

**OPINION 2315 (Case 3351)*****Chelodina rugosa* Ogilby, 1890 (currently *Macrochelodina rugosa*; Reptilia, Testudines): precedence not granted over *Chelodina oblonga* Gray, 1841**

**Abstract.** The Commission did not support an application to give precedence to the name *Chelodina rugosa* Ogilby, 1890 (currently *Macrochelodina rugosa*) for the northern long-necked turtle from northern Australia over *Chelodina oblonga* whenever the two are considered to be synonyms, nor to set aside all previous designations of a type specimen for *Chelodina oblonga* Gray, 1841 and to designate as its neotype the lectotype of *Chelodina colliciei* Gray, 1856.

**Keywords.** Nomenclature; taxonomy; Reptilia; Testudines; CHELIDAE; *Macrochelodina*; *Chelodina*; *Chelodina oblonga*; *Chelodina rugosa*; *Chelodina colliciei*; Australia; side-necked turtles; northern long-necked turtle.

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**Ruling**

- (1) A proposal to give the name *rugosa* Ogilby, 1890, as published in the binomen *Chelodina rugosa*, precedence over the name *oblonga* Gray, 1841, as published in the binomen *Chelodina oblonga*, whenever the two are considered to be synonyms, was not approved.
- (2) A proposal to set aside all previous designations of a type specimen for *Chelodina oblonga* Gray, 1841 and to designate as its neotype BMNH 1947.3.5.91, the lectotype of *Chelodina colliciei* Gray, 1856, was not approved.
- (3) No names are placed on Official Lists or Indexes.

**History of Case 3351**

An application to give precedence to the name *Chelodina rugosa* Ogilby, 1890 (currently *Macrochelodina rugosa*) for the northern long-necked turtle from northern Australia over *Chelodina oblonga* whenever the two are considered to be synonyms, was received from S.A. Thomson (then *University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia*) on 11 May 2005. After correspondence the case was published in BZN **63**: 187–193 (September 2006). The title, abstract and keywords of the case were published on the Commission's website. An adverse comment, with an alternative set of proposals, was published in BZN **64**: 68; an additional comment by the author of the application was published in BZN **64**: 127–128; supportive comments were published in BZN **65**: 62; **66**: 79–80; **66**: 273.

**Decision of the Commission**

The Case was originally sent for vote on 1 June 2008. A majority of Commissioners voted FOR the Case (9 For, 8 Against), but it failed to meet the two-thirds majority required for approval by Article 12 of the Constitution. In accordance with bylaws 24–27, the case was sent for a revote on 1 December 2008, with the alternative set of

proposals set out by J. Savage in BZN **65**: 68. However, the revote was cancelled on 16 March 2009 under bylaws 24, 25 and 26, as a new Comment was received with information that could affect consideration of the Case. In 2010 the author of the Case published a paper including a taxonomic review of the taxa covered in the Case (Georges, A. & Thomson, S. 2010. *Zootaxa* **2496**: 1–37).

On 1 March 2011 the members of the Commission were invited to vote on the original set of proposals published in BZN **63**: 189–190 and the alternative set of proposals in BZN **64**: 68. At the close of the voting period on 1 June 2011 the votes were as follows:

Original proposals:

Affirmative votes – 5: Brothers, Fautin, Pape, Winston and Yanega.

Negative votes – 18: Ballerio, Bogutskaya, Bouchet, Grygier, Halliday, Kojima, Kottelat, Kullander, Lamas, Minelli, Ng, Papp, Patterson, Rosenberg, Štys, van Tol, Zhang and Zhou.

Harvey split his vote, voting AGAINST proposal (1); FOR proposal (2) and did not support all of proposal (3). Krell ABSTAINED.

Alternative proposals:

Affirmative votes – 5: Bouchet, Krell, Papp, Patterson and Zhou.

Negative votes – 20: Ballerio, Bogutskaya, Brothers, Fautin, Grygier, Halliday, Harvey, Kojima, Kottelat, Kullander, Lamas, Minelli, Ng, Pape, Rosenberg, Štys, van Tol, Winston, Yanega and Zhang.

Alonso-Zarazaga, Lim and Pyle were on leave of absence.

Voting AGAINST both the original and alternative proposals, Grygier observed that part of the problem with this Case, as was evident in the comments from earlier rounds, was whether the type locality of *C. oblonga* was Western Australia or Port Essington, as contradictorily stated or implied in different parts of the application. On Grygier's advice, the Secretariat verified the label data for the type specimen of *C. oblonga*, housed in the Natural History Museum, London as stating 'loc. W. Australia, Coll. J. Gould, *Chelodina oblonga* (type)' and having two numbers because the specimen was re-registered after the war as '40.12.9.81' (in which 40 indicates 1840) and '1947.3.5.89'. However, the Accession Register for the Life Sciences Department gave only 'Australasia' as the origin of this specimen. Ng, also voting AGAINST both the original and alternative proposals, said that his feeling about this case was simple. He agreed with the applicants that the books and papers by Wells & Wellington had done a great disservice to taxonomy. They had created huge problems, and Ng explicitly echoed Bouchet's view that this matter should have been dealt with years earlier. That said, however, he felt there would probably be more name changes in the near future as more work was done on the turtles in question. The authors had made it clear that taxonomic work on this group was growing and changing. In this landscape, Ng saw no good reason to make the requested rulings. He said the types were extant, and whatever they were, the names would then fall into line, and science would move on. He still felt this was the cleanest way to proceed in the present circumstances. Štys, voting AGAINST both the original and alternative proposals, commented that he felt, at least for the time being, that the Principle of Priority should be followed for names of taxa and identity of the name-bearing type species and mandatory type specimens. In his view the taxonomy was still too fluid

to benefit from any nomenclatural intervention. Also voting AGAINST both the original and alternative proposals, van Tol too noted that the taxonomic status of the nominal taxa was still unresolved. Under these circumstances any nomenclatural action was premature. Similarly, voting AGAINST both the original and alternative proposals, Zhang said he felt the issues were unresolved and it was best that the Commission did not take plenary action.

Bouchet, voting AGAINST the original proposals and FOR the alternative proposals, said that long-serving Commissioners will recall Case 2531, published in 1987, which sought to suppress three works by Wells and Wellington because their acceptance 'would cause massive and long-lasting instability and confusion in the nomenclature of the Australian herpetofauna'. This generated a heated debate in- and outside the Commission, and the Case was left without a vote. Bouchet said it was clear from his paper in *Zootaxa* that the applicant was resurrecting this battle. In doing so, Bouchet felt the applicant was misinterpreting the role of the Commission, which was to regulate the availability and validity of zoological names, and not to regulate how taxonomy was or should be done, or should be evaluated, or who was entitled to carry out taxonomic research.

Krell, who ABSTAINED from the original proposals and voted FOR the alternative proposals, explained that he felt that transferring an established name from one species to another was probably the most disruptive nomenclatural practice. He suggested that this should be avoided in any Case. Here, *Chelodina oblonga* had always been associated with Western Australian populations, even erroneously, by the original author. Without studying the type, nobody would have had a chance to interpret *Chelodina oblonga* correctly, i.e. in the sense of the type. Now this had been studied, and it had turned out not to be from the place that the original author had thought, and was of a different species from the one that occurred at the locus typicus. In such a situation only two solutions should be considered, either suppression of the confused name (as in the original proposal), or re-definition by a neotype designation (as in the alternative proposal). The original proposal would have re-established an unused name. Krell saw no disadvantage in the alternative proposal, in fact, he considered it an elegant solution. Considering the information available, he did not see the taxonomy of these focal taxa in a worse state than in most other groups, nor did he think the Case in any way premature.

Harvey, voting SPLIT for the original proposals and AGAINST the alternative proposals, explained his split vote AGAINST proposal (1) (but FOR proposal (2)) of the original set of proposals saying there was compelling evidence that the systematic status of the northern Australian species was unresolved and that taxonomic changes would be required when their status was resolved. Nomenclatural solutions should be put into effect only after as many taxonomic issues as possible were settled. The application of the Principle of Priority was the simplest avenue right now, albeit with some inconvenience, as some relatively well-known Australian freshwater turtles would have name changes.

Additional comments made in the first rounds of voting when different or additional to the above are provided here. Alonso-Zarazaga explained that in his opinion, application of the Principle of Priority led to easier solutions and was further consolidated by Thomson's comment (2006; BZN 63: 188–189, para. 12) that the taxonomic status of the northern species of *Chelodina* (or *Macrochelodina*) was still

doubtful. In this Case, he considered that the Commission should only confirm the identity of the extant types, not by allowing any modification of their status but just by confirming that the type species of *Macrochelodina* was *Chelodina rugosa* Ogilby, 1890. He felt that this was another premature request to apply nomenclature before a sound taxonomic basis had been attained, missing the goal of nomenclature, i.e. naming animals after a taxonomic hypothesis had been clarified. Alonso-Zarazaga said he could not see this in either set of proposals.

In the second round of voting Halliday commented that there were three available names for turtles from northern Australia and Papua New Guinea – *oblonga*, *rugosa* and *siebenrocki*. The taxonomic relationships among these populations were clearly unresolved, and it seemed likely that the interpretations of these names would be revised as new taxonomic information became available. It was quite possible that all three of these names would be required in the future. It would be prudent for the Commission to take no nomenclatural action at all for the moment, until taxonomic research had run its course and determined how many taxa were present. Halliday supported Grygier's observation that the Case was damaged by the internal discrepancy over the type locality of *oblonga* (Western Australia or Port Essington). Halliday also voted AGAINST the alternative proposal of Savage (BZN 64: 68). The name *colliei* Gray 1856 was the valid name of the species from southwestern Australia, and was supported by a lectotype, despite the misidentifications beginning with Burbidge (1967). He felt that to designate this specimen as the neotype of *oblonga* as suggested by Savage would add to the confusion, not help to resolve it.