

The Date of Latham's *Supplementum Indicis Ornithologici*: 1801 or 1802?

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Abstract

Evidence for the date of publication of John Latham's seminal Supplementum Indicis Ornithologici, whether 1801 or 1802, is reviewed. Although there are some circumstantial grounds favouring 1802, they are not sufficiently strong, under Art. 21.2 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, to displace the date of 1801 established on the title page of the work.

John Latham's (1801a) *Supplementum Indicis Ornithologici*, hereafter the *Latin Supplementum*, is a foundation work in Australian ornithology. Published at the turn of the 19th century as a latinised companion to Latham's (1801b) *Supplement. II. To the General Synopsis of Birds*, the *Latin Supplementum* used Linnaean nomenclature and contains the first formal scientific descriptions of 224 species of birds. These same species were published concurrently in vernacular English in the *Supplement. II. To the General Synopsis of Birds*, hereafter the *English Supplement. II*. Of them, 155 (70%) are from Australia, almost all described from reports and bird paintings from the First Fleet settlement at Port Jackson (Sharpe 1906: 107-154; Hindwood 1970). No other single volume contains as many new species of Australian birds, and its descriptions form the first significant record of Australia's land birds. The names of some 70 of the Australian species are still in use today, either at specific or, occasionally, subspecific level.

The date of publication of such a work is vitally important in Australian ornithology because

it establishes priority for all species names first published there. Until 1991, the date of publication of the *Latin Supplementum* was accepted as 1801 throughout ornithological literature. Avian checklists and nomenclators using that date included the 15 volume 'Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World* (1931-1986), the Sibley & Monroe world list of bird species (1990) and all Australian checklists up to 1991, e.g. RAOU Checklist Committee (1926), Condon (1975) and Schodde (1975). 1801 (as MDCCCI) is the date appearing on the title page of all copies of the *Latin Supplementum* and most copies of the *English Supplement II*. Some copies of the latter, however, are dated as MDCCCII (= 1802). Of these, the date in at least two is original (Australian Museum, Sydney; Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin) while in others the last numeral has been added after printing (Browning & Monroe 1991, quoting Mullens & Swann 1916-1917). Uncertainty over the year of publication followed in bibliographical literature, as summarized by Zimmer (1926: 375-376).

In 1991, Browning and Monroe (1991) investigated the history of publication. They found, as we have, no direct evidence for a date other than 1801 for the *Latin Supplementum*. From indirect evidence, nevertheless, they concluded that the *Latin Supplementum* did not appear until after 1 April 1802. Their reasoning came from three coincident circumstances surrounding the release of the *English Supplement II*. First, the *Latin Supplementum* gives page and species number references to the names in that companion work, not the reverse. Thus it could not have been type-set until page proofs of the *English Supplement II* were available, and so was presumably printed

and issued no earlier. Secondly, only 250 copies of the *English Supplement II* were released (from Latham 1821: vi, footnote), indicative of a single issue. Thirdly, the English work was first demonstrated to be in existence when Latham presented it to the Royal Society on 1 April 1802, in accord with its date of receipt recorded in the donation lists of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (anon. 1802a) and *Transactions of the Linnean Society* (anon. 1802b).

Browning and Monroe (1991) therefore reasoned that if the single issue of the *English Supplement II* did not appear until 1802, neither did the *Latin Supplementum*. Some information gathered since is consistent with synchronic publication of the two works. The texts of both works were printed on the same pale bluish grey paper with the same watermark (1800) in the same position and alignment on the pages, indicating that they were printed together. Zimmer (1926: 375) suggested that they may well have been issued together, and it is also probable, though not certain, that they were received together by the Royal Society (R. Baker, pers. comm.) and the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin.

Although, since 1991, 1802 has come into wide use as the date for the *Latin Supplementum*, it has not been without confusion nor with unanimity. The American Ornithologists' Union (1998) and several world checklists (Sibley & Monroe 1993; Dickinson 2003) adopted it, as did most Australian checklists, taxonomic manuals and handbooks (Schodde & Mason 1997, 1999; Higgins 1999; Higgins et al. 2001; Higgins & Peter 2002; Peter 2006; Clayton et al. 2006; Christidis & Boles 2008). Yet there were both caveats and lapses. Christidis & Boles (1994) followed Browning & Monroe (1991) in adopting 1802 for two migratory swifts, but then muddled the matter by reverting to 1801 for the other 59 currently accepted Australian species named by Latham in the work. Dickinson (*loc. cit.*: 831) kept options open, and volumes 2 and 3 of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* first used 1801 exclusively

(Marchant & Higgins 1993; Higgins & Davies 1996). Only since volume 5 of that work in 2001 did 1802 become established in it, with 1801 usually added in parenthesis in reference to its earlier use (Higgins et al. 2001). At global level, the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo et al., 1992-2008) kept steadfastly to 1801 alone.

The confusion over the change in date and its effects led the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature, hereafter the SCON, of the International Ornithological Committee to consider the case at the 23rd International Ornithological Congress in Beijing, 2002. Although the SCON opted for 1802, its vote was split, ultimately leading it to place the case before the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature for a ruling. Further information was compiled about the date of publication in the process, and this, as detailed below and reported in Schodde et al. (2007), shed more, not less, uncertainty on the issue. The SCON's case, co-presented with L. Christidis and W.E. Boles of the then-current Birds Australia species list (Christidis & Boles 1994), was submitted to the Commission in mid 2007.

In mid 2008, the Commission informed the SCON that reviewing Commissioners had recommended against the case proceeding. Their reason: it was "not an issue that requires the plenary powers of the Commission". The Commissioners added, furthermore, that should the case be resubmitted, "the evidence against the younger date (= 1802) would be so compelling that it would not need to be voted on". As far as the Commission was concerned, the case for 1802 against 1801 was not only unjustifiable as it stood but would probably also continue to be so.

The Commission's opinion may be explained by newly correlated information presented in the SCON case of mid 2007, and now given here. It revealed that the evidence for 1802 had become increasingly circumstantial, with

several conflicting anomalies. First, although some copies of the *English Supplement II* were “corrected” to 1802, no equivalent corrections were made to any title pages of the *Latin Supplementum*. Secondly, the plates of the *English Supplement II* are dated 30 May 1801, early in that year, even though this is the date of printing and not necessarily their release with the text. Thirdly, we have found that copies (5) of the *English Supplement II* printed with the date of 1801 or corrected by hand to 1802 bear a coloured figure of the Maned Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*) on the title page, whereas in those with a printed date of 1802 (2), the figure is in black-and-white. This is evidence, contrary to Browning & Monroe (*l.c.*), that there were at least two issues of that work, so breaking the nexus between the *Latin Supplementum* and a single issue of the *English Supplement II* supposedly no earlier than 1 April 1802.

Fourthly, the London publisher (Leigh, Sotheby & son), not Latham, managed and distributed both the *Latin Supplementum* and *English Supplement II* (Latham, 1821: vi, footnote), and was free to issue them at any time once they were printed. Latham received the copies that he donated to such bodies as the Royal Society only indirectly, and could well have passed them on later than releases by the publisher. That the copies presented to the Royal and Linnean Societies were delayed, possibly from late 1801 to early 1802, is suggested, contrary to Browning & Monroe (1991), by Latham’s own intimation of less frequent visits to London at the time. Living then in Winchester, he records “finding it very inconvenient to confer with my Booksellers so often as I had been accustomed to do” (Latham 1821: vi, footnote).

Article 21.2 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, hereafter the Code (ICZN 1999), governs the specification of dates of publication as follows: *the date of publication specified in a work is to be adopted as correct in the absence of evidence to the contrary*. The French text of this article, equivalent in force (Article

86.2 of the Code), is even clearer and stronger, with “evidence” replaced by “preuve” = proof. The date specified on the title page of the *Latin Supplementum* is 1801, without any exception and variation whatsoever; and in the context of Art. 21.2 of the Code, evidence for 1802 is presently much too circumstantial and open to question to displace it.

Corroborating the view from the Commission, the SCON accordingly recommends use of 1801 as the date of publication of the *Latin Supplementum* unless or until much firmer evidence for 1802 is found.

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