PROPOSED VALIDATION, UNDER THE PLENARY POWERS, OF THE GENERIC NAME “HELICELLA” FERUSSAC, 1821 (CLASS GASTROPODA)

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I hereby make application to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature for a Ruling on the following question:—

Are the “Explications” for plates 1 to 47 of Férussac’s Histoire Naturelle et particulière des Mollusques terrestres et fluviatiles, which were published on 6th April 1821 with Livraison 9 of the foregoing work, to be taken into account for nomenclatorial purposes under the provisions of the Règles?

2. If the answer to the foregoing question is in the affirmative, I desire to ask that the Commission should use its Plenary Powers to suppress these “Explications” for nomenclatorial purposes, in view both of the confusion and disturbance in nomenclature which their acceptance would involve and also of the extreme rarity of these “Explications” which consequently makes them inaccessible for study by the great majority of workers.

3. The facts in regard to this matter are as follows: A. S. Kennard (1942: 12-17, 105-118) published particulars of the exact dates of publication of the Livraisons in which were published the successive instalments of Férussac’s Histoire naturelle et particulière des Mollusques terrestres et fluviatiles, together with that author’s Tableaux systématiques des Animaux Mollusques. In the paper referred to above Kennard showed that Livraison 9 was published on 6th April 1821 and contained (1) the “Explications” to plates 1 to 47 of the Histoire naturelle, and (2) pages 1 to 32 of the “Tableau systématique de la Famille des Limacons, Cochlea” (edition containing six pages of “Avertissent”), which forms a part of Férussac’s Tableaux systématique des Animaux Mollusques.

4. The “Explications” to plates 1 to 47 issued with Livraison 9 do not form an integral part either of the Histoire naturelle or of the Tableaux systématiques des Animaux Mollusques. They were no more than a provisional explanation of the plates in question, distributed only to those persons who were subscribers to Férussac’s work as it appeared in parts. They were not included in the copies of the completed work sold after the last part had been issued. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that copies of these “Explications” are extremely scarce. Indeed, so far as I am aware, there are only two such copies now extant. One of these is in the library of the United States National Museum in Washington; the other is in the possession of A. S. Kennard at Beckenham (Kent, England).

5. Prior to the publication in 1941 of Kennard’s paper, no reference had ever been made in the literature to these “Explications,” the existence of which was therefore quite unknown.

6. The acceptance, for nomenclatorial purposes, of the "Explications" to plates 1-47, if that were permitted, would involve confusing changes in zoological nomenclature, consequent upon the alteration which would be involved in the type species of the genus Helicella Férussac, 1821 (Class Gastropoda, Order Stylommatophora) which would thereby be involved. The position in this matter is as shown in the following paragraphs.

7. The generic name Helicella was published by Férussac on page 28 of the Tableau syst. des Limaçons with a diagnosis but without any included species cited by name. This page, as explained above appeared in Livraison 9. In the "Explications" to plates 1-47, published in the same Livraison, Férussac employed the generic name Helicella for two species, namely (1) "Helicella (Helioanemes) subdentata Nobis" (pl. 27, figs. 1 & 2) and "Helicella (Helioanemes) planata Chemnitz" (pl. 30, fig. 2).

8. The first author to select a type species for the genus Helicella Férussac, 1821, was A. N. Herrmannsen who in 1847 (1: 507) so selected Helix ericetorum Müll., 1774. This species was included by Férussac in the genus Helicella on page 48 of the Tableau syst. des Limaçons (species no. 281), which is now known to have been published in Livraison 10 on 26th May 1821; as already explained no species had been cited for this genus in the portion of the text which was included in Livraison 9, where this generic name first appeared. Under the provisions of Opinion 46 (since clarified by the Thirteenth International Congress of Zoology at Paris in 1948, as shown in Bull. zool. Nomend. 4: 159-160, 346), Herrmannsen was perfectly entitled to select Helix ericetorum as the type species of the genus Helicella Férussac, that genus having been established without any cited included species, provided that it is granted that the passage relied upon by Herrmannsen is the first place where the name Helicella was validly published, i.e. provided that it is permissible to ignore the "Explications" to plates 1-47.

9. On the other hand, Kennard (1941: 265), who treated the "Explications" as the first place where the generic name Helicella Férussac was published, considered that the only species eligible for selection as the type species of this genus were the two species there cited under this generic name (in explanation respectively of plates 27 and 30). From these species he selected Helicella subdentata Férussac, 1821, as the type species of this genus.

10. The species Helicella subdentata Férussac is currently treated by specialists as belonging to the genus Theba Risso, 1826 (type species: Helix pisana Müll., 1774). Kennard's selection of this species as the type species of Helicella Férussac is perfectly valid, if it is granted that the "Explications" are available for nomenclatorial purposes. On the other hand, the acceptance of Kennard's action would lead to a most confusing transfer of the generic name Helicella Férussac, for instead of comprising as at present Helix ericetorum Müller and its allies, it would in future comprise Helix pisana Müller; the generic name Theba Risso would thus become a junior synonym of Helicella Férussac, while the generic name Planatella Clessin, 1876 (type species: Helix ericetorum Müll., 1774) would need to be brought into use for the genus now universally known by the name Helicella Férussac,
11. I accordingly ask the International Commission to use its Plenary Powers to prevent this unnecessary confusion from arising. The desired object could be attained by the employment of those Powers either (1) to suppress the "Explications" for nomenclatorial purposes or (2) while leaving the "Explications" available, to designate Helix ericetorum Müller, 1774 (or, preferably, its senior subjective synonym, Helix itala Linnaeus, 1758), as the type species of Helicella Férussac, 1821. In either case the result would be the same, since it is only in the case of the generic name Helicella that the acceptance of the "Explications" involves a change in current nomenclatorial practice. The International Commission may feel that, as the present application is concerned only to prevent the confusion which would arise if it were necessary to accept Helicella subdentata Férusac as the type species of the genus Helicella Férussac, the most convenient course would be to adopt the second of the two alternatives outlined above. In that case, I ask that the International Commission should:—

(1) use its Plenary Powers:—
   (a) to set aside all type selections for the genus Helicella Férussac, 1821, made prior to the proposed decision;
   (b) to designate Helix itala Linnaeus, 1758, to be the type species of the foregoing genus;

(2) place the under-mentioned generic names on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology, with the type species specified below:—
   (a) Helicella Férussac, 1821 (gender: feminine) (type species, as designated under Plenary Powers under (1) (b) above: Helix itala Linnaeus, 1758);
   (b) Theba Risso, 1826 (gender: feminine) (type species, designated by Gray 1847 (Proc. zool. Soc. Lond., 15: 173): Helix pisana Müller, 1774);

(3) place the under-mentioned trivial names on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology:
   (a) itala Linnaeus, 1758, as published in the combination Helix itala;
   (b) pisana Müller, 1774, as published in the combination Helix pisana.

References