

Bulletin of the BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Vol. 132 No. 1

Published 14 March 2012

REVIEW

Dickinson, E. C., Overstreet, L. K., Dowsett, R. J. & Bruce, M. D. 2011. *Priority! The dating of scientific names in ornithology: a directory to the literature and its reviewers*. Aves Press, Northampton. 320 pp + CD-ROM with 160 pp of supporting data. Available from: Aves Press, Flat 3, 19 Bolsover Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN20 7JG, UK, e-mail: info@avespress.com. £80 + £7.50 post & packing.

This is not a book that I will ever read through, and I doubt many others will either, but it is certainly an extremely useful resource for anyone concerned with issues of ornithological nomenclature and I already have cause to be grateful to it. A core component of the *International code of zoological nomenclature* ('the Code'), the bedrock on which the scientific naming of animals is based, is the stress laid on the issue of date priority in determining the correct scientific name for any taxon, e.g. species or subspecies. The arbitrary starting point for all zoological nomenclature is the tenth edition of Linnaeus' *Systema naturae*, fixed at 1 January 1758. However, the precise date on which any scientific name subsequently proposed was first validly published, usually in a book or periodical, can for a whole array of reasons be difficult to establish.

Because of the importance attached to this issue, over the years numerous interested parties have investigated aspects that concerned them. Although often publishing their findings on actual publication dates of books or periodical parts, this literature has tended to be scattered and hard to find, making it all too easy for subsequent workers to overlook relevant findings and waste time 'reinventing wheels'. The great virtue of *Priority!* is not that it solves all dating problems relating to ornithological names, because it

doesn't. Rather, in conveniently standardised fashion it collates, reviews and adds to knowledge concerning 148 books and 121 periodicals that both contain taxon descriptions and pose dating problems, concluding with a clearly stated assessment for each as to whether difficulties can be considered fully resolved, partially resolved or still requiring further investigation.

Prior to the detailed publication by publication consideration that comprises most of the book, there are two useful introductory chapters. The first attempts to summarise exactly what the Code considers validly published work and the nature of the evidence relevant to determining date priority. The second uses over 40 pages to describe how the authors went about their task, including perhaps more than many readers may wish to know about the historical detail of the publishing process. The CD-ROM contains 65 tables referenced in the text under particular publications as providing supporting information and also a long Table 66 'intended to link the work done for this book with the needs of readers of the *Howard & Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*, 4th Edition, which will be published soon'.

The entire work is very nicely produced, is well referenced and indexed, and provides an extensive glossary to all of the technical publishing terms used in the text. Overall, the authors, who give appropriate credit to a large number of contributors, must be congratulated on a volume that will both save others much time and frustration, and also provides a clearly referenced springboard for further research into an issue that manages to be both esoteric and fundamentally important.

Robert Prŷs-Jones