

Short Communication

The original description of *Sylvia melanocephala* (Aves: Sylviidae), with notes on David Piesch's birds of Sardinia (1784)

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Abstract - The name of the Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* is usually attributed to Gmelin (1789), but it dates from Piesch (1784). The correct name of the Sardinian Warbler is thus *Sylvia melanocephala* (Piesch, 1784). Comments are added on other bird species described by Piesch (1784) from Sardinia.

Key words: David Piesch, historical ornithology, nomenclature, Sardinia.

Riassunto - La prima descrizione di *Sylvia melanocephala* (Aves: Sylviidae), con note su David Piesch e gli uccelli della Sardegna.

Il nome dell'occhicotto *Sylvia melanocephala* viene attribuito di solito a Gmelin (1789), ma risale a Piesch (1784). Il nome esatto dell'occhicotto è pertanto *Sylvia melanocephala* (Piesch, 1784). Si aggiungono commenti su altre specie di uccelli descritte da Piesch (1784) per la Sardegna.

Parole chiave: David Piesch, storia dell'ornitologia, nomenclatura, Sardegna.

The Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* is a widespread species of the Mediterranean (Cramp, 1992; Baker, 1997; Shirihai *et al.*, 2001; Aymí & Gargallo, 2006). Its name is generally attributed to Gmelin (1789: 970) (e.g. Vaurie, 1959: 265, Watson *et al.*, 1986: 281, Aymí & Gargallo, 2006: 704, Dickinson & Christidis, 2014: 511, del Hoyo & Collar, 2016: 502). However, my search of literature showed that the species was described already by Piesch (1784) in a work, to which Gmelin referred. It seems that no previous ornithologist has noticed this case.

Johann Friedrich Gmelin (1748-1804) was a German naturalist, who wrote the so-called 13th edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, birds being included in the first and second parts of its first volume (Gmelin 1788, 1789). In this work, Gmelin (1789: 970) provided a description of *Motacilla melanocephala* based on "Cetti ucc. di Sard., p. 215". It was probably the Italian title of Cetti's work used by Gmelin which misled subsequent researchers. In his *Uccelli di Sardegna*, Cetti (1776: 218 [note the different page number]) provided a description of this bird without giving it a scientific name and, thus, the name would be attributable to Gmelin (1789). However, the page number given by Gmelin links the reference with a German translation of Cetti's work (Cetti 1784: 215).

The translator of Cetti's work (Cetti 1776, 1784, 1799) was David Piesch (1765-1802), German naturalist and pupil of Nathanael Gottfried Leske (1751-1786), a Sorbian-German naturalist. He worked in 1785-1791 as a co-rector and in 1791-1802 as a rector of the Evangelical Gymnasium in Teschen, Silesia, now Cieszyn, Poland (Schwaldopler, 1806: 234-235, Peter, 1888: 184). Piesch annotated the translation (Cetti 1784, 1799) and supplemented it with an Appendix, written according to Linnaean standards (Piesch 1784, 1799). This appendix contains new names and descriptions of four new avian species (for which see below). Gmelin (1788, 1789) listed all these names, providing references to Piesch's translation of Cetti's work, and there is thus no doubt that Piesch is their author, although Gmelin did not explicitly mention Piesch's name.

Thus, *Sylvia melanocephala*, originally published in the binomen *Motacilla melanocephala*, should be attributed to Piesch (1784: 18), not to Gmelin (1789: 790). The type series upon which *M. melanocephala* was based (unspecified number of specimens known to Cetti, 1776) and the type locality (island of Sardinia, Italy) remain the same.

Of the remaining three names created by Piesch (1784) for the birds of Sardinia on the basis of Cetti's (1776) work, two are doubtless junior synonyms, as follows: *Strix zonca* Piesch (1784: 8) is a synonym of *Otus scops* (Linnaeus, 1758: 92), and *Mergus imperialis* Piesch (1784: 11) is a synonym of *Mergus merganser* Linnaeus (1758: 129).

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Problematic is the taxonomic identity of *Motacilla moschita* Piesch (1784: 18), the last of Piesch's new bird names. Seebohm (1879: 315, 1881: 33) synonymized *M. moschita* with Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* Temminck (1820: 204), noting that *moschita* has precedence over *sarda*, while Hansmann (1857: 426) and Hartert (1909: 583) tentatively synonymized *moschita* with the Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (Linnaeus 1758: 187). Cetti's (1776) description of the bird is almost useless and the Italian vernacular name *moschita* applies to several species of *Sylvia* warblers in Sardinia (see Giglioli 1886, 1907). Thus, I consider *Motacilla moschita* Piesch, 1784 a *nomen dubium*.

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