

## Authorship of the Scientific Name of the Leatherback Sea Turtle

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Molehills adopted as territories tend to become mountains; the recent arguments about *Dermochelys coriacea* exemplify that generality (Fretey and Bour, 1980; Rhodin and Smith, 1982; Bour and Dubois, 1984). The molehill that was just the authorship, type, and type locality for that name has now become the mountain of the nomenclatural availability of numerous early taxonomic works, most totally unrelated to those initially involved.

Fretey and Bour (1980) first challenged the time-honored authorship of *Dermochelys coriacea* by Linnaeus (1766) by proposing that Vandelli (1761) was the original author. Rhodin and Smith (1982) rejected this proposal on the grounds of nomenclatural unavailability of the Vandelli paper and Vandelli's failure actually to employ the binomen *Testudo coriacea*, but accepted the new important information on the type specimen and type locality contained in that work and discovered by Fretey and Bour (1980). Bour and Dubois (1984) disagreed with Rhodin and Smith (1982), argued for the nomenclatural availability of Vandelli's work, and reinstated Vandelli as the original author, citing the need to maintain stability of other old names (e.g., *Testudo cartilagineus* Boddaert 1770) which might become threatened if the same rigorous interpretations of availability as applied by Rhodin and Smith (1982) to Vandelli's (1761) paper were applied to those other old names as well.

Bour and Dubois (1984) properly caution against a too rigorous application of the rules of zoological nomenclature when dealing with *nomina venerata*—names which have been in use for a long time and have become accepted by the scientific community. The underlying principle here is one of nomenclatural stability, and we have at no point ever suggested that long-accepted names be threatened. However, the change in authorship of *Dermochelys coriacea* from Linnaeus to Vandelli is a totally different matter, because "Vandelli, 1761" has never been an accepted authorship for *Testudo coriacea* except by Duméril and Bibron (1835), Bour (1979), and Fretey and Bour (1980), with all other authors both pre- and post-1835 preferring "*Testudo coriacea* Linnaeus 1766."

As pointed out by Bour and Dubois (1984), nomenclatural stability of *Dermochelys coriacea* is not

threatened by either the Fretey-Bour or the Rhodin-Smith interpretation—merely the authorship. The only advantages pointed out by Bour and Dubois (1984) for acceptance of Vandelli as author (a type specimen and a type locality, which are not clear in Linnaeus' description, although since he cited Vandelli's work the material available to Vandelli is syntypic, hence available for designation as lectotype) are equally inherent in the Rhodin-Smith interpretation, for they are the same. The designation by the latter authors of a lectotype that they had "not rediscovered themselves, let alone examined" (Bour and Dubois, 1984) was not a violation of professional conduct or protocol, as implied, but an expression of confidence in the merit of Bour and Fretey's discovery and an attempt to assure maximum proper use of it.

Had nomenclatural stability been involved, certainly no enlightened systematist would endorse a change in a name so long established, and for the same reason the names so long accepted of Schlosser, Boddaert, and Lacépède (examples cited by Bour and Dubois) cannot be challenged despite nomenclatural shortcomings of those works. But since only authorship is involved, one may look more critically at Vandelli's work, especially since Linnaeus had been accepted as author of *Dermochelys coriacea* for 137 years between 1842 and 1979 (Bour and Dubois, 1984), in addition to the 69 years between 1766 and 1835.

The discussion by Bour and Dubois (1984) of Vandelli's description of the leatherback sea turtle gives no indication that the expression *Testudo coriacea* (or even an isolated *coriacea* used in reference to *Testudo*) occurs anywhere in it, nor indeed does it, as Rhodin and Smith (1982) have pointed out. Vandelli merely discussed in Latin a leatherback turtle, for the benefit of Linnaeus, and the descriptive terminology required to do so created word-combinations appropriate as a basis for the formal name that Linnaeus finally applied. Vandelli did not actually apply it. Under the provisions of the second edition of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1964), credit could not, in our opinion, be given to Vandelli for a spelling he did not actually use, however clearly it might be implied. However, the new third edition of the Code (1985), in Article 11(h)(ii) now specifies that adjectival species-group names proposed in a Latin text but written only with an ending appropriate to a case other than the nominative singular are acceptable, and that the ending is to be corrected for the nominative singular. Because of this recent change in the Code, our objections to the Vandelli authorship of *Testudo coriacea* are no longer valid.

In conclusion, we agree with Bour and Dubois (1984) that Vandelli's 1761 paper is nomenclaturally available, and, because of the recent change in the Code, that the binomen *Testudo coriacea* can now be attributed to Vandelli. The scientific name for the leatherback turtle thus becomes *Dermochelys*

*lys coriacea* (Vandell, 1761), and the specimen at Padua University Museum remains the holotype as demonstrated by Fretey and Bour (1980), not the lectotype as proposed by Rhodin and Smith (1982).

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Accepted: 23 October 1985.