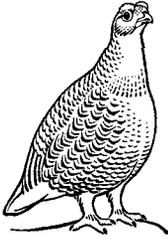


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Editorial

Few birdwatchers are systematists or have any real knowledge of taxonomy and the reasons behind scientific nomenclature. We all, however, make constant use of classification: even non-ornithologists can recognise a duck as a duck or a thrush as a thrush; at a more advanced level, identifications often start with a generic determination such as, 'There's a *Sylvia*', later refined to become, 'It's a Lesser Whitethroat'. Thus, even those who might not be able to define systematics or taxonomy are recognising the basic importance of a natural classification system.

Nevertheless, the sequence in which birds are listed and their scientific names are, sadly, of relatively little interest to the majority of British and Irish birdwatchers. Convenience is of most importance and, for that reason, change is not welcome. The names and sequence employed in *The Handbook* (1938-41) remained in use by British ornithologists for 13 years, until the publication in 1952 of the British Ornithologists' Union's *Check-list of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland*. Since then, the familiar 'Wetmore order' of the 1952 list has remained relatively unchanged, although dozens of new species have been 'slotted in', sometimes in rather arbitrary positions. In 1971, the BOU published *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*, which, with slight modifications, employed a combination of the nomenclature of Dr Charles Vaurie's *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna* (1959, 1965) and, after much argument, the sequence of J. L. Peters's *Check-list of Birds of the World* (1931-70). The local and regional recorders (the people in Britain who make most use of bird lists, in their annual bird reports) expressed their unanimous disapproval, through the Report Editors' Committee, and Robert Hudson produced on their behalf a sequence hardly different from the familiar 1952 list, *A Species List of British and Irish Birds* (1971). This has been used by almost all report editors and by *British Birds*.

Despite this background of opposition to unnecessary change, we nevertheless now announce that, with this issue, *British Birds* is adopting a new sequence. In three issues of the BOU journal, *The Ibis*, Professor Dr K. H.

Voous has produced a completely revised 'List of recent Holarctic species' (*Ibis* 115: 612-638; 119: 223-250, 376-406), based broadly on the Wetmore system and with the aim of finding 'a reasonable compromise between the sequences of orders, families, genera, and species as adhered to by ornithological workers, societies, and organisations in various parts of the northern hemisphere.' Thus, this list involves the minimum necessary changes (in the light of modern knowledge) from the familiar sequence in use here since 1952. Our decision to adopt Professor Voous's list has, however, been strongly influenced by the earlier decision of the editors of *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: the Birds of the Western Palearctic* to do so. 'BWP' must surely be destined to become as widely used and familiar to European ornithologists as was *The Handbook*. We feel, therefore, that our decision is both natural and inevitable: birdwatchers in the late 1970s and 1980s will be using 'the Voous sequence'.

We are producing an up-to-date list of all bird species recorded in the western Palearctic, arranged in the sequence and with the scientific names recommended by Professor Voous; a copy of this '1978 list' will be sent free to every subscriber with the February or March issue of *British Birds*. We do not, therefore, propose to detail here the changes involved, except to mention two that may be of interest to many British and Irish birdwatchers. Professor Voous regards the Scottish Crossbill as a separate species *Loxia scotica*, distinct from Crossbill *L. curvirostra* and Parrot Crossbill *L. pytyopsittacus* (see pages 3-10); the Isabelline Shrike, treated as a distinct species *Lanius isabellinus* when first recorded in Britain in 1950 (*Brit. Birds* 44: 217-219), until its four races were merged as red-tailed forms of the Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio*, now regains specific rank (the reasons for this will be published shortly). Thus, on a light-hearted note, many British birdwatchers may, without stirring from their armchairs, add one (or the luckier of us two) species to their life lists.

We have not yet mentioned the English vernacular names in common usage. Some are in need of revision and the list is currently being reviewed by a working group including representatives of *British Birds*, the BOU, the BTO, *BWP*, the RSPB and the Wildfowl Trust. Following the general principle of making minimum change, pending this full review, we advocate only the following 13 alterations:

SCIENTIFIC NAME	1971 LIST	1978 LIST	REFS. TO NOTES
<i>Aix galericulata</i>	Mandarin Duck	Mandarin	1
<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	Red Grouse	Willow/Red Grouse	6
<i>Colinus virginianus</i>	Bob-white Quail	Bobwhite	2
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Partridge	Grey Partridge	3
<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	Stone Curlew	Stone-curlew	4
<i>Chordeiles minor</i>	Nighthawk	Common Nighthawk	2
<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Rock/Water Pipit	Rock Pipit	5
<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Yellow/Blue-headed Wagtail	Yellow Wagtail	5
<i>M. alba</i>	Pied/White Wagtail	Pied Wagtail	5
<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	Olive-backed Thrush	Swainson's Thrush	2
<i>Corvus corone</i>	Carrion/Hooded Crow	Carrion Crow	5
<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	Myrtle Warbler	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
<i>Icterus galbula</i>	Baltimore Oriole	Northern Oriole	2

(1) Simplification, involving dropping of unnecessary group name, to accord with modern usage; (2) Nearctic species bringing us into line with American terminology; (3) adds adjective to otherwise ambiguous name, and again conforms with modern usage; (4) modification of existing name, to avoid possible misinterpretation of its systematic relationship; (5) to conform to an important principle: that each species should have a vernacular name, whereas each race—distinguishable by its scientific name—does not need one; and (6) acknowledging that the principle in (5) is unlikely to overrule long-established usage in one case: we recommend the use of Willow Grouse, but recognise that Red Grouse may remain the usual name for *L. l. scoticus*. Finally, we consider that female Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* is preferable to 'reeve' and that feral Rock Dove *Columba livia* is preferable to 'Feral Pigeon'.

Apart from such minor adjustments to vernacular names, we hope that the adoption of Professor Voous's sequence and nomenclature by both 'BWP' and 'BB' will signify the start of a new phase of stability in ornithological listing in Europe.