

In Defense of Robineau-Desvoidy

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In his interesting "History of Mosquito Taxonomy in the United States of America" (Mosquito Systematics 6:113-120, June 1974), Knight stated that "Robineau-Desvoidy has not been dealt kindly with by history" and quoted the disparaging remarks of Swainson (1840) and Coquillett (1904). Although the most important part of Robineau-Desvoidy's work concerns the cyclorrhaphous Diptera, notably the calyptrate muscoids, rather than mosquitoes, the unfortunate general impression left by those statements should not be allowed to pass without comment.

Robineau-Desvoidy's masterpiece, the "Essai sur les Myodaires," was published in 1830 and was thus almost contemporaneous with the publications of the respected European dipterist Meigen, whose volumes on cyclorrhaphous flies appeared in 1824, 1826 and 1830. To take the Tachinidae as a sample, Meigen in 1824 and 1826 recognized only 12 genera, with most species included in the catch-all genus *Tachina*. In contrast, Robineau-Desvoidy in the Essai recognized 136 genera in what we now call Tachinidae, most of them newly proposed there. Despite the charge of Swainson that he "made no allusion to the admirable work of Meigen", I note that Robineau-Desvoidy properly credited Meigen's genera to Meigen.

The sudden proliferation of genera in the Essai was the basis for the aspersions cast by Swainson and Coquillett, among others. Yet a high proportion of the genera are recognized today, and many of Robineau-Desvoidy's generic names are familiar currency to those who deal with muscoid Diptera. One need only mention such names as *Hyalomya*, *Dinera*, *Theresia*, *Ormia*, *Dejeania*, *Peleteria*, *Bonnetia*, *Mericia*, *Lypha*, *Actia*, *Belvosia*, *Lydella*, *Blondelia*, *Phorocera*, *Zenillia*, *Sturmia*, *Winthemia*, *Carcelia*, *Wagneria*, and *Voria*, many of which are the type-genera of tribes of Tachinidae and hence have worldwide usage, to realize that Robineau-Desvoidy's generic names loom large in the generic classification of Tachinidae.

In the same Essai he proposed such well-known names as the calliphorids *Calliphora*, *Pollenia*, *Chrysomya*, *Lucilia*, and *Phormia*, the sarcophagids *Agria* and *Amobia*, the muscids *Graphomya*, *Muscina*, *Morellia*, *Pyrellia*, *Ophyra*, *Phaonia*, *Helina*, and *Fannia*, the anthomyiids *Hylemya* and *Pegomya*, and many other less familiar but recognized genera in those families. A number of well-known acalyptrate genera were also named by him in the Essai, including some common ones as *Minettia*, *Limnia*, *Odinia*, *Loxocera*, *Strauzia*, *Rivellia*, *Richardia*, *Hydrellia*, and *Scatella*.

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It is true that his efforts in his posthumous work of 1863 were not as successful, although some important generic names such as *Phaenicia*, *Ravinia*, *Bessa*, and *Drino* do date from that work. Nevertheless, one must conclude from the 1830 Essai that he has been treated unfairly by too much of history. Certainly in the generic classification of Tachinidae he was in reality far ahead of his time, and deserving of respect rather than obloquy.