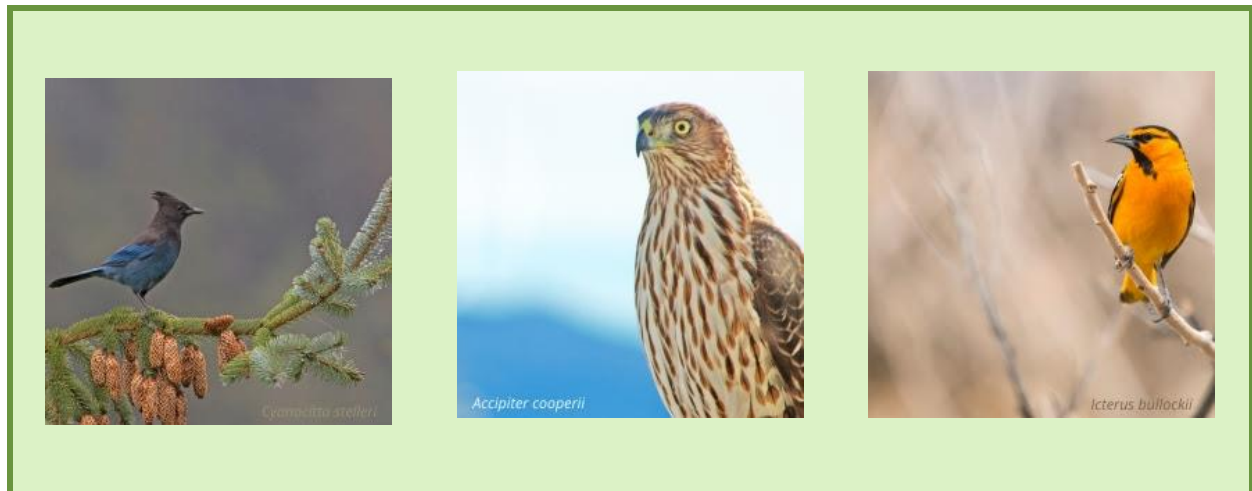


November 1, 2023

Today is a momentous day for the American Ornithological Society (AOS), for birders, and for anyone with an interest in birds. The AOS has been working diligently for many months to determine the best process for changing harmful and exclusionary [English common bird names](#) for species within our geographic realm of responsibility, and the AOS Council is excited to announce three historic commitments:

1. The AOS commits to changing all English-language names of birds within its geographic jurisdiction that are named directly after people (eponyms), along with other names deemed offensive and exclusionary, focusing first on those species that occur primarily within the U.S. or Canada.
2. The AOS commits to establishing a new committee to oversee the assignment of all English common names for species within the AOS's jurisdiction; this committee will broaden participation by including a diverse representation of individuals with expertise in the social sciences, communications, ornithology, and taxonomy.
3. The AOS commits to actively involving the public in the process of selecting new English bird names.

You can read our full commitment, our rationale, and a brief history of this issue in the [AOS Council statement](#).



The AOS Council made this decision very carefully and with great consideration of the role of common names in the study and appreciation of birds, the responsibility of the AOS as a steward of bird names, and the role of the AOS as a scientific society.

Bird names are an important part of how we do our work and enjoy birds. The AOS plays an important role in determining these names with its annual updates to the [Check-list of North American Birds](#), which is used by scientific researchers, federal, state, and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, birdwatchers, and anyone else interested in birds of this region. The impact of bird names reaches well beyond our membership. Therefore, when it was brought to our attention that some English bird names were viewed as harmful or exclusionary, including some named after people who were perceived as symbols of racism and colonialism, the AOS worked hard to reconcile its commitment to uphold stability in taxonomy and names while also addressing concerns of historical biases and social injustices.

The decision to change all eponymous names rather than only some of them was a challenging but ultimately straightforward one. Judging the harm caused by a broad range of historic figures is impossible to approach objectively, as the lens through which we view harm is culturally influenced. Overseeing such a process of judgment would lead to divisive debates about which people would or would not deserve the honor of having a bird named after them, taking our focus away from the birds themselves. Instead, we decided to move forward with a positive engagement opportunity that improves and modernizes our process of selecting bird names. We have chosen to celebrate birds, broaden participation in ornithology and bird conservation, and address the results of past harms by involving the public in the process of selecting descriptive replacement names for all eponyms. Coming to this decision has been a long and thoughtful journey.

The AOS is firmly committed to supporting not only strong ornithological science but also the people who advance and apply that science to promote the understanding and conservation of birds. Our top-ranked journals, our broad and engaging conferences, and our robust research grant programs are all seminal tools for our mission. To be truly successful, we must also promote broad and equitable access to our science, foster a welcoming, diverse, supportive, and dynamic ornithological community, and dismantle historic barriers to participation, as outlined in our [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Values Statement](#). The primary goals of the commitments we are making today are to address issues of past inequity in ornithology and to make science, conservation, and the enjoyment of birds more broadly and equitably accessible. This initiative is [one among many by the AOS](#) to support a broader and more representative ornithological community and to bring more people into our world of studying and appreciating birds.

The next steps of this initiative will be to establish a new, multidisciplinary committee for English common names and to launch a pilot program in 2024 to determine the best way to engage the public. There are about 70–80 species of birds that have been named directly after people and that occur primarily in the U.S. and Canada, so changing these names will be a significant first step. Replacing these names will require a thoughtful and inclusive process, and as we engage the broader public we will educate them about the birds and their conservation needs.

We commend the thoughtful, careful, open-minded, and forward-thinking work of the entire [ad hoc English Bird Names Committee](#), led by [Daniel Cadena, Erica Nol, and Troy Peters](#). This committee's recommendations, detailed in a comprehensive report to the AOS Council and available to the public, helped guide our discussions and inform our decisions. We also recognize and appreciate the diligent work by members of the [AOS's Diversity and Inclusion Committee](#) to lay key groundwork by conducting focus group interviews and hosting a [Community Congress](#) to discuss bird names.

We invite you to learn more about the complex issues involving the English common names of birds and our decision-making process by clicking on the links above. The AOS always welcomes input and questions from our members using our [online contact form](#). We will also host webinars for our members at two different times next week to address your concerns and solicit feedback about next steps; we will follow up later this week to announce the dates and times and provide instructions for signing up. Bird names are an important way in which ornithology intersects with public interests, and we are certain that this decision aligns well with the AOS's vision for a broad and engaged ornithological community that advances the understanding and conservation of birds.

On behalf of the entire AOS Council,



Colleen Handel
AOS President



Sara Morris
AOS President-Elect



Matt Carling
AOS Treasurer



Sushma Reddy
AOS Secretary



Judith Scarl
AOS Executive Director