

Comment on the proposed conservation of *Hydromantes* Gistel, 1848 (Amphibia, Caudata) by the designation of *Salamandra genei* Temminck & Schlegel, 1838 as the type species
(Case 2868; see BZN 50: 219-223; 51: 149-153; 52: 183-186)

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We wish to respond to the criticisms by Prof Dubois (BZN 52: 183-186) of the application by two of us (Smith & Wake) to conserve the name *Hydromantes*, published in BZN 50: 219-223.

1. Of the 20 views pertinent to this case reported by herpetologists (BZN 51: 149-153), 100% were supportive, and their authors included five representatives from Europe (including one of the two co-authors of the name *Hydromantoides*), one from Africa, one from Canada, and one from Thailand, as well as the remainder from the U.S.A. Contrary to the statement by Dubois (BZN 52: 183-186), complete agreement exists among these authors for approval of the application.

2. The arguments advanced in support of that agreement do differ, however, as Dubois observed; some views merely reflected a rejection of generic separation of European and American species (which would require use of *Hydromantoides* for the latter), whereas others were non-committal in that context. The application did not, on the contrary, concern the strictly zoological decision of generic (or subgeneric) separation of the two groups, and the voting by the Commission should not reflect any such concern. Whatever the grounds for support among the comments submitted, the support is still there and undoubtedly would be the same even if the American species were regarded as validly separated generically from the European species.

3. We understand the fundamentalist view Dubois represents, and we admire his uniquely thorough researches into nomenclatural history. Such dedication deserves its just rewards, but let them come where significant threat to nomenclatural stability does not exist. It is far more important to maintain established channels of communication than to follow significantly disruptive priority. Stability was stated in the Preamble of the 1985 edition of the Code as one of its primary objects, and the cover statement accompanying the Discussion Draft of the proposed Fourth Edition of the Code reiterates and strengthens that objective: 'The Editorial Committee has been guided by the principle that scientific names are labels for taxa and provide the only universal means of accessing zoological information. Stability in their application and form, consistent with taxonomy, is therefore of paramount importance

irrespective of any priority or linguistic consideration. This aim to maintain stability must take precedence over the tools that the Code uses to promote it. Thus, while priority remains the basis for determining validity, and linguistics the basis for the formation of names, neither is an end in itself. ... Like all zoologists, members of the Editorial Committee recognize that many names in current use are in breach of the existing Code and that no scientific purpose would be served by continuing to make them vulnerable to change for purely formal reasons. In the proposals for the Fourth Edition every effort has been made to ensure that names in present use will remain valid when the new Code comes into effect, or that they can be easily validated'.

4. The basic contention in the present case is therefore whether the proposed conservation is justified by significant nomenclatural confusion and workers' resentment that would otherwise result. While a gradual increase in adoption of the Dubois system has occurred among European herpetologists (likely the result of our delay in appealing for conservation, and the concomitant assumption that no alternative existed to Dubois's thesis), the use of *Hydromantes* is more frequent than ever, in spite of the fact that the *Zoological Record* from 1986 through 1993/4 lists not a single work for any of the three North American species of the genus. The coverage for European literature on the genus during that period perhaps was more nearly complete than for the North American literature. Nevertheless, we point out that during the relevant period, the *Zoological Record* listed 19 different works using the name *Hydromantes*, as opposed to only one using *Hydromantoides*, and eight using *Speleomantes*. Eight of the nine works using the latter two names came in the period 1990/1–1993/4, when nine works were listed using *Hydromantes*.

5. In part because of the very incomplete coverage of all literature by the *Zoological Record* (see Chiszar, 1993) (especially non-taxonomic and non-scientific literature, although much of the taxonomic and scientific literature also escapes inclusion), the extent of usage of the name *Hydromantes* is not fully appreciated even by all specialists. We have submitted a list to the Commission Secretariat of 98 usages additional to those previously noted, all since 1924 (1925: 1; 1934: 1; 1947: 1; 1957: 1; 1966: 3; 1967: 2; 1968: 2; 1969: 1; 1970: 1; 1971: 1; 1972: 1; 1973: 1; 1974: 1; 1976: 2; 1978: 2; 1979: 1; 1980: 3; 1981: 1; 1982: 3; 1983: 4; 1984: 2; 1985: 1; 1986: 3; 1987: 3; 1988: 11; 1989: 3; 1990: 5; 1991: 10; 1992: 7; 1993: 6; 1994: 10; 1995: 4), and are certain that many more exist, probably of equal or greater number. Such a wide-spread usage is not to be dismissed lightly. We call attention particularly to Gorham (1974), Zeiner, Laudenslayer & Mayer (1988), Collins (1990), Steinhart (1990), Williams, Byrne & Rado (1992), Jennings & Hayes (1994), Thelander & Crabtree (1994) and Wake (1995) because of their synoptic nature and general reference importance.

6. The importance of name-usage in non-taxonomic works should not be underestimated by taxonomists, who are the guardians of biological nomenclature for the benefit not only of themselves, but also of the far more numerous biologists of other disciplines, be those disciplines ecology, conservation, protection, management, genetics, evolution, education, anatomy or physiology, at either molecular or organismic levels. Non-taxonomic biologists depend on taxonomists to assure stability of nomenclature insofar as it is consistent with biological knowledge, keeping that stability immune to changes for purely nomenclatural reasons, where

they are significantly disruptive to understanding by biologists in general. Failure of taxonomists to serve that function well undermines their value to, and endangers the faith in and respect of, their fellow biologists, on whom their acceptance depends.

7. We therefore hold that the voluminous non-taxonomic literature, in addition to the other literature on the taxa properly (under our application) referred to *Hydromantes*, fully justifies conservation of that name (whether applied solely to the European species or, in addition, to the North American ones), is consistent with the rules and spirit of the Code, is overwhelmingly supported by our colleagues, and does not limit consistency in any way with perpetually dynamic biological investigation or interpretation.

References

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