

SHORT NOTE

A new attempt to conserve the name

Hydroporus discretus FAIRMAIRE & BRISOUT, 1859 (Coleoptera: Dytiscidae)

The aims of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature are to promote stability and universality of the scientific names of animals. However, when stability of nomenclature is threatened in an individual case, the strict application of the Code may be suspended by a decision of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN).

Error is human. This is, unfortunately, also true for the ICZN, which, on the 1st of September 2003, ruled definitely against its own principles.

The name *Hydroporus discretus* FAIRMAIRE & BRISOUT, 1859 (Coleoptera: Dytiscidae) is in continuous use since 1887 and it was treated as a valid name in hundreds of publications since then. *Hydroporus discretus* is widely distributed in the Palearctic Realm, where it is known from three continents (Europe, Africa, Asia) and more than 40 countries from Ireland to China. It is especially common in Europe. The name *Hydroporus discretus* was used in numerous keys (SCHAEFLEIN 1971, FRIDAY 1988, etc.), in all catalogues (World Catalogue of Insects: NILSSON 2001: 156, Catalogue of Palearctic Coleoptera: NILSSON 2003: 60) and country-check-lists. Only once during the entire 20th century was its senior synonym, *Hydroporus neuter* FAIRMAIRE & LABOULBÈNE, 1855, used as valid name: in a most dubious article by ADÁM (1996) - for critical comments on this paper see NILSSON (1998).

An official application to conserve the name *Hydroporus discretus* was made by FERY (2001). This application was not only supported by FOSTER (2002) (editor of the "Latissimus", the only water beetle journal world-wide), it was strongly backed also by the "World Catalogue of Insects" (NILSSON 2001: "To be conserved"), and by the "Catalogue of Palearctic Coleoptera" (NILSSON 2003), where the name *H. neuter* was omitted intentionally in order to guarantee unchallenged validity of the name *Hydroporus discretus*. There was practically no doubt that the ICZN would approve this application because in numerous similar cases the Commission always had decided in favour of the junior synonym. Needless to say, that it was a big surprise to the world community of water beetlers to hear that the application was rejected (ICZN 2004)! The species which was known as *Hydroporus discretus* in several hundred publications, project reports, and opinions over more than hundred years should officially be called *Hydroporus neuter* from now on.

How could such a striking misjudgement happen? Certainly, the applicant could have presented the evidence concerning prevailing usage of name *Hydroporus discretus* more emphatically. The sloppiness in providing background data was simply because he did not waste a single thought on a possible rejection of the case, which seemed so unequivocal. On the other hand, it would have been the duty of the ICZN (there are several coleopterists in the Commission) to search for appropriate details. Regrettably, the Commission did not inform the applicant about the opposing, factually misleading comment by BOUCHET (2001) and instead ruled on the basis of irrelevant facts.

The confirmation of the priority of the name *Hydroporus neuter* is definitely not in accordance with the principle of stability and I am not aware of any benefit. It seems therefore necessary to rescind the ruling of the ICZN and to place the name *Hydroporus neuter* on the Official List of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology. An official application will be submitted soon. In any case, to ensure lasting stability I strongly recommend that we all should continue to use the name *Hydroporus discretus*.

References

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