

COLUMN: What is in the name?

Samenvatting

Er wordt ingegaan op (een deel van) de praktijk van naamgeving. Op een in meer of mindere mate schertsende manier wordt wat kritiek geleverd, en er wordt opgeroepen om de fantasie met betrekking tot naamgeving eens wat meer aan het werk te zetten.

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When his tenth edition of the *Systema Naturae* appeared, Linnaeus showed that the names he had already used could say something about the species he described in that book. Concerning shells this was often about the colour, sculpture, locality etc.. Subsequent authors have, when possible, followed this practice. Problems arose, however, if there were already three greyish cones described; there was little left after the use of "*glaucus*" and "*cinereus*". An alternative was to refer to a locality or to name the shell after a person, preferably after someone who had some merit in biology in general or especially in malacology. There is a huge amount of examples, and there is nothing wrong with this practice, especially when one has ran out of "ordinary" names.

Some things, however, are not done. A possible example of unacceptable practice is when there are conditions; for example, you may work on (a part of) my collection, and I insist that every new species has to be named after me. Conspicuous in connection with this is that some names appear very often, like e.g. "*vicdani*".

Furthermore, there is also some sort of

silent agreement not to name species after political figures, accepted following the naming of a tiny beetle after Hitler. Still, not so long ago a shell was named after Lansbergis, the first president of Lithuania after its separation from the former Soviet Union. Not that I am trying to say that Lansbergis was politically unreliable, but still.....

The names of partners or wives/husbands of malacologists may be used, thanking them for understanding, support etc.. Nothing wrong with that, but this can also be exaggerated, just ask Linda.

It is a bit different when people name after their pet cat (*Conus tribblei*). This is rather close to one of the "recommendations" of the old code of 1985 (Appendix D 9: "A zoologist should not propose a name that, when spoken, suggests a bizarre, comical, or otherwise objectionable meaning"). An example could be *Abra cadabra*. This recommendation has disappeared from the current code, in which we can only read "No author should propose a name that, to his or her knowledge or reasonable belief, would be likely to give offence on any grounds." (Appendix A.4), a rather vague definition, but *Abra cadabra* is possible now without objections.

In the past we were startled by *Distorsio minorohnishii* (try to pronounce this perfectly the first time; on a species list from an American dealer - who probably could not believe his eyes when he first saw the name - I came across this name corrupted into "*minorjohnsoni*") and in the same genus the epithet

jenniernestae, not what one should call a jewel.

Considering new names for snail's shells, I recently saw a new nadir: *Bufonaria borisbeckeri* (family Bursidae, named after the German tennis player).

I already have some suggestions: *stef-figrafae* (named after the German female tennis player, preferably within the genus *Distorsio*, since her tax return form was rather "distorted"); *michael-schumacheri* (named after the Formula 1 driver, preferably a species with wing shaped broadened varices, of e.g. the genus *Pterynotus*); or *bayernmuenchenarum* (as a tribute to the wives of the players of the German "Mannschaft" for their daily support, preferably a species which occurs in very large groups, e.g. of the genus *Hydrobia*).

That malacologists are not the only persons with a lack of fantasy became obvious some time ago; in a publication an entomologist described three new species, which he named respectively after his wife, mother and mother in law. Some psychiatric help doesn't seem unsuitable, or do I have too much of a western perception?

That things can be done in another way was proven rather recently; when the author who described the genus *Denticulabrum* found out that that name was preoccupied, he personally changed the name into *Accidenticulabrum*, a true gem.

Come on, dear malacologists, use your imagination.

GCK