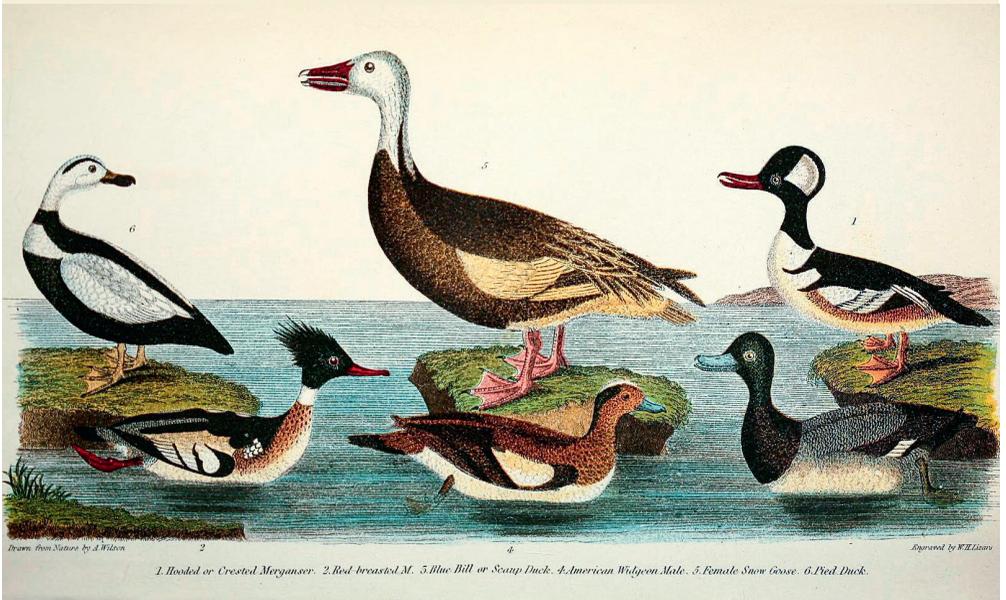


Contents

Acknowledgments	7
Author's Note	7
Introduction	9
The Namers	12
Bird Names A to Z	23
Glossary	387
Illustrations References	389
Notes	393



A IS FOR ACCENTOR



Alpine Accentor in Coloured figures of the birds of the British Islands (1885)

Accentor

The Prunellidae is a monogeneric family with thirteen members in the genus *Prunella* bearing the common name accentor. The German naturalist Bechstein first created the now-disused genus name in 1793, albeit for the “Water Ouzel” (White-throated Dipper):⁴⁶⁹

I am . . . creating a separate genus for it under the Latin name *Accentor*, or German water singer, because he sings well, and in winter no matter how cold it, as long as the sun is shining.

This name derives from the Latin “*accentor*,” meaning “one who sings with another” from *ad*, the preposition “to,” and *cantor*, “singer.”

Adjutant

Two species of storks are named for their supposed stiff military bearing. Latham called the Greater Adjutant the “Giant Crane” but gave a hint of the origin of the present-day name:¹⁶⁶

This singular species is not unfrequent at *Bengal*, where it arrives before the rainy season comes on, and is called *Argala*, or *Adjutant* . . . I have been told, that the bird has obtained this last name from its appearing, when looked on in front at a distance, like a man having a white waistcoat and breeches.

According to the same author, it had other local names, although it’s unclear if these were names given by the English in India or if they were translations of local names:

It has also, from its immense gape, gained the name of *Large Throat*; and, from its swallowing bones, the *Bone-eater*, or *Bone-taker*.



Bocage's Akalat and Miombo Scrub-Robin in Barbosa's Ornithologie d'Angola (1881)

Akalat

Nine species of akalats in the Muscicapidae (Old World flycatchers) are found in Central Africa. The name derives from the languages of Bulu and Fang (both Bantu languages), probably as a general term for small birds. In 1908 the British collector George L. Bates was quoted by Sharpe as corresponding:²⁴³

The little members of the genus *Turdinus* [as they were considered at the time], which are called in Fang and Bulu “Akalat,” are among the most secretive of birds, keeping to the dark thickets of the forest.

Akeke'e

A single species of Hawaiian honeycreeper in the Fringillidae bears the name Akeke'e. It's likely it stems from the Hawaiian word *ke'e*, which is defined in the Hawaiian-English dictionary as meaning “deformity, crooked, bent,” as a reference to the bird's asymmetric bill shape, like that of a crossbill. In the early 1900s, Perkins wrote in *Fauna Hawaiiensis*:²⁴⁴

The native names of the forest-birds are themselves of some interest, showing as they sometimes do the rudiments, as it were, of a crude, and often erroneous, classification. The names are certainly very aptly chosen, and their meaning is in most cases apparent to anyone with some knowledge of the language.

He included the Akeke'e in the category of

names given from peculiarities of structure or plumage, e.g. Akihioloa (*Hemignathus*) from its long, sharply-pointed beak; Nukupuu (*Heterorhynchus*) from its hill-like (i.e. strongly rounded) bill; Palila from its aberrant grey plumage. Such names are often compounded with *a-* beak (lit. jaw) e.g. Akekee, Amakihi, Akohekohe.

Akepa

Three species of Hawaiian honeycreepers in the genus *Loxops* bear the common name akepa. The name is derived from a Hawaiian word meaning “agile, active, or quick” due to the birds’ habit of very actively foraging at the tips of branches. Perkins noted:²⁴⁴

The various species of *Loxops* are amongst the most active of native birds and their name Akepa, signifying “sprightly” “turning this way and that,” is singularly appropriate. This name is applied by well-informed natives of the present day to both the species inhabiting Maui and Hawaii, and Bloxam gave the same name for the Oahuan form three-quarters of a century ago.

Akialoa

Four species in the genus *Akialoa* possess the same common name. All four are now very sadly extinct, but all possessed remarkably long decurved bills. Hawaiians named it for its *a-loa* or very long bill, *a-* for the bill and *loa* meaning “long.” The *Akia* element of the name is from the Hawaiian for “bird,” *akihī*. Perkins wrote that they are notable for “the excessive elongation of the beak” and:²⁴⁴

In their habits the species of this genus are quite intermediate between *Chlorodrepanis* and *Heterorhynchus*, since they are greater nectar-eaters than the members of the latter genus and hunt more persistently, creeper-like, on the limbs of forest trees for wood- and bark-eating insects than does the Amakihi (*Chlorodrepanis*).

Akiapolaau

Closely related to the above species, this Hawaiian honeycreeper is still extant on the island of Hawaii. The name comes from three Hawaiian words—*akihī*, “bird,” *po’o*, “dig,” and *la’au*, “branch,” which is indeed what the bird does with its superbly adapted bill. Henshaw wrote in his checklist of the birds of Hawaii in 1902:²⁴⁵

In the akiapolaau we have another of the interesting and extraordinary bird forms with which Nature has favored the Hawaiian Islands . . . [it] resembles the akialoa . . . but the yellow belly and the short, blunt mandible, in contrast with the long, delicate maxilla, serve at once to distinguish the two apart . . . the short, blunt mandible of the akiapolaau has conferred new powers upon it . . . By means of it, when the maxilla is agape, it can flake off lichens and even pound off small knobs and excrescences under which it suspects larvae to be concealed . . . [Nature] has given to others long bills and brush tipped tongues for probing hidden cavities and seizing the insect prey; and she has equipped the akiapolaau with a special device in the shape of a more or less effective hammer to expose the hidden retreats of larvae.

Akikiki

Another unique Hawaiian honeycreeper, this small, rather plain bird behaves somewhat like a nuthatch, but the name, although of the Hawaiian languages, is said to be onomatopoeic. However, it’s likely that the first part of the name is *akihī*, “bird” (see above). Perkins, who called the bird *Akikeke*, wrote:²⁴⁴

Both the Kauai and Molokai [the Kakawahie] species no doubt received their names from the characteristic cry which distinguishes *Oreomyza* from all other native birds—the reiterated ‘chip,’ with which they resent the presence of an intruder.



Akohekohe from *Wilson's Aves Hawaiienses: the birds of the Sandwich Islands* (1890)

Akohekohe

This very unusual Hawaiian honeycreeper resides in a monotypic genus, *Palmeria*. It's said that its Hawaiian name most likely originated from a variation of its low guttural song, "AH-kohay-kohay." And in 1895 Perkins wrote:²⁴²

The genus *Palmeria* contains but a single species (*P. doli*), which inhabits the higher forests of both Molokai and Maui, especially the wetter portions, where fog and rain are of constant occurrence. On the latter island the natives call it "akohekohe," but on Molokai several of them gave it the name of "hoe," and by repetition of this word gave a very recognizable imitation of its song, showing thereby that they were well acquainted with the bird.

However, Perkins claimed that it is one of the "Names given from peculiarities of structure or plumage . . . Such names are often compounded with *a*-beak (literally jaw) e.g. Akekee, Amakihi, Akohekohe."²⁴⁴ According to the *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language*, *kohe-kohe* is the name for a type of sedge grass, so the name would mean *a*- for "beak" and *kohe-kohe* for "grass," which certainly describes the brushy feather crest that curves forward over the bill.²⁴⁶ Rothschild recounted the diary of Henry Palmer, who collected on Hawaii from 1891 to 1893, who spoke of the name but gave no hint as to its meaning.³⁷

I was talking to an old Kanaka, and he described to me a bird somewhat like that of a farmyard-cock. In Keanei they told me about a bird with a comb, but as I could get no definite information from them I thought it was a myth, but this native assures me it was often seen in Kipalmlu Valley years ago. He calls it "Akohekohe."

Alauahio

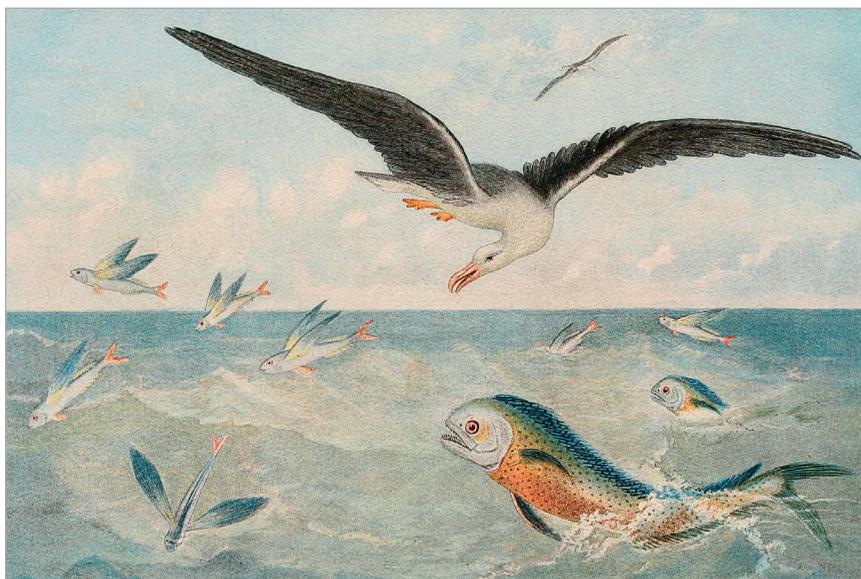
Two species of Hawaiian honeycreepers in the genus *Paroreomyza* sport the name alauahio; one is now extinct and the other is endangered. Perkins wrote in the early 1900s:²⁴⁴

The three most nearly resembling each other, *O. maculata* of Oahu, *O. newtoni* [no longer valid] of Maui, and *O. montana* of Lanai are called Alauwahio, or by the shorter name Alauwi or Lauwi, indiscriminately in each case.

The exact derivation of the name is unknown, given in Andrews's *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* from 1865 as:²⁴⁶

Alauwahio (ā-lā'u-wā-hī'o), n. A small yellow bird (*Oreomyza montana*) resembling the canary. Also known as alauhiio. See lauwi.

The name is thought to be echoic of the bird's pleasant song.



Wandering Albatross in Alfred Frédo's (Moquin-Tandon's) *Le Monde de la Mer* (1866)

Albatross

The fifteen species in the Diomedidae all go by the vernacular name albatross. The story of the word is a convoluted one. The word came into the English language from the Portuguese form *alcatraz* for the pelican. The Portuguese acquired their word from the Arabic الغَطَّاس *al-ḡaṭṭās*, “the diver,” also their name for the pelican. The Arabic name is an etymon of القَادُوس *al-qādūs*, “the bucket,” which in turn is from the Ancient Greek κάδος *kádos*, meaning a “pail or jar,” a reference to the pelican's voluminous gular pouch in which, as it was believed at the time, they carried water to their young. Newton wrote albatross is⁷

a corruption of the Spanish and Portuguese *Alcatraz* or *Alcaduz* . . . The word is Arabic, *al-cádous*, adopted from the Greek κάδος, water-pot or bucket, and especially signifying the leathern bucket of an irrigating machine. Thence it was applied to the Pelican, from the resemblance of that bird's pouch, in which it was believed to carry water to its young in the wilderness.

The name, with various spellings such as *alcatraza*, *alcatross* and *albitross*, was used fairly indiscriminately for all sorts of seabirds in the past, but over time came to be used for the members of the Diomedidae.⁷ It's thought the later modification of the spelling to albatross was perhaps influenced by the Latin word *albus*, feminine *alba*, meaning “white,” in contrast to frigatebirds and other waterbirds, which are black.

Alethe

There are six species of alethes, two in the genus *Alethe* and four in the genus *Chamaeactylas*, all in the Old World flycatcher family, the Muscicapidae, and all found in sub-Saharan Africa. The etymology of this unusual common name is unclear. The genus was erected by Cassin in 1859, but the same year du Chaillu appeared to be surprised at the choice of name when he wrote in *Journal für Ornithologie*.⁸⁹

The new genus *Alethe* (!), the somewhat mysterious etymology of which we have unfortunately not yet managed to find, is described by Cassin.

The word *alitheia* is the Greek for “truth or reality,” and Alethe is presented as the Priestess of Isis in a novel, *The Epicurean*, by Thomas Moore, the seventeenth-century Irish poet. In the tale, apparently, Alethe was given “the most honourable of the minor ministries . . . to wait upon the sacred birds of the Moon, to feed them daily with eggs from the Nile, of which they were fond, and provide for their use purist water.” She is the most beautiful of the priestesses and the hero of the story, Alciphron, endures an initiation into Christianity in order to stay with her. In the end, they are both persecuted and killed by the Romans. But Alethe’s birds were Sacred Ibis, so why this moniker was attached to such dissimilar birds is unclear. (There is also the goddess of truth, Alithea, who was apparently Apollo’s nurse; and Alethes, son of Hippotas and the king of Corinth.)

Amakihi

Four species (one now extinct) of Hawaiian honeycreepers sport the name amakihi. Although Perkins includes the Amakihi in his group of “names given from peculiarities of structure or plumage . . . [which] are often compounded with *a-* beak (lit. jaw),” this doesn’t account for the *ma* syllable.²⁴⁴ The name is properly spelled *‘Ama-kīhi*. The word *ama* means “talkative,” while *kīhi* means “curved or corner.” It seems likely that these common (formerly, in some cases) and vocal birds were dubbed “talkative curve bills” by the original inhabitants of the islands.

Amāui

This Hawaiian thrush, which was sadly the first of the genus to go extinct, got its name from the name ‘Āmaui for all the thrushes from Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and Oahu that were considered by the Hawaiians to be one species. See Hawaiian Thrushes for more details.

Anhinga

Although there are four species in the *Anhinga* genus, found on four different continents, only one bears the common name Anhinga. The name was first used by Marcgrave in the scientific literature in 1648 when he referred to the *Anhinga Brasiliensibus Tupinambæ*, with the meaning “the Anhinga of the Brazilian Tupinamba.”⁹⁰ Garcia wrote that the etymology is¹³³

é nombre antiguo tupi, que equivale á *cabeza pequeña*. [an old Tupi name, which is equivalent to *small head*.]

The *añágá*, *ajítia*, or *ayinga* was in local beliefs a jungle spirit or demon (the word is still used in present-day Brazilian-Portuguese, for example in the Brazilian municipality Itanhanga “itá + añágá”: devil’s rock). No doubt the bird’s hieratic stance with wings outstretched and snake-like appearance in the water contributed to the Tupi superstitions. As Wilson noted:⁹⁸

In those countries where noxious animals abound, we may readily conceive that the appearance of this bird, extending its slender neck through the foliage of a tree, would tend to startle the wary traveller, whose imagination had portrayed objects of danger lurking in every thicket.

Nash wrote that in the mid-1500s, Aspilcueta, the Spanish missionary⁹¹

would go among them [the Tupi] adopting the technique of the Indian pagés, singing out the mysteries of the Roman faith, running round his auditors, stamping his feet, clapping his hands, making the easy substitution of Hell for Anhangá, copying the very tones and gestures of the medicine men by whom they were wont to be affected.

Over time the name changed to *anhinga* in the Tupi-Portuguese *Língua Geral*, the simplified version of the Tupi languages.



Groove-billed Ani (Mexico)

Ani

The anis are three species of large, all-black cuckoos found in the Caribbean and Middle and South America. The name was coined in the early nineteenth century from the Spanish *ani* and Portuguese *anum*, which both came from the Tupi *a'nũ*, the name given specifically to these three species in the genus *Crotophaga*.²⁵ According to Garcia in his *Nomes de Aves em Língua Tupi (Names of Birds in the Tupi Language)* from 1913, it is not an onomatopoeic name, but rather it derives from the Tupi radical *anã* for “related, kin” followed by the suffix *úm* for “black or dark.”¹³³ He wrote that:

The interpretation of Batista Caetano seems to me all the more true as the ornithologists say that this species is mainly characterized by their communal customs, living in bands and making large colonial nests, where the females lay the eggs jointly.

Anianiau

Another Hawaiian honeycreeper with a unique name deriving from the Hawaiian language. Like many of the Hawaiian bird names beginning with *a-*, this bird is named for the shape of its beak. Perkins wrote in the early 1900s that the name²⁴⁴

is admirably adapted to the bird in question, A-nianiau meaning simply straight-beak.

Antbird

Most members of the *Thamnophilidae*, the typical antbirds, bear compound names based on the ant theme. Ninety-seven, and counting, different species possess the antbird designation. The etymology is very straightforward—many, but not all, of these forest-dwelling understory birds regularly attend army-ant swarms feeding on fleeing insects as they go.

Anteater-Chat

These two very closely related birds are members of the *Myrmecocichla* genus in the *Muscicapidae* from Africa. Both of them feed on all sorts of invertebrates, but mainly ants, which they forage for by hopping and jumping on the ground. (See Chat.)

Antpecker

Three species of antpeckers in the *Estrildidae* occur in West and Central Africa. Most of the estrildids feed primarily on seeds, but the antpeckers, in the genus *Parmoptila*, as the name suggests, feed on ants, and sometimes other small invertebrates, by pecking them from stems or off the ground.

Antpiper

The antpipits are two species of *Corythopsis* in the *Tyrannidae*, the tyrant flycatchers of the New World. As is often the case with compound bird names, they superficially resemble their Old World counterparts, the pipits (see entry). The first element of the name suggests their feeding habits, although studies have shown beetles constitute 40 percent of their diet, with ants only 20 percent.¹

Antpitta

The seventy antpittas (two in the *Conopophagidae* and sixty-eight in the *Grallariidae*) superficially resemble the pittas (see entry) of the Old World, thus explaining the latter part of the compound word. Surprisingly, they show no obvious predilection for eating ants but do favor a mixed diet of invertebrates.

Antshrike

Fifty-three species belonging to fourteen genera in the *Thamnophilidae* bear a superficial resemblance to the Old World shrikes, with strong, hooked bills. As with so many birds, the early naturalists or settlers of English descent misnamed this group due to a similarity to species from Europe with which they were more familiar. They regularly join mixed feeding flocks of insectivores, and some are known to occasionally follow army-ant swarms.



Spot-backed Antshrike and Giant Antshrike (with Magpie Tanager and House Wren) in Descourtilz's Ornithologie Brésilienne (1854)

Antthrush

The antthrushes are a family, the Formicariidae, of twelve species in two genera from the Neotropics. They bear a (very) superficial resemblance to thrushes (family Turdidae), but, despite the moniker, they infrequently attend ant swarms and more typically forage on the forest floor, flipping leaf litter for invertebrate prey.

Ant-Thrush

The capitalized word “Thrush” in the hyphenated name denotes that these are two species of true thrushes. They are members of the *Neocossyphus* genus in the Turdidae found in Central and West Africa. Although they will feed on all types of invertebrates, they attend army-ant swarms, dominating smaller bird species. One species in particular, the White-tailed Ant-Thrush, is rarely seen away from the swarms and is heavily dependent on them.

Antvireo

Eight species of thamnophilids possess the name antvireo. As with all the members of the antbird family, they feed on ants, although, as foliage gleaners, a variety of invertebrates comprise the diet. Presumably, the early English-speaking naturalists who encountered these birds thought they looked a lot like vireos. (See Vireo.)

Antwren

Sixty-one species belonging to nine genera in the Thamnophilidae, the typical antbirds, are somewhat wren-like but, of course, unrelated to the wrens of the Troglodytidae. They generally do not follow ant swarms, but feed by actively gleaning insects from foliage.³

Apalis

There are twenty-six species of apalis of two genera, *Oreolais* and the synonymous *Apalis*, in the Cisticolidae. All occur in Africa. In 1838, Swainson erected the genus name *Apalis* from the Ancient Greek *απαλος hapalos*, meaning “delicate, tender, or gentle,” an apt description of these small birds.⁵⁰

Apapane

This Hawaiian fringilid (finch) is the most abundant of the honeycreepers; it is a vocal gymnast with at least ten different songs and six calls. The name is the Hawaiian name for the bird; Perkins included it in his category of “Names derived from the nature of the sounds uttered by the bird,” describing it as²⁴⁴

a most untiring songster and its song though short is pleasing, but from constant repetition becomes wearisome. Its call note is a plaintive whistle.

Apostlebird

The single species of Apostlebird, in the Corcoracidae, is endemic to Australia and is supposedly always found in groups of twelve, hence the reference to apostles, but of course, the numbers vary. The name was given to it by local settlers in the late 1800s. Robert Hall, who called it the “Grey Jumper” noted the popular name:¹⁷⁰

It is a noticeable feature in winter to see about a dozen together, from which the common name “Twelve Apostles,” or Apostle-bird, has been derived.

Aracari

Eleven species in the Ramphastidae, the toucans, are known as aracarís. All are in the genus *Pteroglossus*. The name was coined in the early nineteenth century via Portuguese from the Tupi *arasa'ri*. Marcgrave, who first introduced the name to European scholars in the mid-1600s, suggested that the name is echoic of the vocalizations, writing in Latin:⁹⁰

Avis haec quasi suum nomen profert, clamando acuto sono sed non admodum clangoro *Aracari*. [This brings us to the name of the bird, calling with a sharp tone and not a very loud *Aracari*.]

And Garcia wrote in 1913:¹³³

O nome *Araçari* por que tambem se designam essas aves, é onomatopaico do grito que ellas soltam. [The name *Araçari*, as these birds are also called, is onomatopoeic of the cry that they release.]



Black-necked Aracari and Curl-crested Aracari in Descourtilz's Ornithologie Brésilienne (1854)

WikiAves²⁴⁷, a website aimed at the Brazilian community of birdwatchers, claims that the name means “little bright bird (like the day)”; the word *’ara* meaning “day” in Tupi.

Argus

The three argus pheasants found in Southeast Asia have hundreds or thousands of ocelli, eye-like spots in their plumage pattern, and thus the name refers to the mythical hundred-eyed giant Argus Panoptes of Greek mythology, whose murder by Hermes so upset Hera that she transformed his eyes into the beautiful jewels of a peacock’s tail. Although he had only ever seen a specimen of the bird, Edwards wrote an accurate description of the plumage in 1751:⁷⁸

What is most extraordinary in these feathers is that each of them has on the outer web, close adjoining to the shaft, a row of very distinct spots like eyes, so shaded as to appear imbossed; they are larger and smaller as the feathers to the outer quills; they are from twelve to fifteen on each feather; the largest eyes are an inch diameter; they are incircled first with black, and without that with light brown, their shafts are white; the eyes, in the two or three innermost quills, are not so regularly marked, they lose their roundness and become confused. These beautiful eyes are not seen unless the wings are a little spread.



Great Argus from Gould's *Birds of Asia* (1850)

Asity

The etymology of the name for these two species of Madagascar endemics in the Philepittidae lies in the local Malagasy name for the birds. In G. E. Shelley's discussion of the Velvet Asity in *The Birds of Africa, comprising all the species which occur in the Ethiopian region* (1900), he stated:¹³⁹

Owing to the numerous native dialects spoken in Madagascar, the present species is not only known as "Asity," but according to the Rev. J. Sibree as, "Variamanangana" in the Betsileo country, and as "Tsoitsoy" by the Betsimisaraka people.

He also applied the name to the bird he called the *Yellow-breasted "Asity,"* the present-day Schlegl's Asity. In his *New Malagasy-English Dictionary* from 1885, Richardson listed "Asity: A bird allied to the ground thrushes [Pittae]" referring to the Philepittidae.²³¹ (See also Sunbird-Asity.)

Astrapia

These remarkable birds are five species of birds-of-paradise from New Guinea in the synonymous genus *Astrapia*. The common name derives from the genus name, which is said to be from the Greek ἀστραπῆς *astrapēis* for "lightning or flashing." The genus name was erected by Vieillot in 1816 without elaboration.²⁴⁸ It is a reference to the male's iridescent plumage and long, flowing tail feathers. Vieillot may have been thinking of the ἀστραπῆς *astrapēis*, the lightning stone, that is mentioned in Pliny as "a precious stone, black in color, with gleams of light crossing the middle of it," a description that would perfectly fit the iridescent velvety-black plumage of these spectacular birds-of-paradise.⁴⁷⁰

Attila

The genus *Attila* is also the common name given to these seven members of the Tyrannidae of the New World. Lesson erected the genus in 1831, calling Bright-rumped Attila by the colloquial name "Le Tyran olive."²⁴¹ Although he gave no specific reason for his choice of the appellation, we can be fairly certain that the use of the *tyran(t)* and the name Attila are correlated. Attila the Hun was indeed a tyrant who terrorized large swathes of Europe in the fifth century. He was described in the fifth century by Priscus, the Greek historian, as

being “short of stature with a broad chest and a large head . . . and a swarthy complexion,” a description that could possibly fit for the gray or even the typical morphs of the Bright-rumped Attila.⁴⁷¹ It may seem odd that a New World bird should be named after an Old World despot, but the hegemony of Europe was overarching in the early 1800s, and many names were given to species from the study of specimens that had never been seen in the wild by the students of natural history whose world view 200 years ago was very different from our own.

Auk and Auklet

Seven species of small Alcidae, the auks, murre, and puffins, get their names from the late-seventeenth-century Old Norse *alka*, and the Proto-Germanic *alkō*, usually claimed as probably originally imitative of a waterbird cry. The name *Alka* was first mentioned in the literature, possibly for the Razorbill, of Clusius in 1605 from correspondence he received from Høyer, the Norwegian physician who collected in the Faroe Islands in the 1600s, thus accounting for the Scandinavian origins.^{249, 338} It's likely the name *Alka* was used in Scandinavia for many species of black and white alcids. The first use of the English name auk is in Ray and Willughby, where they used it to refer to a related bird, “the Razor-bill, *Auk* or *Murre*. *Alca Hoieri*”:¹⁶

Hoiers Alka and our *Awk* . . . hatcheth its young ones in holes and chinks of high Promontories. That Hoier was not mistaken in the name of this Bird I conclude, because it is called by the very same name, *viz. Auk*, in the North of *England*; so that it is manifest either our Northern men borrowed it of the *Ferroese*, or the *Ferroese* of them, it being very unlikely that by chance they should impose the same name upon it. But that ours borrowed this name of the *Ferroese* seems to me more probable because in other parts of *England*, farther distant from the *Ferroyer* Islands this Bird is called by other names.

Lockwood argued that the Old Norse *alka* had the original meaning of *neck*, in reference to the Razorbill's habit of bending its head over its back.³³⁷

Such characteristic behavior has played a part in the nomenclature, witness one of the Faroese names *nakkalanga* lit. “long neck.” Indeed, the very name we are dealing with appears to be no more than a secondary application of an unrecorded sense of ON *alka*, namely “neck,” preserved in the Icelandic idiom *teygja álkuna* “crane the neck.”

Most authorities don't appear to have accepted this explanation, a fact that Lockwood referred to:

The etymologists have been rather cavalier in their treatment of this item, and the circumstances of its transmission into English and subsequent fate await clarification.

The addition of the diminutive suffix *-let*, from the Latin diminutive *-ettus*, is applied to smaller auks.

Avadavat

There are two avadavats, small estrildid finches found in Asia. The name is a variant of the earlier *amadavat*, an old spelling of Ahmedabad, a city in Gujarat, India, from which the bird was imported to Europe. Another old name for the bird was Amandava. In *Hobson-Jobson: being a glossary of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms etymological, historical, geographical and discursive* by Henry Yule in 1886 an entry reads:²⁵⁰

Avadavat: Improperly for Amadavat. The name given to a certain pretty little cage-bird (*Estrela amandava*, L. or “Red Wax-Bill”) found throughout India, but originally brought to Europe from Ahmadābād in Guzerat, of which the name is a corruption.

One of the earliest references to the bird is in Fryer’s *New Account of East India and Persia* from 1673:³³¹

From Amidavad, small Birds, who, besides that they are spotted with white and Red no bigger than Measles, the principal Chorister beginning, the rest in Consort, Fifty in a Cage, make an admirable Chorus.



American Avocet (Arizona, USA)

Avocet

The common name was originally assigned to the Pied Avocet and is said to derive from the Venetian name *avosetta*. It appeared first in the Italian naturalist Aldrovandi’s *Ornithologiae* in 1637 under the heading “Avosetta Italis Dicta.”¹⁰¹ Ray and Willughby referred to “The Avosetta of the Italians” in 1678,¹⁶ while Pennant popularized the name in English in *British Zoology* in 1776.¹⁷⁷ The etymology of the Italian word is unrecorded, but it seems likely that it came from the Latin *avis* for “bird” and the diminutive *-etta*. Newton stated that the word comes “from the Ferrarese *Avosetta*” and goes on to say:⁷

This word is considered to be derived from the Latin *avis*—the termination expressing a diminutive of a graceful or delicate kind, as *donnetta* from *donna* . . . but it is spelt *Avocetta* by Prof. Giglioli [in *Avifauna Italica*].

Avocetbill

One species of hummingbird, the Mountain Avocetbill, in the monotypic genus *Opisthoprora* carries this name. It is a clear reference to the shape of the bill, which is sharply upturned at the tip, in a very similar shape to that of an avocet’s. In every other way, it bears no resemblance whatsoever to an avocet. Wood (1862) stated in *The Illustrated Natural History*:⁸⁵

This singular species is remarkable for the curious manner in which the bill is curved upwards at the extremity, after running nearly straight for the greater part of its length. As this formation of beak bears some resemblance to that which is found in

the well-known Avocet, the present species has been named the Avocet Hummingbird. When the first specimen of this bird was brought to Europe, the peculiar shape of the beak was thought to be accidental, and owing to pressure against the side of the box in which the bird had been packed; but it is now clear that the structure is intentional, and that in all probability, it subserves some very important purpose. Some persons have suggested, with some show of reason, that the beak is recurved in order to enable the bird to feed upon the nectar and insects which reside in the deepest recesses of certain tubular flowers.

Awlbill

The single species of awlbill, Fiery-tailed Awlbill in the genus *Avocettula*, is a hummingbird with a very unusually shaped bill. The end of the bill is sharply upturned in a shape resembling the tip of a stitching awl, a tool used to puncture holes when sewing heavy and thick materials. Gould noted the somewhat similar shapes of the bills of this species and the Avocetbill, calling the bird now known as an awlbill, the “Fiery-tailed Avocet”.⁶

Avocettula and *Avocettinus* are the generic terms applied to the two species rendered remarkable by the points of the mandibles being curved upwards in the shape of a hook: this extraordinary deviation from the usual structure is doubtless designed for some especial purpose; but what that may be, is at present unknown to us.



Fiery-tailed Awlbill from Gould's Monograph of the Trochilidæ (1849)

B IS FOR BABAX



Giant Babax in Dresser's *Descriptions of Three new Species of Birds* obtained during the recent Expedition to Lhasa (1905)

Babax

Four species of the Leiothrichidae, the laughingthrushes and allies, were previously in the genus *Babax*, which was erected by Père Armand David in 1875. In his account of the Chinese Babax he wrote:⁹²

And all year round, this bird is very talkative and makes its strange notes heard about everything, which sometimes are very sweet and sometimes seem to express anger. The new generic name we are proposing for this species, *Babax*, a synonym of *Garrulax*, alludes to this endless babble.

The name is derived from the Ancient Greek onomatopoeic word βαβάζω *babázō*, “to speak inarticulately,” with related words such as βάβιον *bábion*, “child,” and βάβαχοι *bábakoi*, “cicadas,” and clearly refers to the bird’s garrulous, varied vocalizations.

Babbler

It’s thought that the name was first used in ornithology in 1837, but it derives from a word used from the sixteenth century to describe a foolish, chattering person. The word “babble” comes from the mid-thirteenth-century word *babeln*—to prattle and utter sounds indistinctly and talk like a baby, so probably originally imitative of baby talk. Certainly many of the birds given the epithet are vocal and active, as well as often very social, hence the designation. Most species boasting the name were confined to the Timaliidae, described in Newton as a family that⁷

no systematist has yet been able to define satisfactorily, while many have not unjustly regarded it as a “refuge for the destitute.”



Puff-throated Babbler (Vietnam)

Indeed, he and others have been proven to be correct as the many babblers now spread across several different families. The name is used in many hyphenated forms, as well. These are striped-babbler, shrike-babbler, jewel-babbler, rail-babbler, pygmy-babbler, tit-babbler, wren-babbler, scimitar-babbler, pied-babbler, mountain-babbler, and thrush-babbler.

Bamboo-Partridge

Three Asian members of the Phasianidae in the genus *Bambusicola* are called bamboo-partridge. Gould erected the genus in 1863 from the scientific name for “bamboo,” *Bambusa*, and the *-cola*, “dweller”:³³

The predilection the bird . . . evinces for bamboo forests suggested the term *Bambusicola*.

He also appears to have been the first to use the name “Bamboo Partridge,” although Swinhoe may have foreshadowed it with the name “Bamboo-fowl.”²²⁶

Bamboowren

The Spotted Bamboowren is not a wren, but rather a member of the Rhinocryptidae, the tapaculos. Or at least, it now is—in the past, it has been placed in the Thamnophilidae, the antbirds; the Troglodytidae, the wrens; and the Polioptilidae, the gnatcatchers. With its cryptic coloring and cocked tail, it certainly looks like a wren. It favors bamboo stands and very dense vegetation, in which it skulks. The name appears to have first been used as late as the 1990s.

Bananaquit

A small, nectarivorous songbird in the New World, the name comes from banana and *quit*, used for several species of small passerines dating back to the 1800s. The word *quit* is used in several other bird names (e.g., Grassquit, Orangequit) and derives from a Caribbean word applied to small birds. *Quit-quit* was the small bird in the “Anansi” Jamaican folk stories that

originated in West Africa and were transmitted to the Caribbean by way of the transatlantic slave trade. It is onomatopoeic, from the call note described as *quit-quit*.⁴⁰⁴ Newton wrote:⁷

Quit [is] a name applied in Jamaica, and perhaps some others of the British Antilles, to several very different kinds of birds, probably from the note they utter.



Coppersmith Barbet (Malaysia)

Barbet

The barbets are birds of three families (previously one) found on three continents: Asia, Africa, and South America. Across the three families, all share the characteristics of short, thick bills; small, ovoid bodies; and rictal bristles. These canopy-dwelling fruit eaters derive their name from the French *barbe* meaning “beard; long hair of certain animals,” which references the group’s distinctive rictal bristles. Buffon justified the common name in 1780:⁸

The Naturalists have given the name of barbet to several birds which have the base of the beak trimmed with slender feathers, long, stiff as bristles & all directed forward.

Barbtail

This is a group of four birds in the Furnariidae, the ovenbirds and woodcreepers, of Central and South America. The name is descriptive—all have tails that are graduated with the central rectrices slightly stiffened, with the distal 3–6 mm of shafts lacking barbs, giving the appearance of spines. The tails are used for support as the birds forage by creeping along trunks and branches.

Barbthroat

The barbthroats are three species of hummingbirds, all in the genus *Threnetes*. The name is descriptive, referring to the spiky feathers on the chin and throat. Gould was the first to give this group a common English name, calling them “Barbed-throats” in 1849.⁶

Bare-eye

As the common generic name suggests, the three members of the *Thamnophilidae* in the genus *Phlegopsis* all have bare skin around the eyes. Bare orbital patches in birds can serve a number of functions, such as sexual communication for advertising status or quality, group signaling, thermoregulation, or the prevention of soiling of the feathers in species that feed on fruit or carcasses. In the case of these understory denizens of the Neotropical rainforests, the function is debated but is most likely associated with communication.

Barwing

There are seven species of medium-sized Asian “babblers,” all in the genus *Actinodura*, in the diverse *Leiothrichid* family. The name is descriptive; all have distinctive black barring on a chestnut background on the wings.



Spectacled Barwing from Gould's Birds of Asia (1850)

Bateleur

The Bateleur is a striking and large raptor, widespread throughout the African continent. The unusual name, originally assigned by legendary eighteenth-century naturalist and explorer Le Vaillant, is borrowed from the French word *bateleur* meaning “juggler” or “acrobat” due to the bird’s habit of rocking and tilting in gliding flight and from its habit of performing aerial somersaults. He described the bird in 1799:⁹³

The Bateleur soars in circles, and lets escape from time to time two very raucous sounds, one of which is waxing an octave higher than the other; often it suddenly folds down its flight, and descends to a certain distance, beating the air of his wings, so that one would think that he is injured and will fall to the ground. His female never fails to repeat the same game. We can hear these wingbeats at a very great distance; I cannot better compare the noise which results from it, and which is only a rustling in the air, than that made by a sail, one of the corners of which has come loose, and which a great wind blows violently. . . . I got the name of this bird from its way of playing in the air: one might say, in fact, a juggler who performs feats of strength to amuse the spectators.

Batis

Small songbirds with a sub-Saharan distribution in Africa, the batises comprise nineteen species in the Platysteiridae. All are fairly similar in appearance, with predominantly black and white plumage and distinctive yellow to gold irides. The common name is also the genus name and derives from the Ancient Greek *βατίς batis* or *batidos*, an unidentified worm-eating bird mentioned by Aristotle:¹⁰⁹

Others feed on grubs, such as the chaffinch, the sparrow, the “batis,” the green linnet, and the titmouse.

In the *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae*, printed in 1578, an entry reads:¹⁰⁸

Batis, Plin. [Pliny]. . . . A little bird, also much like the bunting.

At the time, the use of the word was probably in reference to a variety of buntings, warblers, and chats or possibly the European Stonechat. The nineteenth-century German naturalist Boie, who coined the name for the genus in 1833, possibly thought that the description of the calls of the various species recalled those of the Stonechat.

Bay-Owl

The genus *Phodilus*, containing three species of bay-owls, is characterized by the birds’ unusually shaped facial disc. One of the earliest accounts of the Oriental Bay Owl is in Latham who confirmed the etymology of the name:¹⁷

Plumage bay, spotted with black, paler beneath; front of the head, and chin whitish, variegated with bay; legs covered with down, colour pale chestnut.

Not related to the name but an amusing anecdote was related by Temminck:⁹⁴

This Owl is little known in Java, its favorite home away from homes and villages is always in the interior of the most dense forests, of which it rarely abandons the protective shade. It is believed that she prefers the den of the Royal Tiger to any other dwelling, and the people claim that she approaches this animal with impunity, in the same manner, says Mr. Horsfield, that the [myna] will pose without fear on



Oriental Bay Owl from Gould's Birds of Asia (1850)

the backs of the Oxen: our Owl would have no distrust of the Tiger, and would rest on its back. This popular opinion needs to be confirmed by observations so that it can be credited.

Baywing

The baywings are two species of medium-sized icterids (troupials and allies) found in Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. The name is descriptive, as both species have rufous to chestnut wings. This name was formerly used for Vesper Sparrow in North America.⁴⁰⁵



Black Baza in Temminck's *Nouveau recueil de planches coloriées d'oiseaux* (1838)

Baza

A small genus, the *Aviceda* is three species of medium-sized, crested hawks found from India and China, through Southeast Asia to New Guinea and Australia. The name derives from the Hindi *baaz*, meaning “hawk.” The origin is, however, from the Farsi word *باز* *bāz*. The name was originally erected as a genus without explanation by Hodgson in the 1836 issue of *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.⁹⁶ (See Besra.)

Becard

The genus *Pachyramphus*, all known colloquially as becards, comprises sixteen species in the Tityridae, the tityras and allies. The name comes from the French *bécarde*, from *bec* meaning “beak,” and the suffix *-arde*, a marker of “belonging.” Although originally referring to Black-tailed Tityra, Buffon created the name in the eighteenth century in his *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux* in homage to the broad, slightly hooked bills:⁸

Ainsi nommées à cause de leur gros & long bec rouge; ont le corps plus épais que nos pie-grièches; celles envoyées de Cayenne sous les noms de pie-grièche grise & de pie-grièche tachetée, paroissent être le mâle & la femelle; notre bécarde à ventre jaune, est la pie-grièche jaune de Cayenne. [So named because of their large & long red beaks; they have a thicker body than our shrikes; those sent from Cayenne under the names of gray shrike & spotted shrike, appear to be the male & female; our yellow-bellied becard is the yellow shrike of the Cayenne.]

The genus name similarly means broad bill.



Purple-bearded Bee-eater (Sulawesi, Indonesia)

Bee-eater

The Meropidae are a family of twenty-eight species found throughout much of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. All bear the common name bee-eater despite belonging to three different genera. The name derives from their habits—they are sit-and-wait predators and are literally eaters of bees, favoring bees and wasps.³ The name is first used in Charleton’s *Onomasticon Zoicon* in 1668, which is written in Latin with the English “Bee-eater” a direct translation of *Apiaster* in the heading.³³⁹ Ray and Willughby wrote in 1678:¹⁶

Flying in the air it catches and preys upon Bees, as Swallows do upon flies. It flies not singly, but in flocks, and especially by the sides of those Mountains where the true Thyme grows. Its Voice is heard afar off, almost like to the whistling of a man.

Bellbird

A number of unrelated species are endowed with the name bellbird: four species of cotingas in Central and South America, two species of honeyeaters in the New Zealand genus *Anthornis*, and three species of Oreocidae (Australo-Papuan bellbirds) in New Guinea and Australia. In all cases, the name is descriptive of the bell-like vocalizations. Also note that throughout much of Australia the Bell Miner, an aggressive honeyeater, is known informally as “the Bellbird” due to its tinkling song. Latham described the Bearded Bellbird, a cotinga, in 1821:¹⁷

This species inhabits Brasil, called there *Araponga*; and has a loud voice, which may be heard a great way off . . . : this cry is of two kinds, one like that of a hammer, striking on a wedge; the other similar to the noise of a cracked bell . . . Hence called by the English, the *Bell Bird*.

Bentbill

Two species of unusual Tyrannidae belong to the genus *Oncostoma*, derived from the Ancient Greek *ὄγκος onkos* and *στόμα stoma*, which translates as “bulky mouth.” This is probably a better description of the unusual shape of the bill than the common name conveys. Nevertheless, their name references the bird’s short, broad, and distinctively downcurved bill with a notably thick upper mandible. An older name from the early 1900s for the bentbills was “bent-billed flycatcher.”

Bernieria

Alphonse Charles Joseph Bernier was a French medical doctor and naval surgeon who collected extensively in Madagascar in the early to mid-1800s. One of the birds he collected was a Malagasy Warbler in the Bernieridae now known as Long-billed Bernieria. Pucheran described the species from the specimen in 1855, naming the genus *Bernieria* in the doctor’s honor.



Hooded Berryeater in Swainson’s Zoological Illustrations (1820)

Berryeater

Two rather similar-looking species of cotingas in the genus *Carpornis* are known, somewhat unimaginatively, as berryeaters, due to their penchant for fruit.

Berryhunter

The single species of berryhunter is a drab, poorly known bird from the mountains of New Guinea belonging to a monotypic family, the Rhagologidae. What is known is that it likes berries, hence the name, which is, of course, descriptive.

Berrypecker

The common name berrypecker is assigned to two species in the Paramythiidae and seven species of Melanocharitidae, all from New Guinea. All eight species feed predominantly, if not entirely, on fruit, hence the descriptive name.

Besra

This sleek avivore is a relatively small *Accipiter*. Its unique name comes from the Hindi word *Basra*, which is the diminutive of *Baaz*, meaning “hawk” or “goshawk,” as it does in Arabic also (باز *baz*). The name in Hindi is used only for the female bird; the males are known as *Dhotee* or *Dharti*. Blyth explained the names in 1849:²⁸³

Básra (diminutive of *Báz*, “Goshawk”), and the male—*Dharti* (“a handful,” or “held in the hand”). Hindi.

Vikram Jit Singh wrote in the *Hindustan Times*:¹⁰²

The choice of English name [used for both sexes] underlines the female’s precedence over the male because in raptors or birds of prey, the females are larger and pack more power than males.

(See Baza.)



Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise from Elliot’s *A Monograph of the Paradiseidae* (1873)

Bird-of-Paradise

The birds-of-paradise, found in eastern Indonesia, New Guinea, and Australia, are among the most legendary and mysterious of birds. And the story of how they got their common name is no less intriguing. The first Europeans to encounter birds-of-paradise acquired their skins during the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan on his circumnavigation of the Earth. The Italian scholar Antonio Pigafetta, who was on the expedition, wrote:

The people told us that those birds came from the terrestrial paradise, and they call them *bolon diuata*, that is to say, “birds of God.”

The voyagers brought the specimens back to their home countries in the early sixteenth century. Unknown to the explorers, however, the skins had been prepared by native traders who removed the wings and feet in order to use them as decorations. As a result, the Europeans came to believe that these exotic birds were without feet and never landed, some sort of mythical phoenix or *Garuda*. It was even believed that the females laid their eggs on the backs of the males.

In the 1678 publication *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby of Middleton in the county of Warwick, esq.* we find that:¹⁶

Birds of Paradise, so called, should want feet, as was not long since generally believed, not only by the Vulgar, but also by the greatest Naturalists themselves, even such as were most conversant in the History of Animals, because those brought out of the Indies were wont to be mutilated and bereaved of their feet, is now sufficiently convinced to be false by the testimony of eye-witnesses, and by the Birds themselves brought over intire, so that no man in his right wits can any longer doubt of that matter.

Bishop

There are sixteen species of bishops, all in the genus *Euplectes*. They are a type of weaver belonging to the Ploceidae, the weavers and allies. These small, stocky seedeaters with their stout, conical bills all sport a variation on the theme of red, orange, or yellow on black plumage with ruff-like head feathering. Originally referred to as either cardinals or grosbeaks, the bishops were named for an analogy with the colors of the robes of bishops in the Catholic church. In 1794, Hayes wrote about the Southern Red Bishop under the heading of Grenadier Grosbeak:¹⁴⁸

As I had an opportunity of making drawings from, and examining a cage of these birds which were sent from Lisbon as a present to the late Earl of Sandwich, when at the head of the admiralty; and although there were several of them, there were scarcely two alike: in a letter which accompanied them, they were called the Portugal Bishop.

Later, the vernacular name was sometimes used for a number of species of New World tanagers. Newton wrote that the names Bishop-bird or Bishop-Tanager were¹⁷

Latham’s rendering of the French *l’Évêque* [the bishop], by which a species inhabiting Louisiana was, according to Dupratz, originally called . . . Dupratz’s bird was probably the *Spiza cyanea* of modern ornithology, the Indigo-bird or Indigo-Bunting of the English in North America but Buffon confounded it with his *Organiste* [euphonias] of Santo Domingo, a very different species . . . while Brisson had already applied the French name (*l’Evesque*, as he wrote it) to a third species from Brazil, which subsequently became the *Tanagera episcopus* of Linnaeus, and this seems to be the only one now known (and that to few but “fanciers”) as the “Bishop-Bird” or “Bishop-TANAGER”—the colour of its plumage suggesting, as in the original case, the appellation. Audubon, himself a Louisianian, makes no mention of the name “Bishop-Bird”; but says that it was known to his countrymen as the *Petit Papebleu* [little blue pope]. He adds that the first settlers called all the Buntings, Finches and “Orioles” *Papes* [popes].

While the birds now known as bishops are predominantly red and black, the birds discussed by Newton are either blue, purple, or blue and yellow, as in the case of the euphonias. Both colors are traditionally worn by bishops of the Catholic church—French canons of the cathedral wore red to distinguish themselves from other clergymen, while the use of purple attire by bishops was originally intended to show that they possessed religious and spiritual authority equal to the authority of princes and kings, who used it as a symbol of their status since it was among the most difficult of colors to produce.

Bittern

There are many species of bitterns within the Ardeidae, all secretive denizens of reed beds and marshes. The name is based on the Latin *butio*, “bittern,” and *taurus*, “bull” (because of its call). It then traveled into Old French *butor*, and then to the late Middle English *bitore*, appearing in Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” in 1386:

Til she came there, hir herte was a-fyre,
And, as a bitore bombleth in the myre.

[And then went there, her heart afire,
And, as a bittern bumbled in the mire.]

The *-n* was added in the sixteenth century, perhaps by association with *hern*, which is an obsolete variant of heron. Ray and Willughby mentioned the bittern under the heading “The Bittour or Bittern or Mire-drum”:¹⁶

It is called by later Writers, *Butorius* and *Botaurus*, because it seems to imitate boatum tauri, the bellowing of a Bull. The Author of *Philomela* calls it *Butio*: But his mistakes are so many, that no account is to be made of his authority.

The local name “mire-drum,” mentioned by Ray, displays similarities and is a reference to the bird’s booming call heard in the marshes, the “mire.”

Blackbird

The origin of this name is straightforward: the Middle English was *blakebird* or *blacbrid*, the equivalent to *black* + *bird*. As Ray and Willughby succinctly noted:¹⁶

Blackbirds, so called from their colour.

If we want to get into more detail, the word *black* comes from the Proto-Indo-European word *bhleg*, “to burn.” The original blackbird was undoubtedly the Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*, but there are now a number of other blackbirds—six within the genus *Turdus* and twenty-four in the New World Icteridae (troupials and allies), all of which share the common characteristic of being predominantly black. Lockwood noted that the name illustrates an interesting evolution of the word “bird,” which, up to the 1400s, was used only to refer to small birds:⁸⁴

When this name was created, there was . . . no possibility of confusion with such birds as Crows or Ravens, which at the time would have been referred to as “black fowls.”
[See Introduction.]

Blackcap

Both of these two species of Sylviidae, the sylviid warblers, parrotbills, and allies, have conspicuous black caps (though only in the male in the case of Eurasian Blackcap) that

contrast with olive upperparts and gray throat. While Ray and Willughby referred to the Marsh Tit as the “Marsh Titmouse or Black-cap,” there is also an entry for the bird now known as Eurasian Blackcap:¹⁶

The Black-cap: Atricapilla seu Ficedula . . . called by the Italians, Capo Negro.

This is a very small bird, not weighing above half an ounce: Its length from the tip of the Bill to the end of the Tail is six inches; its breadth between the ends of the Wings stretch out nine. The top of the Head is black, whence it took its name.

Swann pointed out in 1913:¹²¹

The name is also applied to many other species which have the cap or summit of the head black, i.e. the COAL-TITMOUSE, MARSH-TITMOUSE, GREAT TITMOUSE. REED-BUNTING, STONECHAT, BULLFINCH and BLACK-HEADED GULL. The present species is the “Atricapilla seu Ficedula” of Aldrovandus.

Black-Chat

This small chat, the White-fronted Black-Chat, is a representative of the *Oenanthe* genus, all black apart from a bright, white forehead patch in the male. Other members of the *Oenanthe* are wheatears, chats, and the Blackstart. (See Chat.)

Blackstart

The single species of Blackstart, a small Old World flycatcher in the Muscicapidae, is found in northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The second part of the name comes from the Middle English *stert* and *start*, in turn from the Old English *steort* or *stert*, and from Proto-Germanic *stertaz*, all meaning “tail.” This is probably due to the conspicuous behavior of fanning, flexing, and wagging the tail when alighting on the ground. (Compare to redstart.)

Blackthroat

The Blackthroat is a congener of the rubythroats and the Firethroat in the genus *Calliope*. It is obviously named for this morphological feature, its black throat, but in the past has been called by other names such as Black-throated Robin and Black-throated Blue-Robin.

Bleeding-heart

The stunning bleeding-hearts are pigeons in the *Gallicolumba* genus, all endemic to the islands of the Philippines. They sport a neat red patch on the breast that contrasts conspicuously with the white plumage of the underparts, giving the appearance to the human eye of a bleeding wound. Beebe wrote in 1906:¹⁰⁰

What explanation can we give of the Blood-breasted Pigeon or Bleeding-heart Pigeon, which, as its name denotes, has a splash of blood-like scarlet in the centre of its breast? The remarkable and inexplicable resemblance is heightened by the stiffened vanes of the centre feathers, causing them to appear bedraggled and clotted, as if by an actual wound!

In fact, it's thought that the function is one of sexual selection, as the male will chase a female, displaying his inflated breast to show fully his vivid red marking or “heart,” in order to gain her attentions.



Luzon Bleeding-heart in Temminck's *Les Pigeons* (1811)

Blossomcrown

Two species of blossomcrown hummingbirds in the *Anthocephala* (which also means “blossom crown”) are found in Colombia. The name is descriptive of the male’s white and orange crown feathers. Gould noted in his 1861 description of a specimen that had been sent to him:⁶

This pretty little species, to which I have given the trivial name of Blossom-crown, is an inhabitant of the great country of Columbia, and is one of the most recent discoveries made in that rich region.

Bluebill

Three species of *Spermophaga* finches from western and central Africa are known as bluebills. However, they have varying amounts of blue on the bills, with only two species, the Red-headed and Western Bluebills, possessing a predominantly blue bill. The exception, Grant’s Bluebill, has a predominantly red bill.

Bluebird

The bluebirds are three species of *Sialia* in the Turdidae, the thrushes and allies, native to North and Central America. One of the earliest accounts of the bird was in Vieillot’s *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux* in 1807:⁶⁸

The name of *Blue-bird*, Oiseau bleu, is what the Americans have imposed on this small bird, one of the most common in North America. Although this denomination can also be applied to several other birds of the same region, it is always better suited to it than that of Robin, since it does not have a red throat, and that, if not a kind familiarity and a tail swing up and down, it bears no relation to our Robin, to which it has been compared as a very similar species and as its representative in the new Continent. It does not have the flight, the song, the manners, or the habits.



Mountain Bluebird (Washington State, USA)

Bluebonnet

The bluebonnets are two species of small parrot found in outback southeastern Australia. The forehead and face are blue, giving the appearance of a blue face rather than a bonnet; nevertheless, the name is descriptive. Often rendered as “Blue Bonnet,” the bird’s name has gone through various iterations, as Leach illustrated in his comment about the species in 1912:¹⁴⁴

The “Bull-oak,” or “Blue Bonnet,” is a beautiful bird, and is common on inland plains. It has a brownish-olive back and a gray chest. The bright, blue cheeks, forehead, and shoulder, red abdomen, and light yellow base to tail present a striking appearance. Its vernacular name—Yellow-vented Parrakeet—has now been altered to Blue Bonnet Parrot.

Bluetail

The two bluetails were previously considered to be conspecific; they are in the genus *Tarsiger* in the Muscicapidae, the Old World flycatchers. Both are blue above with rufous flanks, hence an alternative name, no longer favored, blue-robin. Both have blue tails, but this is more noticeable in the female as this is her only blue plumage.

Bluethroat

The migratory Bluethroat, a *Luscinia* in the Muscicapidae, has a huge distribution over the Palearctic to southern Asia, central Africa, and southern Europe. The throat is indeed blue, but only in the male. Earlier names included Blue-breast, Blue-throated Warbler, and the cumbersome Blue-throat Redstart. Linnaeus wrote about the Bluethroat in 1776 (continued...)