BioOne COMPLETE

The New Guinea bird names Macgregor's Bowerbird and Macgregor's Honeyeater

Author: Frith, Clifford B.

Source: Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club, 140(2) : 214-216

Published By: British Ornithologists' Club

URL: https://doi.org/10.25226/bboc.v140i2.2020.a12

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/Bulletin-of-the-British-Ornithologists'-Club on 29 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

The New Guinea bird names Macgregor's Bowerbird and Macgregor's Honeyeater

by Clifford B. Frith

Received 23 April 2020, revised 5 June 2020; published 22 June 2020

http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:D1A9F3B9-623E-4226-9114-A4E2E33DE2BC

Macgregor's Bowerbird *Amblyornis macgregoriae* of the uplands of New Guinea was named by Charles W. De Vis and was 'Dedicated to Lady Macgregor', wife of Sir William McGregor (*sic*) who was Administrator of British New Guinea during 1888–98 (knighted in 1889) by the specific name *macgregoriae* (De Vis 1890). Sir William's surname was originally, and thus formally, McGregor but he adopted the spelling MacGregor while in New Guinea as his personal preference.

Similarly, what was long called Macgregor's Bird of Paradise of the highlands of New Guinea was originally named *Macgregoria pulchra* by De Vis (1897) 'after Lady Macgregor' and was known thereafter as Macgregor's, or by some MacGregor's, Bird of Paradise. Having long been thought to be a bird of paradise, it is now established that *Macgregoria pulchra* is in fact a large honeyeater with extensive facial wattling, and was therefore re-named Macgregor's Honeyeater (Cracraft & Feinstein 2000).

In their Introduction del Hoyo *et al*. (2009: 46–47) discussed the issue of the English name spelling for the bowerbird and honeyeater, and their confusion as to the correct usage. They undertook 'an extensive search', which 'did not prove totally conclusive'. Because these authors found that Lady Mary McGregor signed her letters 'MacGregor' they considered it proof of what the McGregors 'used themselves'. Del Hoyo *et al*. (2009) apparently did not, however, appreciate that their formal name was McGregor and that Lady Mary's signature merely reflected her husband's idiosyncratic personal preference. Jobling (1991: 136) used the correct spelling Lady Mary McGregor but subsequently (Jobling 2010: 234) employed MacGregor, perhaps influenced by del Hoyo *et al.* (2009).

Contrary to the widespread use of the vernacular name Macgregor's for the bowerbird and what is now the honeyeater for some 120 years in major publications dealing specifically with the bowerbirds and birds of paradise (e.g. Gilliard 1969, Cooper & Forshaw 1977, Everett 1978, Peckover 1997, Frith & Beehler 1998, Lenz 1999, Frith & Frith 2004, 2008, 2010) some authors (e.g. Iredale 1950, Gregory 2019) use MacGregor's in one or both cases. It is difficult to see any point or benefit in changing Macgregor's to MacGregor's for the name for the bowerbird and honeyeater, as the former was consistently used in the majority of the relevant ornithological literature. The argument that MacGregor's should be used because McGregor personally preferred it is fundamentally weak. A far stronger argument is that the names should be changed to McGregor's Bowerbird and McGregor's Honeyeater because that was the man's official name (but see below).

The rules for zoological nomenclature do not apply to vernacular names. Pertinent points that should be considered, however, are:

(1) That the International Ornithological Committee (IOC; Gill & Wright 2006) listed ten rules or principles that should be considered in applying common names. The first was that 'Existing usage would be the predominant guideline'. The spelling Macgregor's for the two bird species involved here could not be more long established—that spelling having been used by most authoritative authors since both birds were named. Thus to apply the first rule correctly the name should be Macgregor's.

© 2020 The Authors; *This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.*

ISSN-2513-9894 (Online)

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/Bulletin-of-the-British-Ornithologists'-Club on 29 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

(2) Had De Vis applied a common name to *Amblyornis macgregoriae* and *Macgregoria pulchra* in describing them he would doubtless have used Macgregor's Bowerbird and Macgregor's Bird of Paradise respectively, as is consistent with his dedications.

(3) Gregory (2019: 320) stated 'the long-standing usage' of Macgregor's is wrong and that MacGregor's is correct because that is how 'Sir William signed his name' but this is erroneously selective history because Sir William's original surname was McGregor.

(4) Changes such as this lead to confusion and inconsistent misuse in the literature: such as in del Hoyo & Collar (2016) in which both MacGregor's Bowerbird and Macgregor's Honeyeater are conflictingly applied!

(5) In Rand & Gilliard (1967) MacGregor's Bowerbird and MacGregor's Bird of Paradise are used, whereas in Gilliard (1969) Macgregor's is used, suggesting Gilliard, specialist in these two bird groups (or his colleagues, as his monograph was published posthumously), came to consider the latter the correct usage.

(6) Similarly Sibley & Monroe (1990) used MacGregor's for both birds but Monroe and Sibley (1993) use Macgregor's, possibly having realised the error of their former spelling.

(7) Contrary to the last, and emphasising my point, Pratt & Beehler (2015) use Macgregor's Bowerbird, while Beehler & Pratt (2016) use MacGregor's Bowerbird.

(8) Rule 8 of the IOC, in applying vernacular names to birds, noted that 'brevity and simplicity are virtues'. Surely having an (unnecessary and erroneous) upper case letter in the middle of a common name makes for complexity and confusion rather than simplicity.

I am not arguing for a change of names to McGregor's (Sir William's correct name) Bowerbird and McGregor's Honeyeater. This would be change for the sake of change, and no more helpful than the change to MacGregor's from the original and long and widely used Macgregor's—an unnecessary and erroneous change for no good, logical or justifiable reason.

Future confusion and contradictory usage, as is clearly demonstrated above as occurring in recent literature, is best avoided by using the long-standing vernacular name Macgregor's for the bowerbird and honeyeater.

Acknowledgements

I thank my esteemed fellow New Guinea ornithologists Bruce Beehler, K. David Bishop, Richard Donaghey Thane Pratt and Edwin Scholes, and eminent natural history author Stanley Breeden, for kindly commenting objectively on a draft of this note; and Guy Kirwan for valued editing and sound advice.

References:

Beehler, B. M. & Pratt, T. K. 2016. *Birds of New Guinea; distribution, taxonomy, and systematics*. Princeton Univ. Press.

Cooper, W. T. & Forshaw, J. M. 1977. *The birds of paradise and bower birds*. Collins, Melbourne.

Cracraft, J. & Feinstein, J. 2000. What is not a bird of paradise? Molecular and morphological evidence place *Macgregoria* in the Meliphagidae and the Cnemophilinae near the base of the corvoid tree. *Proc. Roy. Soc. Lond., Ser. B Biol. Sci*. 267: 233–241.

De Vis, C. W. 1890. Appendix G. Report on birds from British New Guinea. *Ann. Rep. British New Guinea*: 57–62.

De Vis, C. W. 1897. Description of a new bird of paradise from British New Guinea. *Ibis* 7(3): 250–252.

Everett, M. 1978. *The birds of paradise and bowerbirds*. Putnam, New York.

Frith, C. B. & Beehler, B. M. 1998. *The birds of paradise: Paradisaeidae*. Oxford Univ. Press.

Frith, C. B. & Frith, D. W. 2004. *The bowerbirds: Ptilonorhynchidae*. Oxford Univ. Press.

Frith, C. B. & Frith, D. W. 2008. *Bowerbirds: nature, art & history*. Frith & Frith, Malanda.

Frith, C. B. & Frith, D. W. 2010. *Birds of paradise: nature, art & history*. Frith & Frith, Malanda.

Gill, F. & Wright, M. 2006. *Birds of the world: recommended English names*. Christopher Helm, London.

Gilliard, E. T. 1969. *Birds of paradise and bower birds*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.

Gregory, P. 2019. *Birds of paradise and bowerbirds*. Bloomsbury, London.

del Hoyo, J. & Collar, N. J. 2016. *HBW and BirdLife International illustrated checklist of the birds of the world*, vol. 2. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

© 2020 The Authors; *This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.*

ISSN-2513-9894 (Online)

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/Bulletin-of-the-British-Ornithologists'-Club on 29 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Christie, D. A. (eds.) 2009. *Handbook of the birds of the world*, vol. 14. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
Iredale, T. 1950. *Birds of paradise and bower birds*. Georgian House, Melbourne.
Jobling, J. A. 1991. *A dictionary of scientific bird names*. Oxford Univ. Press.
Jobling, J. A. 2010. *Helm dictionary of scientific bird names*. Christopher Helm, London.
Lenz, N. 1999. *Evolutionary ecology of the Regent Bowerbird*. Ökologie der Vögel, Bd. 22. Suppl.
Monroe, B. L. & Sibley, C. G. 1993. *A world checklist of birds*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT.
Peckover, W. S. 1997. *Papua New Guinea birds of paradise*. La Galamo Books, Lae.
Pratt, T. K. & Beehler, B. M. 2015. *Birds of New Guinea*. Second edn. Princeton Univ. Press.
Rand, A. L. & Gilliard, E. T. 1967. *Handbook of New Guinea birds*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
Sibley, C. G. & Monroe, B. L. 1990. *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT.

Address: P.O. Box 581, Malanda, Queensland, Australia 4885, e-mail: frithandfrith@bigpond.com

© 2020 The Authors; *This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.*

ISSN-2513-9894 (Online)

Downloaded From: https://complete.bioone.org/journals/Bulletin-of-the-British-Ornithologists'-Club on 29 Mar 2024
Terms of Use: https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use