Correct authorship of the genus Pyrgilauda (Aves: Passeridae)

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The correct generic name and its authorship of southern snowfinches has been a matter of debate since the 1980s (Kašín 1982; Nejřel'dt 1986; Stepanán 1990) until Mlíkovský (1998) showed that Pyrgilauda is the correct generic name and that it should be attributed to Bonaparte (1850: 511), not to Verreaux (1871: 40), because Bonaparte (1850: 511) first listed that name in synonymy, because it was used as a valid name for a taxon before 1961 and because Art. 11.6.1 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999; hereafter the Code) applies to this case (in 1998 I referred to the then-valid Third Edition of the Code, ICZN 1985, where this Article was called "11/e").

Gregory & Dickinson (2012: 53–54) agreed that Pyrgilauda is the correct generic name for southern snowfinches, but argued that Pyrgilauda should be attributed to Verreaux (1871), because Art. 11.6.1 of the Code does not apply. This prompted me to restudy the case. As I show below, one of the two arguments used by Gregory & Dickinson (2003) is not in agreement with the Code (ICZN 1999) and the other one is incorrect.

First, Gregory & Dickinson (2012) argued that Art. 11.6.1 of the Code can apply only if the name first listed in synonymy is subsequently used in the same sense. However, the Code does not require this. This is wise, because it is impossible to understand from a name not associated with description or indication first listed in synonymy in which sense its actual creator intended to use it. The author who listed it in synonymy may have used it in the same meaning as its actual creator or in another sense. Thus, the condition added by Gregory & Dickinson (2012) to the Code could never be fulfilled.

As regards genus-group names, Art. 11.6.1 of the Code refers for their type species to Art. 67.12 of the Code. There it is explicitly said that “the type species of the nominal genus or subgenus first published as a synonym is that nominal species (cited by an available name) first directly associated with it” (ICZN 1999: 69). The Example attached to Art. 67.12 of the Code explicitly says “The type species of Ceratopogon [used as valid by Meigen 1818: 82] is not automatically the type of either Palpomyia or Forcipomyia [both first cited in the synonymy of Ceratopogon by Meigen 1818: 82 and 73, respectively].” The taxonomic meaning of nominal genera is fixed (“provides the objective standard of reference for the application of the name it bears”) by their type species (Art. 61 of the Code) and the provisions of the Code thus mean that generic names validated under Art. 11.6.1 of the Code can be used in a different meaning than the generic name in the synonymy of which they were first cited (contra Gregory & Dickinson 2012). This is supported by the Example attached to Art. 11.6.1 of the Code: the generic names Ceratopogon Meigen, 1818 (used as valid by Meigen 1818: 70–86) and Palpomyia Meigen, 1818 (validated from Meigen 1818: 82 under Art. 11.6.1 of the Code) have different type species and are in current use for different groups of flies (Insecta: Diptera) (e.g. Borkent 2012).

Second, Gregory & Dickinson (2012) argued that Verreaux (in Bonaparte 1850) used the name Pyrgilauda for a lark (Aves: Alaudidae), while he later (Verreaux 1871) used it for a snowfinch (Aves: Passeridae). They said “Verreaux named a new snow-finch, not a lark, i.e., he did not ‘adopt’ Bonaparte’s name and the potential availability ceased when Verreaux used it in a wholly different context” (Gregory & Dickinson 2012: 54). Thus, based on this incorrect assumption (see below), Gregory & Dickinson (2012) suggested in fact that Verreaux created the generic name twice: first for a lark and later for a finch. However, Gregory & Dickinson (2012) seem to have overlooked the fact that the systematics of finch-like songbirds have evolved considerably between Bonaparte’s/Verreaux’s and modern times.

Bonaparte (1850: 511) listed Pyrgilauda in the synonymy of Pyrrhulauda “Smith, 1829” [= Swainson 1837: 294], which was itself later synonymized with the older Eremopterix Kaup (1836: 139). Verreaux’s Pyrgilauda was created as a combination of Pyrgita (sparrow) and Alauda (lark), thus meaning sparrow-lark, while Smith’s Pyrrhulauda was created as a combination of Pyrrhula (bullfinch) and Alauda (lark), thus meaning bullfinch-lark. Whatever the reason an author lists a manuscript or label name in the synonymy of a generic name he or she used as valid, it has no bearing upon the availability and taxonomic meaning of the name first listed in the synonymy (Art. 11.6.1 and Art. 67.12 of the Code).

Birds of the genus Eremopterix, now known to be larks (Aves: Alaudidae), were classified as finches in the mid-19
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