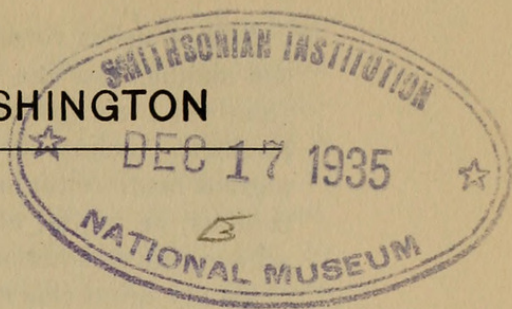


PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON



THE IDENTITY OF CORVUS MEXICANUS
GMELIN.

BY JAMES L. PETERS.

On page 375 of the 13th edition of the *Systema Naturae*, Gmelin described *Corvus mexicanus* in the following words: "C. totus ex caeruleo ater. Habitat in nova Hispania, ad oppida, perpetim sonorus, monedulae magnitudine. Rostrum pedes et ungues nigri." The references on which the bird was based are *Pica mexicana major* Briss. av. 2, p. 43, no. 4.; Hoitzanatl Raj., av. p. 162; Cirard, Pernetty, It. Mal. 1, p. 185; Hocisana, Buff. Hist. Nat. Ois. 3, p. 103; Mexican Crow, Lath. Syn. 1, pt. 1, p. 396, no. 34.

These references are given in the order used by Gmelin, but for convenience I shall take them up chronologically beginning with Ray (Joannis Raii, Syn. Meth. Av. & Pisc. London, 1713). This author cites (p. 162) Hoitzanatl of Fernandez which is a lapsus for Hocitzanatl since the description agrees practically verbatim with Fernandez "Hocitzanatl." Brisson in 1760 gives as the basis for his Grande Pie de Mexique the Hocitzanatl of both Fernandez and Ray; Buffon, 1774, cites as "synonyms" of his "L. Hocisana" the Hocitzanatl of Fernandez and Ray together with the Grande Pie de Mexique of Brisson, while Latham in 1781 in characterizing his "Mexican Crow" bases it on Ray, Brisson and Buffon, adding the "Criard" from Pernetty Voy. au Malouines.

It is perfectly obvious therefore that the Hocitzanatl of Fernandez is the one and only original of *Corvus mexicanus* since all the references by Gmelin go back to this bird and his diagnosis alone is quite insufficient to identify the species.

I give the original description of the Hocitzanatl taken from the Latin edition of the *Nova Plantarum Animalium et Mineralium Mexicanorum Historia*, published at Rome in 1651.

"Circa urbes versatur Hocitzanatli, essetque monedulis nostratibus prorsus similis, nisi eas vinceret corporis magnitudine & prolixitate caudae (qua vel Picis ipsis est par) & e nigro colore in caeruleum splendentum paulisper inclinaret. Garrula est, altaeque vocis, sonorae, crura sunt nigra & mediocriter longa ac pedes in quaternos fissi digitis, armatos unguibus prolixis, ac nigris; alimoniam iucundam praebet, atramque, pertinentem ad succum melancholicum, sunt qui Cacaxtototli vocent."

To my mind this description of a bird the size of a jackdaw with a tail as long as a magpie, having a high-pitched sonorous note can not apply to a crow even if the color is black inclining to iridescent blue. Apparently Latham's calling the bird "Mexican Crow" was responsible for Gmelin naming the bird *Corvus mexicanus*, and once the bird was in the genus *Corvus*, ornithologists found it much more convenient to apply the name to a crow from Mexico than to take the trouble to go back to the original sources and find out what it was really all about.

There is just one Mexican bird to which the description of the Hocitzanatli can apply and that is the Great-tailed Grackle, at present known as *Megaquiscalus major macrourus*, and having so identified *Corvus mexicanus* a far reaching trail of consequences arises.

In 1831 Lesson, in his *Traité d'Ornithologie*, page 433, diagnosed the Genus *Cassidix* for the first time, giving as the only species the "Cassique a mantelet" for which *Corvus mexicanus* Gmel. and *Cassicus niger* Vieill. *Gal. des ois. pl. 89 ?* were cited as synonyms. His generic diagnosis is without much question referable to a Rice Grackle but his synonymy is not, —*Corvus mexicanus* being a Great-tailed Grackle and *Cassicus niger* is certainly some sort of *Holoquiscalus*. In 1840 Gray designated as the type of *Cassidix*, "*C [assidix] mexicanus* (Gm.) Less." [= *Corvus mexicanus* Gmel.] Thus *Cassidix* being of earlier date than *Megaquiscalus* (Cassin 1866) must replace it, and *Corvus mexicanus* Gmel. being an earlier name for *Quiscalus macrourus* Swains. and also of earlier date than *Quiscalus major* Vieill. 1819, the boat-tailed Grackles will stand as:

Cassidix mexicanus mexicanus (Gmel.)

"	"	<i>major</i> (Vieill.)
"	"	<i>obscurus</i> (Nels.)
"	"	<i>graysoni</i> (Scl.)
"	"	<i>nelsoni</i> (Rigw.)
"	"	<i>assimilis</i> (Scl.)
"		<i>tenuirostris</i> (Swains.)
"		<i>nicaraguensis</i> (Salv. & Godm.)

This action is three-fold in its immediate effect on nomenclature, for in the first place the Rice Grackles will require a different generic name, furthermore the bird hitherto known as *Cassidix oryzivora mexicana* (Less.) must be renamed since Lesson named no such bird but merely cited Gmelin's *Corvus mexicanus* in the synonymy of his "Cassique a mantelet," and it is quite obvious that the same name can not be used for two different species, and lastly the Mexican Crow must receive a name, since it never really had one.

There seems to be no generic synonym available for the Rice Grackles. Ridgway, Birds No. & Mid. Am. pt. 2, 1902, p. 196, cites *Scaphidura Swainson* (Classif. Bds. 2, 1837, p. 272) as a synonym, but after considerable hesitation and on the advice of Dr. Richmond, I have considered it a lapsus or emendation of *Scaphidurus Swainson* (Philos. Mag. N. S. 1, no. 6, June, 1827). *Scaphidurus* is a substitute name for *Quiscalus* and, under Art. 30, par. f of the International Code, takes the same type, so *Scaphidurus* is a synonym of *Quiscalus* as is also *Scaphidura* (if regarded as an emendation or lapsus).

The Rice Grackles therefore being nameless, I propose the name

Psomocolax

for Cassidix of authors *nec* Lesson, with *Oriolus oryzivorus* Gmelin as the type. The Mexican Rice Grackle I name

Psomocolax oryzivorus impacifus, subsp. nov.

Type, adult male, no. 102320, Museum of Comparative Zoology, from Pasa Nueva, Vera Cruz, Mexico; collected 22 April, 1901, by A. E. Colburn and P. W. Shufeldt.

Characters.—Similar to *Psomocolax oryzivorus oryzivorus* (Gmelin) but averaging larger, plumage of adult male uniformly glossed with violet without trace of bronze.

Remarks: The three races of *Psomocolax oryzivorus* with their characters and distribution are:

- P. o. impacifus* nob. Size medium, wing of ♂ 183–210, bill 37–38.5; gloss entirely violaceous sometimes with a wash of steel blue, but never bronzy. Southern Mexico to western Panama.
- P. o. violeus* (Bangs). Size larger, wing of ♂ 196–210; bill 37–40; violaceous gloss confined to pileum and posterior upper and underparts; mantle, neck ruffs and anterior underparts strongly glossed with bronze. Canal Zone through northern Colombia to northeastern Venezuela.
- P. o. oryzivorus* (Gmel.). Size small, wing of ♂ 180–190, bill 34–36, coloration like *violeus*. Probably from the Guianas south through tropical Brazil to Paraguay and north-eastern Argentina.

This leaves but one more change to make, that of naming the Mexican Crow. It may be called:

Corvus imparatus, sp. nov.

Type: Adult male, no. 49840, Museum of Comparative Zoology, from Rio La Cruz, Tamaulipas, Mexico, collected 24 June, 1909, by Frank B. Armstrong.

Characters.—Similar to *Corvus ossifragus* Wilson but much smaller, plumage much more brilliantly glossed; bill relatively weaker and more slender; nasal plumes shorter and less dense.

In conclusion I tender my warmest thanks to Dr. C. W. Richmond not only for his advice and guidance on the questions here involved, but on the many other occasions when his valued counsel has been sought and freely given.



Peters, James Lee. 1929. "The identity of *Corvus mexicanus* Gmelin." *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 42, 121–123.

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