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COMMENTARY

Comment on Jukema et al. (2015), “Geographic variation in morphometrics, molt, and migration suggests ongoing subspeciation in Pacific Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*)”

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ABSTRACT

Jukema and colleagues published in *The Auk* a study dealing with geographic variation within the Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*). We highlight a taxonomic problem created unwittingly by the last sentence of their article, in which the authors suggest a new name for the Siberian population.

Keywords: new subspecies, nomenclature, Pacific Golden-Plover

Comentario sobre Jukema et al. “Variación geográfica en morfometría, muda y migración sugieren subspeciación en curso en *Pluvialis fulva*”

RESUMEN

Jukema et al. (2015) publicaron en *The Auk* un estudio relacionado a la variación geográfica al interior de *Pluvialis fulva*. Resaltamos aquí un problema taxonómico creado inconscientemente por la última frase de su artículo, en la cual los autores sugieren un nuevo nombre para la población de Siberia.

Palabras clave: nomenclatura, nueva subespecie, *Pluvialis fulva*

In the July issue of *The Auk*, Jukema et al. (2015) published a study dealing with geographic variation within the Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*). Their detailed analysis of morphometrics, molt, and migration pathways provided convincing evidence of distinction between two populations with separate breeding grounds, Siberian and Alaskan. In their conclusion, Jukema and colleagues argued that these two populations exhibit possible reproductive isolation, and thus they proposed that the populations be recognized as two distinct subspecies of *P. fulva*. The purpose of our comment is not to discuss or contradict the evidence presented in their study, but to highlight the taxonomic problem created unwittingly by the last sentence of their article, in which the authors refer to the Siberian population: “We suggest the name *Pluvialis fulva johnsoni* in honor of two long-term students of the species, Oscar W. and Patricia Johnson.”

Although the dedication of a new name to esteemed colleagues is an honorable intention, by writing this sentence the authors created a name that, according to the rules regulating zoological nomenclature, cannot be used. Among its main purposes, the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature—currently in its fourth edition

(International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature [ICZN] 1999)—is intended to stabilize zoological taxonomy by providing, among other things, procedures for the registration of new names. Briefly, these procedures include, for names published after 1930, explicit mention that the name is new, description of the new taxon (ideally a full diagnosis that allows a comparison with closely related taxa), and identification of the type specimens (the name-bearing specimens that should be held in a museum collection). Complete formal guidelines can be found on the ICZN website (<http://iczn.org/code>). In the case of Jukema et al.’s (2015) paper, although the name *Pluvialis fulva johnsoni* was explicitly given as new, the absence of the other requirements, and in particular of the designation of type specimens, makes this an unavailable *nomen nudum* (“naked name”) that cannot, and should not, be cited as a new name. (This problem is independent of the incorrect Latinized suffix employed on “johnson” in the paper: genitive singular *johnsoni* versus genitive plural *johnsonorum*.) Because they only “suggest” this name, it is likely that the authors did not intend to make a formal description of a new taxon. Nevertheless, by including a name presented as new in their paper, the authors, and the

associate editor who supervised the publication, inadvertently created exactly the kind of situation that the nomenclatural code seeks to avoid: the unruly creation of new names to the detriment of the use of previously published ones—such as led, in the early 19th century, to a multiplicity of synonyms and unavailable names.

That said, what can be done now? One option is to render a full and formal description of *Pluvialis fulva johnsoni* that includes all requirements of the code. This can be written by the original authors or by anyone else. In both cases, attribution of authorship and date would accrue to the full description and not to the first publication. It should be made clear to all ornithologists and birdwatchers, however, that until such full description occurs, the subspecies *johnsoni* does not exist from a nomenclatural point of view, and this name should be withdrawn from any publications, including websites and databases. Alternatively, it might be possible to use a name already published and available for the Siberian population of *P. fulva*. Lists of available synonyms, for instance in Hartert's (1920) *Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna* and Ridgway's (1919) *Birds of North and Middle America*, include taxa described from Japanese or western Pacific localities that might correspond to the Siberian population studied by Jukema and colleagues. A full examination of these synonyms, their descriptions, type localities—and, if possible, type specimens—would be necessary to resuscitate the use of one of these older names. Personally, this is the solution we prefer, and we would thus keep the creation of a new name as a solution only if no prior names are discovered. In conclusion, we stress again that this comment does not criticize the comparative study

presented by Jukema and colleagues; it is intended to remind all ornithologists of the necessity to consider the creation of new names in an informed and careful manner.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the two colleagues who reviewed this commentary. One of them recommended that a point regarding nomenclature should be added to *The Auk's* reviewer evaluation checklist: If a taxonomic recommendation is made in a paper submitted to the journal, the manuscript should automatically be sent to designated experts on nomenclature, such as representatives from formally designated checklist committees, for their review. We fully agree with this proposal.

Author contributions: All authors contributed equally to this paper.

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