



Nomenclatural notes on the Lesser Crested Tern (Aves: Laridae, *Sterna*)

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Abstract. The Lesser Crested Tern should be called *Sterna media* Horsfield, 1821, not *Sterna bengalensis* Lesson, 1831, because the latter name is not preoccupied, contrary to former beliefs.

Key words. Nomenclature, taxonomy, birds, *Sterna*, *Thalasseus*.

INTRODUCTION

The Lesser Crested Tern is a widespread bird of tropical and subtropical seas of the Old World (Gochfeld & Burger 1996). The species was usually called *Sterna media* from the 1820s to the 1920s and *Sterna bengalensis* from the 1930s onwards. I show below that abandoning *media* in favor of *bengalensis* was done by Hartert (1921: 1697) on unsound grounds. Nomenclatural notes on further names applied to this species are added.

Nomenclatural issues follow the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999; hereafter the Code). Museum acronyms are as follows: AMNH = American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA; BMNH = Natural History Museum at Tring, Tring, United Kingdom;

NOMENCLATURAL NOTES

***Sterna media* Horsfield**

Sterna media was based by Horsfield (1821: 199) on a holotype (now in BMNH; Warren 1966: 181) from the island of Java, Indonesia. Subsequently, the species was generally known under this name until Hartert (1921: 1697) stated that it is preoccupied by *Sterna media* Vieillot, 1820 and that the species thus should be called *Sterna bengalensis* Lesson, 1831, which is its next-oldest name available for this taxon (see below). Hartert (1921: 1697) did not provide a reference to the Vieillot's 1820 paper. Despite this weakness, Hartert's unsupported suggestion was adopted by Peters (1934: 343) in his influential *Check list of birds of the world* without further notice. Subsequently, *Sterna bengalensis* started to be in prevailing use for Lesser Crested Terns.

I restudied the correctness of Hartert's (1921) claim with the following results. To the best of my knowledge, the name *Sterna media* first appeared in Bossi (1808: 222), where it was accompanied with two French vernacular names ("aigrette" and "guifette" [sic]) and where the author said that the name "aigrette" (= "little egrets" in French) is inappropriate for the bird, because it resembles "aigrettes" only in being generally whitish. This cannot be accepted as a description and a reference to vernacular names does not qualify as an indication. Hence, *Sterna media* is a nomen nudum at this point. Note that Joseph Aurèle de Bossi (1758-1824), French politician and poet, who was prefect of the Department of Ain in 1808, is the only person named as the author of the book, which was an official complex description of the Department under his leadership. It is highly improbable that he authored all parts of this book, but he is the "author" of *Sterna media* as a nomen nudum in the sense of the Code.

Next, the name *Sterna media* was used by Vieillot (1816: 238), who repeated the information previously given in Bossi (1808), omitting the mention that the bird is whitish. *Sterna media* is a nomen nudum here.

Third, Vieillot (1820: 347) – and this is probably the source to which Hartert (1921) referred – said "Latham rapporté à cette espèce [= *Sterna boysii* Vieillot, 1820], comme un jeune oiseau, la Guisette, de la pl. enlum. de Buffon, n. 924 (*Sterna media*); mais nous croyons qu'il se méprend.", i.e. "Latham attributed to this species, as a juvenile bird, the Guisette of Buffon's Planches Enluminées Nr. 924 (*Sterna media*), but we think that he erred in this." Here, *Sterna media* appears as a citation from Latham. This reference can be traced back to Latham (1787: 296), where Latham used the name *Sterna naevia* Linnaeus (1766: 228) for his "Sandwich Tern. Var. A", and further to Latham (1785: 358), who listed the bird on Buffon's pl. 924 in the "synonymy" of the "Sandwich Tern. Var. A". Vieillot (1819: 167) used an almost identical sentence in referring to Latham's opinion on Buffon's (1781a,b) pl. 924, but wrote "*Sterna naevia*" instead of "*Sterna media*" as in 1820. This agrees with Latham (1787), who wrote "*naevia*", not "*media*". I thus conclude that "*Sterna media*" in Vieillot (1820: 347) is just a misprint for *Sterna naevia*, not a new name.

In summary, *Sterna media* of Bossi (1808) and Vieillot (1816) are nomina nuda, and *Sterna media* in Vieillot (1819) is a misprint for *Sterna naevia*. Hence, *Sterna media* of Horsfield (1821) is not preoccupied (contra Hartert 1921) and can be used for the species for which Horsfield (1821) created it. It is not a nomen oblitum, because it was widely used for this taxon after 1899 (see Art. 23.9.1.1 of the Code), e.g. by Robinson (1910), Grote (1912), McLennan (1916), La Touche (1917) and Fitzsimons (1923), to select just a few works from different parts of the world.

***Sterna affinis* Cretzschmar**

Cretzschmar (1826: 23) based this nominal taxon upon specimens collected on the coasts of the Red Sea by the Rüppel Expedition and housed in the SMF (Steinbacher 1949: 106). The name is a junior primary homonym of *Sterna affinis* Horsfield (1821: 199) = *Sterna nilotica affinis* Horsfield (Dickinson 2003: 149).

***Sterna arabica* “Ehremberg [sic]” Temminck**

Temminck (1840: 456) attributed this name to “Ehremberg” [= Ehrenberg], listing it in the synonymy of *Sterna affinis* Cretzschmar, 1826. Vaurie (1965: 491) observed that *arabica* was a label name listed in the synonymy and concluded that it is thus a nomen nudum. Currently, Art. 11.6.1 of the Code offers a way how to make such names available for nomenclatural purposes (before 1961) from the work where they were listed in synonymy, but I found no paper in which provisions of this Article were fulfilled. *Sterna arabica* Temminck is thus a nomen nudum.

***Thalasseus maxuriensis* Lichtenstein**

Lichtenstein (1854: 98) listed under this name six specimens in ZMB from “Arabien, Ostindien” (“Arabia, East India”). Saunders (1896: 87) studied these specimens in ZMB and concluded that they belong to the Lesser Crested Tern. Bonaparte (1856: 772) listed *Thalasseus maxuriensis* as a valid species, attributing the name to “Ehr.”, i.e. Ehrenberg. Schilling (1860: 147) and Gurlt (1878: 203) listed *Sterna maxuriensis* as a valid name, without giving its author. The specific name *maxuriensis* is a nomen nudum in all of these authors. Gray (1871: 119) listed *Sterna maxuriensis* “Ehr.” as a valid name of a tern from “N. Africa”, with “*melanocephala*, Temm.; *affinis*, p., Schl.” in its synonymy. This would make *maxuriensis* available as a new replacement name for *melanocephala* Temminck, but I found no tern called *melanocephala* Temminck. Angas (1860: 4) and Eyton (1867: 226) listed *Sterna melanocephala* as a valid name, without giving its author. The specific name *melanocephala* is a nomen nudum in both these cases. In summary, I found no work in which *maxuriensis* were made available for the purposes of zoological nomenclature.

***Pelecanopus bengalensis par* Mathews & Iredale**

Mathews & Iredale (1921: 94) stated that *Thalasseus bengalensis arabicus* Mathews, 1912, described from the Red Sea, was based upon specimens from the nominotypic subspecies and created a new name for populations inhabiting Red Sea, without referring to particular specimens. Peters (1934: 343) and Vaurie (1965: 491, footnote) incorrectly said that Mathews & Iredale (1921) considered *arabica* Mathews preoccupied (which they did not) and that they created their *par* as a new replacement name for Mathews’s *arabica* (which they did not, either).

AVAILABLE NAMES

I list here available names applied to the Lesser Crested Tern. They are arranged in chronological order; type localities are listed where possible.

- 1821 *Sterna media* Horsfield (1821: 199): island of Java, Indonesia (see Warren 1966: 181).
- 1826 *Sterna affinis* Cretzschmar (1826: 23): Red Sea (see Steinbacher 1949: 106).
- 1831 *Sterna bengalensis* Lesson (1831: 621): Pondicherry, SE India (see Voisin & Voisin 2011: 52).
- 1843 *Thalasseus torresii* Gould (1843: 140): Port Essington, Cobourg Peninsula, Northern Territory, Australia (see Stone 1913: 138).
- 1912 *Thalasseus bengalensis arabicus* Mathews (1912: 355): Red Sea (see Warren 1966: 18, Greenway 1978: 36).

- 1916 *Thalasseus bengalensis robini* Mathews (1916: 55): Utingu, Cape York, Queensland, Australia (see Greenway 1978: 36).
- 1921 *Pelecanopus bengalensis par* Mathews & Iredale (1921: 94): Red Sea (see Mathews 1921: 94; not based on particular specimens).
- 1934 *Sterna bengalensis emigrata* Neumann (1934: 331): Tanger, Morocco (see Neumann 1934: 331).

CONCLUSIONS

The Lesser Crested Tern exhibits geographic variation in body size, bill size and shape and plumage coloration (Vaurie 1965, C.S. Roselaar in Cramp 1985, Olsen & Larsson 1995), but patterns of these variations are unclear and similarly unclear is whether observed differences are of taxonomic importance or just reflect inter-population variation.

Accordingly, intraspecific classification of this taxon is confused. The species was considered monotypic (e.g. Vaurie 1965), or was divided into two (e.g. Roselaar in Cramp 1985) or three (e.g. Gochfeld & Burger 1996, Dickinson 2003) subspecies. Note that three three subspecies of Gochfeld & Burger (1996) differ from those of Dickinson (2003).

The species should be called *Sterna* (or *Thalasseus* in some classifications) *media* Horsfield, 1821. Names of subspecies (if they are recognized) depend on the taxonomic treatment of this species.

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