general rule making genera ending in *-ops* masculine, provided an exception is included for cases where usage is clear establishing a different gender or where the author plainly indicates a different gender. Such an exception should be included (whatever the general rule) for otherwise many wholly unnecessary changes will be required creating confusion in the literature. Indeed it would seem that unless some such exception is included a formal amendment of the Code would be required.

We suggest the adoption of the following modification of the Declaration voted at the Washington meeting of the Commission:

“... except in cases where established usage or the unequivocal indication by the author of the genus shows the genus to have a different gender.”



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