

XV. TERRORIST TACTICS IN TAXONOMY

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Under the catching title given above G.B. MONTEITH, Queensland Museum, has written an editorial in the Austr. Entom. Soc. News Bull. 21 (1985) 66—69, which has been copied in the Austr. Syst. Bot. Soc. Newsletter 44 (1985) with a comment by A. KANIS (CANB). Although it mainly concerns Australian herpetologists, many readers of the Flora Malesiana Bulletin will not have these journals available, so a short summary of its contents seemed to be in place, to give the situation a broader audience.

Two Australians, who we will not honour to name, nor call scientists, have published two large, privately-owned, unrefereed papers in 1984 and 1985, purporting to revise the entire Australian herpetological fauna. They have added no less than 470 new or revived species and 107 genera to what previously was generally accepted. Apparently nearly all names must be considered as effectively and validly published and hence legitimate under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature. Most names have been introduced without diagnoses; many are erected on information in other people's work. In the second 'work' lectotypes for a number of names have been indicated. It also has a chapter on references, with no less than 500 papers by the authors themselves; listed by titles and page numbers, some approaching 100 pages, published in a certain journal. Reference is also made to a 10 volume work 'The Herpetology of Australia' written by them and said to be in press. The remarkable thing is that no one has ever seen any of these papers, nor is the journal known, nor is anyone aware of the 'Herpetology'. Both publications effusely acknowledge the assistance of other Australian herpetologists, rather to their chagrin! Species have been named after nearly everybody in sight, a genus even after the villain of the movie series 'Star Wars', Darth Vader!

What has prompted these people, and how could they cover such a large field?

In the first paper they stated 'many species have their true identity masked by conservative taxonomic treatment, and are experiencing extensive loss of range ... An urgent task is official recognition of their existence ... Effective environmental protection can only be enhanced if a region's biological diversity is recognized at its finest possible resolution ... Lack of detailed studies is no grounds for the widespread suppression of taxa.'

This, then, is 'des Pudels Kern!' In a misguided effort to 'help' conservation they have brought nomenclature in disrespect. It is not a kid's game! Instead of giving every variant or disjunct population a chance to be conserved in a more normal way, they have now endangered all reptiles and amphibians in Australia, for the laymen will not be able to distinguish between these spurious names and serious ones and may not believe in any of them at all.

How they were able to list all these names was fairly simple. It is certainly no coincidence that the first paper appeared soon after the issue of the first volume of the 'Zoological Catalogue of Australia' which treats the herpetofauna, listing all the valid species, synonyms, with bibliographic references, type localities, registration numbers of type specimens, and distribution. Thus the authors were able to put names to scores of populations mentioned without ever

having seen any specimens. If type material was insufficiently cited, they have sometimes nominated 'the largest specimen' as the lectotype.

The Catalogue instead of facilitating taxonomic research has attracted charlatans who may have caused havoc. Our Index Nominum Genericorum has attracted some nuts of the botanical kind, but these at least stayed between more or less acceptable boundaries, while people like Rafinesque, Gandoger and Roberty earnestly thought they had 'good' taxa, but their methods are presently considered to be at fault.

Clearly the Zoological Code is much less restricting as far as effective and valid publications are concerned, for instance after 1 January 1986 photocopied manuscripts are considered to constitute effective publication! No doubt this will at some time also be proposed for botany. I hope the Congress will then be wise enough to suppress such attempts. The criteria for effective publication are difficult as they are.

This all may seem to be very funny, and it's happening to zoologists, anyway, but there is no reason to be so smug about this. If mischievous people really set themselves to it, they can come a long way with the Botanical Code in validating names and causing similar chaotic situations. Both Nomenclatural Codes were set up as aids to well-meaning, honest workers; unfortunately, in view of the complicated subject enough holes will always remain for rats to squeeze through.