

On the availability of the name *Curculio primitus* Herbst, 1795 (Coleoptera, Curculionidae)

ROBERTO CALDARA*, ENZO COLONNELLI**, MIGUEL ÁNGEL ALONSO-ZARAZAGA***

*Milan, Italy; **Rome, Italy; ***Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT

The use as an adjective of the name Curculio primitus Herbst, 1795 despite it being an adverb in Latin is discussed, and the availability of Sibiria primita (Herbst, 1795) is confirmed among Curculionidae Curculioninae Tychiini.

Key words: Curculionidae, *Curculio primitus*, *Sibiria primita*, availability.

RIASSUNTO

Sulla validità del nome *Curculio primitus* Herbst, 1795 (Coleoptera, Curculionidae)

Viene discusso l'uso del nome *Curculio primitus* Herbst, 1795 come aggettivo, nonostante esso sia un avverbio in latino, e *Sibiria primita* (Herbst, 1795) è confermato come nome valido tra i Curculionidae Curculioninae Tychiini.

Parole chiave: Curculionidae, *Curculio primitus*, *Sibiria primita*, validità.

During the compilation of the just issued catalogue of the Palaearctic Curculionidae (Löbl & Smetana, 2013) we, as well as other authors, had to face numerous nomenclatural problems (homonymies, nomina protecta, spelling etc.), which were included in a chapter of about 60 pages entitled “New Acts and Comments”. One of these questions dealt with a common species of Curculioninae Tychiini currently named *Sibiria primita* (Herbst, 1795), described as *Curculio primitus* by Herbst (1795: 104) based on specimens from Germany.

Subsequently, this species was placed in the genus *Sibiria* Germar, 1817 by Stephens (1831: 58), who changed its name to *S. primita* in accordance with the feminine genus of *Sibiria*, thus considering “primitus” as an adjective. His opinion was followed by all authors till our days (see Caldara, 1985 for a review).

The third author of this note, a member of the International Commission of Nomenclature, pointed out that, according to the Latin dictionaries, the name “primitus” is actually not an adjective but an adverb (meaning “at first”) and is therefore indeclinable, also casting doubts about its availability since it could not have met the requirements of the Art. 11.9.1. of the ICZN (1999). Therefore the name *Sibiria primita* was deleted in the catalogue (Caldara, 2013) and replaced with *Sibiria signata* (Panzer, 1809), its first junior synonym. Unfortunately, due to an editorial misun-

derstanding, the comment concerning the reasons of this change was not quoted in the proper chapter of the catalogue.

When the second author asked the editors for an explanation of this change and got to know the reasons of it, namely the alleged unavailability of the name because of its adverbial nature, he communicated to both the first and the junior authors that he did disagree with this decision due to a misleading interpretation of the above-mentioned article of the Code.

However, nobody of us knew of similar cases concerning the use of adverbs in zoological literature. We decided thus to make a research online and to seek for advice of experts, among whom three other members of the Commission (Alberto Ballerio, Frank Krell and Alessandro Minelli), concerning the use of the name “primitus”.

We found online that the name “primitus” was already used as adjective in zoological nomenclature for an extinct bird, *Shenshiornis primita* Hu, Li, Hou & Xu, 2010, now a synonym of *Sapeornis chaoyangensis* Zhou & Zhang, 1992 (anonymous, 2013). Moreover, Hans Fery (pers. comm.) signaled to us that Schenckling (1917, 1922) wrote that “primitus, a, um” has also the meaning “der erste” [= the first] and, thus, is to be considered a noun or an adjective, pointing out that “although we cannot be sure whether Schenckling can be seen as an expert in Latin grammar, his opinion at least

indicates that “primitus” has been used as adjective in entomology, no matter if correctly or not”.

The opinion received by all the experts consulted was unanimous about the name “primitus” being available. For convenience and clearness here we quote Frank Krell’s opinion that summarize perfectly what was written also by the other experts: “Maintaining a bit of classical scholarship in our profession is a commendable intention, but at the end of the day, scientific names are just tools to communicate. I would try to follow classical grammar in forming new names, but declaring an over 200 years old, commonly used name unavailable because it is an adverb would violate the preamble of the Code (“The objects of the Code are to promote stability and universality in the scientific names...”). It is correct that adverbs are not available as species group names, but what does the Code actually say? Art. 11.9.1.: “A species group name..., if a Latin or latinized word must be, or be treated as, ...” an adjective or a noun. The crucial word here is “be treated as”. Primitus is an adverb in both classical and medieval Latin, but it has been treated as an adjective (Schenkling and other authors). So let’s continue treating it as an adjective. As such, it has to be declined (-us, -a, -um) which might look even more awful to anybody who loves classic languages, but there we go.”

Therefore the correct name for the Tychiini species is *Sibinia primita* (Herbst, 1795) [= *Sibinia signata* (Panzer, 1809); = *Sibinia gyllenhali* Desbrochers des Loges, 1895]

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AUTHORS ADDRESSES

- ROBERTO CALDARA - via Lorenteggio, 37 - 20146 Milan, Italy; e-mail: roberto.caldara@gmail.com
- ENZO COLONNELLI - via delle Giunchiglie, 56 - 00172 Rome, Italy; e-mail: ecolonnelli@yahoo.it
- MIGUEL ÁNGEL ALONSO-ZARAZAGA - Departamento de Biodiversidad y Biología Evolutiva, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (CSIC), José Gutiérrez Abascal, 2 - 28006 Madrid, Spain; e-mail: mcnaz39@mncn.csic.es