

Identifying the correct type species of *Sylvietta* Lafresnaye, 1839

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ABSTRACT: The generic name *Sylvietta* Lafresnaye, 1839, is shown to have had three originally included nominal species, with no clear indication of type by original designation as required by Article 68.2 of the Code. The first and therefore only valid subsequent designation (Article 69.1) is shown to be that of *Sylvietta rufescens* (Vieillot, 1817) = *Sylvietta crombec* Lafresnaye, 1839, by G.R. Gray in 1841, under Article 69.2.2.

KEYWORDS: *Sylvietta*, Lafresnaye, Africa, type species, *brachyura*, *crombec*, *rufescens*, Vieillot, G.R. Gray.

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Lafresnaye introduced the generic name *Sylvietta* in the *Revue Zoologique, par la Société Cuvierienne*, for the year 1839, volume 2, number 9 (Septembre), p. 258. Here, he described for the first time *Sylvietta brachyura* Lafresnaye, 1839, a new species from north-western Africa, and named the species depicted on plate 135 of Levaillant's *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique*, volume 3, p. 145, "Le Crombec, ou figuier a bec courbé", as *Sylvietta crombec* Lafresnaye, 1839. This species had previously been named by Vieillot as *Dicaeum rufescens* Vieillot, 1817, now *Sylvietta rufescens* (Vieillot, 1817). A third species was then described by Lafresnaye, *Sylvietta icteropygialis* Lafresnaye, 1839, now *Eremomela icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye, 1839).

Lafresnaye, in carefully comparing the first of his new nominal species with that of Levaillant's southern African original "Crombec", clearly stated that he was founding a small genus following the opinion of Levaillant: 'd'après l'avis de Levaillant', and placed *Sylvietta crombec* first, before *Sylvietta brachyura*: 'Nous ajoutons donc aux *Sylvietta crombec* et *brachyura*', before describing the third.

In the continuation of James L. Peters, *Check-list of Birds of the World*, volume XI (1986: 207), M.A. Traylor, Jr. cited *Sylvietta brachyura* Lafresnaye, 1839, as the type by 'original designation'. However, the rather esoteric presentation of the material in Lafresnaye's paper, as with so many from the early 19th century, makes asserting original designation of any of the originally included species an impossibility. Article 67.5 of the Code (ICZN, 1999: 68) states that the term "designation" in relation to the fixation of a type species must be rigidly construed, and Article 68.2 (ICZN, 1999: 70) lays down the requirements for 'original designation', none of which can be said to apply to any of the three nominal species originally included, and we believe that Lafresnaye's conscious subsequent ordering of the species, alluded to above, precludes any 'position precedence', when applied to designating a type species. The examples in Recommendation 69A (ICZN, 1999: 73), are of course for actions undertaken in the present, and are not a guide to those of the past.

In the *Systema Avium Aethiopicarum*, volume 2 (1930: 531), W.L. Sclater was equally incorrect in citing the type to be by 'monotypy', *Sylvietta brachyura* Lafresnaye, 1839, as has been clearly demonstrated above, and before that, Reichenow, in *Die Vögel Afrikas*, volume 3, pt. 2 (1905: 624), simply stated that the type was *S. brachyura* Lafresnaye. This could be

viewed as a subsequent designation, but Article 69.1 (ICZN, 1999: 72), accepts only the earliest, which is G.R. Gray, *A List of the Genera of Birds*, ed. 2 (1841: 33). Here, *S[ylvietta]. rufescens* (Vieill[ot].) was designated the type of genus *Sylvietta* Lafresnaye, 1839, and *S[ylvietta]. crombec* Lafresnaye, while clearly indicated as from Levaill[ant]. *Ois. d'Afr.*, pl. 135, was simultaneously identified as a synonym of *S. rufescens* (Vieillot), thereby fulfilling the requirements of Article 69.2.2 (ICZN, 1999: 72) for type species fixation.

The correct citation is therefore:

Sylvietta

Sylvietta Lafresnaye, 1839 gender feminine

Rev. Zool., 2, no. 9, p. 258.

Type by subsequent designation, G.R. Gray, 1841, *A List of the Genera of Birds*, ed. 2, p. 33.

S[ylvietta]. rufescens (Vieill[ot].) = *Dicaeum rufescens* Vieillot, 1817

Sylvietta rufescens (Vieillot, 1817)

Type fixation under Article 69.2.2, *Sylvietta rufescens* (Vieillot, 1817) = *Sylvietta crombec* Lafresnaye, 1839

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¹ 'Lafresnaye' is the shortened form of this authors name when used in formal lists and discussion, and as given above in bibliographies, but in his earlier works at least, he is self-styled as Fr. de La Fresnaye.