

RALLUS TABUENSIS GMELIN, 1789 (AVES): PROPOSED
CONSERVATION UNDER THE PLENARY POWERS BY THE
SUPPRESSION OF *RALLUS NIGRA* (sic) MILLER, 1784.
Z.N.(S.)2276

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This application is designed to preserve the long established and generally used specific name of *Rallus tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789, *Syst. Nat.* 1(2), p. 717 (based on the Tabuan Rail of Latham, 1785, *Gen. Syn. Bds* 3, p. 135, from Tongatabu Island), a widespread crake from the Philippines to New Zealand and south east Polynesia. It is currently placed in the genus *Porzana* (see Olson, 1973, *Wilson Bull.* vol. 85, pp. 381–416) and it is known by the English name of the Spotless Crake.

2. Sherborn & Iredale (1921, *Ibis* (11) vol. 3, pp. 302–309) pointed out that the name *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784, *Var. Sub. Nat. Hist.* 9, pl. 50, from the island of Tahiti, antedates *Rallus tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789, but they did not know whether there might be some difference between birds from Tongatabu and Tahiti. Lysaght (1956, *Bull. Br. Orn. Cl.* vol. 76, pp. 97–98) commented that Amadon, who used the name *tabuensis* (1942, *Am. Mus. Novit.* 1175, pp. 10–11), had been unable to detect any differences between Tongatabu and Tahiti birds, which he classified in the same (nominate) subspecies as *Porzana tabuensis tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789). As a result Lysaght advocated the adoption of Miller's name, *nigra*, for the species. We have also examined specimens from Tongatabu, Tahiti and from other localities in the Tonga and Society Islands and found no morphological differences between them.

3. The specific name *nigra*, based on *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784, has been used as *Porzana nigra* (Miller, 1784) in place of *Porzana tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789) only five times (see Appendix 1). The name was originally published in the form *Rallus nigra*, although *Rallus niger* (masculine) would have been correct. Subsequent authors have not corrected the spelling because transferred to the genus *Porzana* the feminine ending becomes suitable.

4. Peters (1934, *Checklist Bds World* Volume 2, p. 188) tentatively placed *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784 in the synonymy of *Porzana atra* North, 1908, the endemic crake of Henderson Island, which he placed in the monotypic genus *Nesophylax*. Lysaght (1956, *op. cit.*) has shown that Peters' description of Miller's plate was inaccurate in some import-

ant details, apparently because he examined the second edition of Miller's plates (1796, *Cimelia Physica*) in which the hand-colouring is less accurate than in the first edition. More importantly, Peters evidently overlooked the locality 'Otaheite' [= Tahiti] given in the interleaved text when he stated that Miller gave no locality. In view of the locality, there can be little doubt that *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784 is different from the endemic Henderson Island Crake, *Porzana atra* North, 1908, and that it is the same as *Porzana tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789).

5. With the few exceptions noted in paragraph 3 above and in Appendix 1, the Spotless Crake has been known overwhelmingly, and is currently known, by the name *Porzana tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789) (see Appendix 2). This name is used in the literature listed in Appendix 2, selecting publications chiefly from the last fifty years, but also including a few major older works that are or were relied on for nomenclature by zoologists.

6. While *Porzana nigra* (Miller, 1784), based on *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784, has priority over *Porzana tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789), based on *Rallus tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789, its adoption would disturb the stability and universality of usage of *Rallus tabuensis* Gmelin and cause confusion. Peters' (incorrect) attribution of *Rallus nigra* Miller, 1784 to *Porzana atra* North, 1908 in the generally standard *Checklist of the Birds of the World* would aggravate the confusion if Miller's specific name were to replace *Porzana tabuensis* (Gmelin, 1789), the identity of which has not been in dispute. Article 79(b) allows a junior synonym to be conserved in the interest of promoting stability and universality of usage or avoiding confusion. Suppression of Miller's name is preferable to a Ruling that Gmelin's name should be given precedence when they are regarded as synonyms because the birds of Tahiti are now well known and it is extremely improbable that *nigra* could apply to some form other than the nominate *tabuensis*. In accordance with Article 80, *Rallus tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789, the currently used name, must be maintained as the valid name until the decision of the Commission is published.

7. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is therefore requested:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the specific name *nigra* Miller, 1784, as published in the binomen *Rallus nigra*, for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy;
- (2) to place the specific name *tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789, as published in the binomen *Rallus tabuensis*, on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology;
- (3) to place the specific name *nigra* Miller, 1784, as published in the binomen *Rallus nigra* and suppressed under the plenary powers in (1) above, on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology.

APPENDIX 1

Books and papers using the name *nigra* Miller, 1874 for the Spotless Crake:

- SHERBORN & IREDALE 1921. *Ibis* (11) vol. 3, pp. 302–309.
 MATHEWS 1927. *Syst. Av. Australas.* vol. 1, pp. 92–93.
 BERLIOZ 1934. *Bull. Mus. natn. Hist. Nat., Paris* (2) vol. 6, p. 340.
 LYSAGHT 1956. *Bull. Br. Orn. Cl.* vol. 76, pp. 97–98.
 LYSAGHT 1959. *Bull. Br. Mus. (Nat. Hist.), Hist. ser.* vol. 1, p. 302.

APPENDIX 2

Recent and major books and papers using the name *tabuensis* Gmelin, 1789 for the Spotless Crake:

- GRAY 1871. *Handlist Gen. Species Bds* vol. 3, p. 63.
 SHARPE 1894. *Cat. Bds Brit. Mus.* vol. 23, pp. 93, 111–112.
 SHARPE 1899. *Handlist Gen. Species Bds* vol. 1, p. 102.
 MURPHY 1924. *Am. Mus. Novit.* No. 124, pp. 4–7.
 CAYLEY 1931. *What bird is that?* pp. 5, 241.
 PETERS 1934. *Checklist Bds World* vol. 2, p. 187.
 ADAMSON 1939. *Bull. Bernice P. Bishop Mus.* vol. 159, p. 64.
 MAYR 1941. *List of New Guinea birds*, p. 24.
 AMADON 1942. *Am. Mus. Novit.* No. 1175, pp. 10–11.
 MAYR 1945. *Bds Southwest Pacific*, pp. 60, 111, 128, 157, 179, 203, 219.
 DELACOUR & MAYR 1946. *Bds Philippines*, p. 64.
 MAYR & GILLIARD 1954 *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.* vol. 103, pp. 318, 326, 335.
 GREENWAY 1958. *Extinct and vanishing bds World.*, p. 219.
 WILLIAMS 1960. *Ibis* vol. 102, pp. 61–62, 66.
 DELACOUR 1966. *Guide des oiseaux de la Nouvelle Calédonie*, p. 66.
 FALLA, SIBSON & TURBOTT 1966. *Field guide bds New Zealand*, p. 108.
 RAND & GILLIARD 1967. *Handbook New Guinea Bds*, p. 111.
 SOPER 1969. *Notornis* vol. 16, pp. 219–220.
 HADDEN 1970. *Notornis* vol. 17, pp. 200–213.
 DUPONT 1971. *Philippine Bds*, p. 69.
 SLATER *et al.* 1971. *Field guide Australian Bds. Non-Passerines*, p. 271.
 FRASER 1972. *Notornis* vol. 19, pp. 87–88.
 THIBAULT 1973. *Alauda* vol. 41, pp. 112, 302, 314.
 MACDONALD 1973. *Bds of Australia*, p. 138.
 KING 1973. *Wilson Bull.* vol. 85, p. 98.
 THIBAULT & THIBAULT 1973. *Oiseau, Rev. fr. Orn.* vol. 43, p. 62.
 HOLYOAK 1974. *Oiseau, Rev. fr. Orn.* vol. 44, p. 25.
 LACAN & MOUGIN 1974. *Oiseau, Rev. fr. Orn.* vol. 44, pp. 231, 272.
 THIBAULT 1974. *C.r. Acad. Sci., Paris, Sér. D.* No. 278, p. 2477.
 HOLYOAK 1975. *Oiseau, Rev. fr. Orn.* vol. 45, pp. 215, 227.
 PETITOT & PETITOT 1975. *Oiseau, Rev. fr. Orn.* vol. 45, p. 83.
 CONDON 1975. *Checklist Bds Australia. Vol. 1*, p. 103.
 JOHNSON 1976. *Notornis* vol. 23, p. 357.
 RIPLEY 1977. *Rails of the World*, pp. 230–231.
 HOLYOAK & THIBAULT (in press). *Bull. Mus. natn. Hist. nat., Paris*.
 BRUCE (in press). *Checklist Bds Wallacea*.



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