

Z. Säugetierkunde 56 (1991) 190–191
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ISSN 0044-3468

The scientific name of the Bontebok

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Receipt of Ms. 16. 11. 1990
Acceptance of Ms. 19. 12. 1990

“I have begun to run over all the Cabinets, and to collect whatever seems remarkable to me with regard to the Quadrupeds”, the young PETER SIMON PALLAS (1741–1811) wrote from Holland to THOMAS PENNANT on 18 January, 1766 (URNES 1967). PALLAS found a rich treasure of interesting animals in the large number of private cabinets in Holland and in the museum of the Prince of Orange. The results of his investigations were laid down in the *Miscellanea Zoologica* of 1766. In the first chapter of that book he described 17 species of antelopes, eight of which today still bear the names he proposed at that time following the (then) new system of classification introduced by LINNAEUS. He must have received a number of comments about his work, because PALLAS immediately began to revise the text: “Er sagte es scheine ihm, daß jenes Werk diese Verbesserung bedürfe, daß er sich selbst nicht genug gethan, und daß ihm vornemlich die Kupferstiche misfielen. Diesen Entschluss machte er im Mai 1767, und also kurz vor seiner Abreise nach Petersburg bekannt” (C. G. BALDINGER in PALLAS 1767). The revised book, the *Spicilegia Zoologica*, appeared in installments: the issue on antelopes in 1767. PALLAS made quite a number of changes in the text and in the classification: he renamed three species, he deleted two, and he separated one species into two.

In the *Miscellanea*, PALLAS (1766) described the *Antilope dorcas* after “integras ... pelles” (undamaged skins). His statements about the morphology of the horns, the colour of the body and the size of the animal show beyond doubt that he must have examined skins of the antelope now called bontebok. He called it *Antilope dorcas*, because he assumed that it was identical with the ‘dorcas’ of the ancients, and by implication with the *Capra dorcas* of LINNAEUS (1758). In the revised *Spicilegia*, PALLAS seems to have realised that he had combined two species in his *A. dorcas* or rather that the ‘dorcas’ of the ancients could not have been the animal from which he had examined the skins. He retained *A. dorcas* for the animal found in the old texts (but he did not describe it further), and he now gave a new, but essentially similar description of the bontebok skins under the new name *Antilope pygargus* (PALLAS 1767). Incidentally, it seems that PALLAS was rather casual in his nomenclature, which may need some further study; he mentioned in his note on *Antilope dorcas* that the dorcas [= *Capra dorcas*] of LINNAEUS to him appeared to be the same as the antelope which he had called *Antilope bubalis* in 1767 (or *A. buselaphus* in 1766).

The change by PALLAS from *A. dorcas* in 1766 to *A. pygargus* in 1767 has been the cause of much nomenclatorial confusion. During the 19th century, the bontebok was generally referred to as *Antilope pygarga*, with some changes in the genus name. SCLATER and THOMAS (1894–1900) gave a very succinct and correct exposition of the understanding at that time: “In his first essay on the genus *Antilope*, published in 1766, PALLAS described it as *Antilope dorcas*, having confounded it with the *dorcas* of Aelian. But in his second essay upon the same group, issued in the following year, he selected for it the very appropriate name *pygarga*, by which it has been generally known ever since.”

This problem was reviewed again by HARPER (1940). He argued that *A. pygargus* was correct in the 19th century, because *A. dorcas* Pallas, 1766 then was preoccupied by *Antilope* [= *Capra*] *dorcas* Linnaeus, 1758. However, when the two species were referred to different genera, *A. dorcas* Linnaeus to *Gazella*, and *A. pygargus* Pallas to *Damaliscus*,

“the *dorcas* of PALLAS becomes available again... and the combination to be used henceforth is *Damaliscus dorcas* (Pallas). *A. pygargus* becomes a synonym.” This has been generally followed since then and the bontebok has been referred to as *Damaliscus dorcas* (PALLAS, 1766).

Based on Article 59(b) of the 1985 Code of Zoological Nomenclature, I advanced a different argument (ROOKMAAKER 1989). These matters of homonymy are never easy to settle, especially when it concerns 18th century authors like PALLAS who did not yet have a nomenclatorial code. One could argue, however, that PALLAS in his *Spicilegia Zoologica* of 1767 intended to differentiate two species, the *dorcas* gazelle and the bontebok. He used the existing name *A. dorcas* for the first of these. He had earlier referred to the bontebok with this same name, but in 1767 he could no longer do so as the name had already been used for another species, i.e. *A. dorcas* for the bontebok was a secondary homonym. PALLAS then renamed the animal, without explicit explanation, to be called *Antilope pygargus*. According to the present Code of Nomenclature, a junior secondary homonym once replaced (before 1961) is permanently invalid. For that reason, *A. dorcas* cannot now be used for the bontebok and that species should be called *Damaliscus pygargus* (PALLAS, 1767).

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Zeitschrift/Journal: [Mammalian Biology \(früher Zeitschrift für Säugetierkunde\)](#)

Jahr/Year: 1991

Band/Volume: [56](#)

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Artikel/Article: [The scientific name of the Bontebok 190-191](#)