

A GUIDE TO FORMING AND CAPITALIZING COMPOUND NAMES OF BIRDS IN ENGLISH¹

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THERE is much variation in usage, and much uncertainty among authors and editors (especially editors of nonornithological publications), with respect to the orthography of English names ("common names" or "vernacular names" of many authors, but see Parkes 1975: 819) when these names are compounded from two or more words. I refer only to the English group-name, not to the modifying word or words used to denote the particular species. Our concern here is with "Frigatebird" and not with "Magnificent."

The first modern attempt to standardize the orthography of the English names of North American birds was made by Cheesman and Oehser (1937), in a report originally prepared for the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union. The recommendations in their report dealt with several matters of orthography beyond those considered here.

Eisenmann (1955), in his paper on Middle American birds, "followed in the main" the recommendations of Cheesman and Oehser, and, in turn, most of the names used by Meyer de Schauensee (1966) were those recommended by Eisenmann as a consultant on English nomenclature. Even within these two works, however, the formation of compound names is inconsistent.

In spite of the editorial policies of some journals and book publishing companies, most ornithologists (including the writer) appear to believe firmly that the names of bird species should be capitalized. The usual reasons given for this, which are valid, are that it prevents the ambiguousness of such combinations as "gray flycatcher" and "solitary sandpiper," and that it makes the names of birds easier to spot in a page of print. In addition, the English name of a bird species can be considered to be a *proper name*, and thus entitled to capitalization (see editor's footnote in Cheesman and Oehser 1937: 335). Group-names in the plural are sometimes capitalized when they are intended as parts of two or more species names: thus, Common and Roseate Terns rather than Common and Roseate terns (U.S. Government Printing Office 1959: 22). However, the Council of Biology Editors prefers the second (uncapitalized) version (Council of Biology Editors 1972: 184), which should be used in manuscripts intended for biological journals.

When group-names are used alone in a textual context, whether single or compound, they are not capitalized. Thus we write, "The smallest of the hummingbirds is the Bee Hummingbird." Similarly, *Otus choliba* is the Tropical Screech-Owl, but there are several other species of *Otus* collectively called screech-owls (some of which are tropical screech-owls).

I developed the following "rules" during my attempt to standardize the nomenclature used in the "Avian Biology" series (Farner and King 1971–1975). They are intended as a kind of style manual; that is, guidelines for an approach to an almost complete consistency in the formation of compound names. Some are virtually unchanged from those of Cheesman and Oehser, and others attempt to codify the refinements made by Eisenmann and others. Adherence to these "rules" will, it is

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hoped, result in consistency of usage within journals and in ornithological works with multiple authorship.

I am indebted to Eugene Eisenmann, Chairman of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the A.O.U., for having read several drafts of this paper; a number of his suggestions have been incorporated in this version. The Committee voted to adopt the "rules" in the A.O.U. Check-list, and has followed them in the published Supplements to the fifth edition. The manuscript was also read by Charles G. Sibley, whose forthcoming book on birds of the world will also reflect these "rules."

THE "RULES"

- I. Compound bird names should be spelled as **a single word, unhyphenated**, if:
 - A. The second component is the word "bird."
 EXAMPLES: Tropicbird, Frigatebird, Oilbird, Hummingbird, Puffbird.
 - B. The second component is a part of the body.
 EXAMPLES: Spoonbill, Pintail, Finfoot, Lapwing, Yellowlegs, Greenshank, Barbthroat, Violetear.
 - C. The name describes an activity of the bird (whether or not accurately!).
 EXAMPLES: Shearwater, Roadrunner, Goatsucker, Honeyguide, Woodcreeper, Gnatcatcher, Seedeater.
 - D. The second component is a misnomer; either (1) a fanciful nonornithological noun, or (2) a group of birds to which the bird in question does not really belong.
 EXAMPLES: (1) Woodnymph, Hillstar, Sunangel; (2) Sungrebe, Seedsnipe, Nighthawk, Antpitta, Fruitcrow, Peppershrike, Waterthrush, Meadowlark.
 - E. The second component is a broadly categorical bird name, not applying to any one particular kind of bird.
 EXAMPLES: Moorhen, Guineafowl, Peacock and Woodcock, Bananaquit and Grassquit ("Quit" = old Jamaican word for a little bird; Newton and Gadow 1896: 761).
 - F. The name is onomatopoeic.
 EXAMPLES: Bobwhite, Killdeer, Poorwill, Chickadee, Chiffchaff.

EXCEPTIONS: Names that would normally be spelled as single unhyphenated words under this rule should be spelled as **two (or more) hyphenated words, with only the first capitalized**, when:

- (1) Spelling as a single word would result in a double or triple letter, from the juxtaposition of the last letter of the first word and the first letter of the second.
 EXAMPLES: Thick-knee, not Thickknee (or Thicknee as in Williams 1963: 89); Bee-eater, not Beeeater; Whip-poor-will, not Whippoorwill; Swallow-wing, not Swallowwing; White-eye, not Whiteeye.
- (2) An unhyphenated word would be excessively long (usually four syllables or more), or clumsy, or imply an incorrect pronunciation.
 EXAMPLES: Plains-wanderer, not Plainswanderer; Chuck-will's-widow, not Chuckwill'swidow; Foliage-gleaner, not Foliagegleaner; Firewood-gatherer, not Firewoodgatherer; False-sunbird, not Falsesunbird; Silky-flycatcher, not Silkyflycatcher; Mudnest-builder, not Mudnestbuilder.

II. Compound bird names should be spelled as **two capitalized, hyphenated words**, if:

The second component is the name of a kind of bird, and is *not* a misnomer; i.e., the bird in question does belong to that general group. The first component may be a noun or an adjective.

EXAMPLES: Storm-Petrel, Diving-Petrel, Night-Heron, Whistling-Duck, Painted-Snipe, Ground-Dove, Screech-Owl, Wood-Wren, Bush-Shrike, Brush-Finch.

EXCEPTIONS: Some bird names that are technically of this kind have become enconced in the English language as single nouns in their own right. As might be expected, these are names that were originally applied to British birds, viz. Sparrowhawk, Skylark, Stonechat, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Bullfinch. In some, the first word has even evolved away from its original spelling, viz. Shelduck, Goshawk.

NOTES

There is obviously a subjective element in decisions as to what is awkward or excessively long and thus to be excepted from being spelled as a single word under Category I. Few cases, however, should present any difficulties of decision.

One special case is that of the group name for the Paradisaeidae. Ideally we should call these "Paradisebirds," but the inverted version is too firmly fixed to alter. I have seen the name rendered as "Bird of Paradise," "Bird of paradise," and "Bird-of-paradise"; I recommend the hyphenated form as used by Thomson (1964).

No compound group-name for a bird should be spelled as *two unhyphenated words*. In some instances this conflicts with A.O.U. Check-list usage, but not with that of Eisenmann; thus, "Night Heron" of the A.O.U. (1957) should be "Night-Heron." (On the other hand, "Great Blue Heron" and "Little Blue Heron" are unhyphenated, as there is no group of "Blue-Herons," both adjectives in these two names modifying the group-name "heron.") In a few cases, Eisenmann himself used unhyphenated words, but consistency would require that these be hyphenated. Thus "Black-Hawk" rather than "Black Hawk" should be used for the species of *Buteogallus*, congruent with Eisenmann's use of "Yellow-Finch" for the species of *Sicalis*. There is no justification for such a splitting as "oyster catcher" or "seed eater."

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