

NEOROMICIA ROBERTS, 1926 (MAMMALIA VESPERTILIONIDAE): CORRECTION OF GENDER AND ETYMOLOGY

MARCO RICCUCCI^{1*}, BENEDETTO LANZA²

¹Gruppo Italiano Ricerca Chiroteri (G.I.R.C.), Via Maccatella 26/B, 56124 Pisa, Italy;

*Corresponding author, e-mail: marco.ricucci@alice.it

²Museo di Storia Naturale (Sezione Zoologica “La Specola”) e Dipartimento di Biologia Animale e Genetica, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Via Romana 17, 50125 Firenze, Italy; e-mail: benedetto.lanza@libero.it

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RIASSUNTO - *Neoromicia Roberts, 1926 (Mammalia Vespertilionidae): Correzione del genere grammaticale ed etimologia.* *Neoromicia Roberts, 1926*, sinora considerato erroneamente di genere maschile, è in realtà femminile. La sua etimologia deriva quasi certamente dal Greco antico “*ρόμιζα*”, corrispondente al Latino “*Rumex*” (sorta di giavelotto), per la presenza di un cospicuo sperone calcaneale in *Romicia calcarata*, specie tipo del genere.

Parole chiave: Nomenclatura, etimologia, *Romicia*, *Neoromicia*, Chiroptera, Vespertilionidae

According to the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN, 1999): Art. 31.2 (agreement in gender), “A species-group name, if it is or ends in a Latin or latinized adjective or participle in the nominative singular, must agree in gender with the generic name with which it is at any time combined.” Article 34.2, concerning mandatory changes in spelling, states “The ending of a Latin or latinized adjectival or participial species-group name must agree in gender with the generic name with which it is at any time combined [Art.31.2]; if the gender ending is incorrect it must be changed accordingly (the author and date of the name remain unchanged [Art.50.3.2]).” Furthermore, Art. 34.2.1 continues, “If a species group-name is a noun in apposition its ending need not agree in gender with the generic name with which it is combined and must not be

changed to agree in gender with the generic name [Art. 31.2.1].”

Neoromicia Roberts, 1926, with type species *Eptesicus zuluensis Roberts, 1924* by original designation, was described without any statement of gender. The name *Neoromicia* clearly was derived from *Romicia* by adding the prefix “neo” (new). Gray (1838) described *Romicia*, with type species *Romicia calcarata Gray, 1838* by monotypy. Although Gray did not explain his choice of *calcarata* as the species-group name, the meaning is clearly “provided with a spur”, a feminine adjective referring to the well-developed calcar (*R. calcarata* is a junior synonym of *Pipistrellus kuhlii* [Kuhl, 1817]). Therefore, *Romicia* is feminine and it follows that the gender of *Neoromicia* also is feminine.

Consequently, we correct the gender of the following specific names: *Neoromicia*

africanus becomes *N. africana*, *N. ater* becomes *N. atra*, *N. brunneus* becomes *N. brunnea*, *N. minusculus* becomes *N. minuscula*, *N. nanus* becomes *N. nana*, *N. notius* becomes *N. notia*, *N. pusillus* becomes *N. pusilla*, *N. somalicus* becomes *N. somalica*. The other specific names remain unchanged because they are adjectives of no fixed gender (e.g., *capensis*, *flavescens*, *zuluensis*), a noun in apposition (e.g., *helios*), or nouns in the genitive case (e.g., *melckorum*, *rendalli*, *ugandae*). Those species-group names requiring a change of gender were originally described as species of *Eptesicus* or *Pipistrellus*, both of which are masculine. Authors (including Simmons, 2005) did not change the original spelling when these taxa were transferred to *Neoromicia*.

Gray (1838) did not specify the etymology of *Romicia*; however it is almost certain that *Romicia* derives from the Greek word “ῥόμιζα”; (Liddell and Scott, 1992) (“*Rumex*” in Latin; Glare, 1992), meaning “a kind of javelin or hunting-spear”, a name obviously linked to the occurrence of the above mentioned conspicuous uropatagial spur in *Romicia calcarata*, type species of the genus.

The classically correct spelling of the Latin name would have been *Rhomicia*, as the correct Latin transliteration of the Greek «ῥ» with the *spiritus asper* (i.e., rough breathing) is “rh”. However, the original spelling is not to be changed.

The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature has been petitioned to rule that the gender of the name *Neoromicia* Roberts, 1924 is feminine (Case no. 3397, BNZ 2006).

The Case was closed on Decembrer, 2007 (BNZ 2007) and the Commission expressed this opinion on the subject:

“Case 3397 was reviewed by the ICZN Commissioners and their recommendation was that it should not be published (see the notice of closure in BZN 64 p.269).

The reason for this decision was that *Neoromicia* is, and has always been, feminine as you correctly stated. Specific names following *Neoromicia* should agree in gender (Article 30.1). When some authors recently transferred certain species from the genus *Pipistrellus* to *Neoromicia*, the ending should have been changed accordingly but this was apparently overlooked and masculine endings were published.

The next author to use these names should therefore correct the endings to the feminine gender. This is a mandatory change and no explanation need be given.

As such, this is not a matter which requires a ruling by the ICZN.” (Steven Tracey, ICZN Secretariat, *personal communication*, January 22, 2008).

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