

TRENDS IN SEABIRD SYSTEMATICS: RECENT, SOMETIMES CONFLICTING DECISIONS OF BOURC AND CSNA

In the presentation of his list of Recent Holarctic Bird Species, Voous (1973) was convinced, after consultation with many ornithologists from all parts of the world, that the time had not arrived for an attempt to reach reasonable agreement on a list of bird species of the world. Today, more than 25 years and several world lists later, and while the enormous undertaking the Handbook of the Birds of the World (Del Hoyo *et al.* [in series]) is well under way, consensus has still not been reached. While Voous' lists (1973, 1977ab) have been the standard for many years, several amendments have been published by the BOU Records Committee (BOURC) and more recently by the Dutch committee for avian systematics (CSNA). For *Atlantic Seabirds*, a joint venture between a UK and a Dutch organisation, this means that different lists and sequences, even different systematic principles, have been adopted in either country.

The debate will go on, no doubt. Meanwhile, there is scope for confusion and there is an increasing risk for misunderstanding. For example, most ornithologists refer to the Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* as a polytypic species that includes a very black, small and slender nominate race in the north and east of Europe, and two paler, bulkier races around the North Sea (*L.f. graellsii* and *L.f. intermedius*). The CSNA considers the Baltic Gull *L. fuscus* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. graellsii* as specifically distinct, and '*intermedius*' is considered conspecific with *graellsii* (Sangster *et al.* 1999). Similar decisions were published for the soft-plumaged petrel complex *Pterodroma mollis/maderia/feae*, for Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea/borealis/edwardsii*, Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus/yelkouan/mauretanicus*, the herring gulls/yellow-legged gull complex *Larus argentatus/cachinnans/michahellis*. Previously, the BOURC has suggested changes to the British and Irish List (e.g. BOURC 1991, 1998). For example, *Sula bassana* was changed to *Morus bassanus*, a proposal adopted by CSNA only in 1997. The mediterranean subspecies of Manx Shearwater was accorded species status *Puffinus yelkouan* (including subspecies *mauretanicus*), while the nominate was now considered monotypic. However, CSNA has split this complex (for Europe) into three distinct taxa (Table 1; Sangster *et al.* 1999).

Attempts for a definitive (European) list are now under way, but there are no grounds for believing that consensus will be reached soon. We hope to regularly inform readers of *Atlantic Seabirds* of recent developments and decisions by various authorities in this section. In this first contribution, foregoing differences are highlighted. An overview of the main differences be-

Table 1. Nomenclature of seabird species as proposed by Voous 1977 and as currently in use in Britain (BOU 1998) and in The Netherlands (CSNA 1999).

| Voous 1973 | BOURC 1991, 1998 | CSNA 1999 |
|--|---|---|
| Soft-plumaged Petrel <i>Pterodroma mollis</i> (incl. subsp. <i>feae</i> , <i>madeira</i> , and <i>mollis</i>) | | Fea's Petrel <i>Pterodroma feae</i> ; Zino's Petrel <i>Pterodroma madeira</i> ; Soft-plumaged Petrel <i>Pterodroma mollis</i> |
| Cory's or Mediterranean Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i> (incl. subsp. <i>diomedea</i> , <i>borealis</i> and <i>edwardsii</i>) | Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i> (incl. subspecies <i>diomedea</i> , <i>borealis</i> and <i>edwardsii</i>) | Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris borealis</i> ; Scopoli's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i> ; Cape Verde Shearwater <i>Calonectris edwardsii</i> |
| Common or Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> (incl. subsp. <i>puffinus</i> , <i>yelkouan</i> and <i>mauretanicus</i>) | Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> (monotypic) Mediterranean Shearwater <i>Puffinus yelkouan</i> (incl. subsp. <i>yelkouan</i> and <i>mauretanicus</i>) | Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> (monotypic); Balearic Shearwater <i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i> ; Yelkouan Shearwater <i>Puffinus yelkouan</i> |
| Northern Gannet <i>Sula bassana</i> | Northern Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i> | Northern Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i> |
| Shag <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> | European Shag <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> | European Shag <i>Stictocarbo aristotelis</i> |
| Great Skua <i>Stercorarius skua</i> | Great Skua <i>Catharacta skua</i> | Great Skua <i>Stercorarius skua</i> ¹ |
| Lesser-Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i> (incl. subsp. <i>fuscus</i> , <i>intermedius</i> and <i>graellsii</i>) | Lesser-Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i> (incl. subsp. <i>fuscus</i> , <i>intermedius</i> and <i>graellsii</i>) | Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus graellsii</i> ; Baltic Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i> |
| Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> (incl. many subspecies) | Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> (incl. many subspecies) | Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> Pontic Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i> Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i> Armenian Gull <i>Larus armenicus</i> Heuglin's Gull <i>Larus heuglini</i> Vega Gull <i>Larus vegae</i> American Herring Gull <i>Larus smithsonianus</i> |
| Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i> | Gull-billed Tern <i>Sterna nilotica</i> | Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i> |

¹ Sangster *et al.* 1997 used *Catharacta skua*, but following subsequent phylogenetic analyses returned to *Stercorarius skua* (Sangster *et al.* 1998).

tween The British and the (new) Dutch list are summarised in Table 1, showing names proposed by Voous (1973), names used on the British List (BOURC 1998), and proposals by the CSNA (Sangster *et al.* 1999), which have recently been adopted by the Netherlands Ornithologists' Union (NOU).

Underlying the main differences are different systematic principles adopted by either committee. While CSNA has decided to use the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC), the BOURC is apparently still working along the lines of the Biological Species Concept (BSC), but it is not clear which taxonomic philosophy forms the basis of their decisions. In the absence of international consensus in these matters, we will have to live with different systems and conflicting lists.

Sinds de lijsten van Holarctische Vogels van Voous (1973, 1977ab) zijn er zowel in Groot Brittannië als in Nederland veranderingen doorgevoerd (BOURC 1998, Sangster et al. 1999). Omdat de commissies die dergelijke veranderingen voorstellen verschillende systematische principes voorstaan is er steeds groter verschil tussen beide soortenlijsten ontstaan en daarmee een toenemende kans op verwarring door de gebruikers. Voor een tijdschrift dat door een Britse en een Nederlandse organisatie wordt geproduceerd is het uitblijven van internationale consensus een extra handicap. Er rest de redactie vooralsnog weinig anders dan de verschillen in beeld te brengen en in geval van twijfel middels bijvoorbeeld een voetnoot de benodigde duidelijkheid te verschaffen. In deze mededelingen worden de verschillen van drie lijsten (Voous, BOURC en CSNA voor wat betreft de echte zeevogels aangegeven.

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