

NOTE ON THE GENUS SPHEROIDES.

BY THEODORE GILL.

In a valuable "Review of the American species of Tetraodontidæ," published in 1886 (Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., v. 9, p. 232), President D. S. Jordan and Mr. Charles L. Edwards have applied the name *Sphæroides* to the genus called *Cirrhisomus* or *Cheilichthys* by some preceding ichthyologists, and still more recently President Jordan has taken up a later name (*Orbidus*) for the same genus. As the last name has already enjoyed some currency (appearing in the "Manual of the Vertebrate Animals of the Northern United States," 1888, p. 170), some words are timely before its use is so established that inconvenience will result from its disuse.

The name *Sphéroïdes* was introduced into scientific literature by Lacépède in 1798, and was based on the front view of a fish which he had already described as "le *Tetrodon Plumier*." The proposition to generically distinguish the figure was the result of sheer ignorance, oversight, and stupidity. Lacépède diagnosed the genus as follows in his "Histoire Naturelle des Poissons" (v. 2, pp. 1-22):

Les Sphéroïdes.

Point de nageoires du dos, de la queue, ni de l'anus, quatre dents au moins à la machoire supérieure.

The only species was "le *Sphéroïde tuberculé*."

Not a single character thus assigned to the genus was pertinent to it. Almost immediately Schneider, in the "Systema Ichthyologiæ" of Bloch (Index, p. lvii), corrected the mistake of the Frenchman ("errorem Galli") and showed that the *Sphéroïde tuberculé* was based simply on the front view of the *Tetrodon Plumieri*. Far from Schneider's knowledge of that fish resting only on the work of Lacépède ("after Lacépède"), as Messrs. Jordan and Edwards assert, it was based on a critical examination of four figures of the fish derived by Bloch from Plumier, and therefrom he was enabled to correct the strange error of Lacépède. (See pp. 509, 510, and Index, p. lvii.)

It is questionable whether genera, based on such premises as were *Sphéroïdes* and some others, of the old authors, should be adopted. Surely it is inconsistent in any one to adopt such groups and refuse to adopt such as are based on well-known species.* Nevertheless, it is

*President Jordan is fond of referring to such generic names as are based on given species without accompanying diagnoses as "nomina nuda." But they are not "nomina nuda," inasmuch as the exact information needed as to the types is given. "Nomina nuda" are those generic or specific names that are suggested without any information as to characters or any guide as to what they are meant for. If the old authors generally had specified the types of their genera and omitted "descriptions" of them, science would be a gainer.

difficult to draw a line between such as should be adopted and those that ought to be rejected. President Jordan accepts all the bad work of the old naturalists, provided that we can know what species they had in view. I have been hitherto more conservative, and have generally refused to take cognizance of such genera as "*Sphéroïdes*" and analogous ones (*e. g.*, *Tetroras*, *Etmopterus*, etc.), but am now inclined to think that the less exceptions are made to the rules of nomenclature the sooner we may have some agreement. In this case I am further influenced to accept the name *Spheroides*, inasmuch as, if we reject that, the vista of equally bad work and worse names lies before us.

But later President Jordan discovered that *Orbidus* was substituted by Rafinesque for "the French name 'Les Sphéroïdes'" in 1815, while the "Latin form *Sphæroides* was not applied until 1831" by Pillot. He therefore took up the name *Orbidus* instead of *Sphæroides* in the Proceedings of the U. S. National Museum (v. 10, p. 481) and in "A Manual of the Vertebrate Animals of the Northern United States" (5th ed., p. 170).

It may be fairly questioned whether a name derived directly from the Greek or Latin and coined especially for a given genus should not be accepted as a Latin name, even if it has a French article before it and French accents. But in the case at issue we are not called upon to consider this question. A "Latin" name was soon supplied in an unequivocal manner.

In 1806 A. M. C. Duméril published his "*Zoologie Analytique*," and therein he adopted the genus *Sphéroïdes*. In the text (p. 108) he used the word with the French accent (Les Sphéroïdes or Sphéroïde), but the index is divided into two parts, one ("table Française") containing the French names, and the other ("table Latine") the Latin names, and in the latter part (p. 342) we find the name *Spheroïdes* given as a Latin name, while in the former part (p. 328) it appears under the guise of *Sphéroïde*. According to President Jordan's views, therefore, "*Spheroides*" should be attributed to Duméril, take the date of 1806, and thus take priority of the name *Orbidus* given as a substitute in 1815.*

* The generic names originally given in French by Lacépède were Latinized by Duméril in his "*Zoologie Analytique*" in 1806, and thus the question whether the names derived directly from Greek, but used only in a French form, should be excluded need not be considered in his case.



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