



Research Note

The source of the name of the Sooty Albatross, *Phoebetria fusca*: a correction

Murray D. Bruce

P.O. Box 180, Turramurra 2074, NSW, Australia; m.d.bruce@hotmail.com

lsid:zoobank.org:pub: 442B27EB-F079-4BE5-8FBB-65D71B8EB8C8

Karl [or Carl] Theodor Hilsenberg (1802–1824) was a young naturalist and collector, principally as a botanist, who died at sea off Île Sainte-Marie (Nosy Boraha), an island off the northeast coast of Madagascar on 11 September 1824 at only 22 years of age (Pritzel 1872: 144; Hooker, in Hilsenberg & Bojer 1833: 246–247). He had travelled to Mauritius with his friend and fellow botanist Wenceslas Bojer (1795–1856), arriving there on 6 July 1821. After spending about a year in Madagascar in 1822–1823, Hilsenberg and Bojer were back at Mauritius. It was during a second expedition, departing in 1824, on its way to the eastern coast of Africa, with Bojer, that Hilsenberg died (Martial 2006)¹. His material left at Mauritius included unfinished manuscripts, although some were later used (*cf.* Hilsenberg & Bojer 1833), including naming a new plant genus in his honour, *Hilsenbergia* (Bojer 1837: 42, 1842: 189), from Mauritius, originating from Madagascar, *Hilsenbergia cannabina*, alternately credited to Hilsenberg & Bojer or Bojer, ex Hilsenberg & Bojer MSS, and as *Dombeya cannabina* (e.g. Jackson 1893:

787)². Moreover, another *Hilsenbergia* already had been named (Reichenbach 1828: 117) and although later synonymised with *Ehretia* L., it is now recognised as a distinct genus, comprising 21 species in the forget-me-not family Boraginaceae³.

More recently, Hilsenberg's claim to fame, and actually published while he was still active, was in naming a new species of albatross, *Diomedea fusca* (Hilsenberg 1822a: col. 1164). A short note on his *Diomedea fusca*, including circumscriptive details, also was provided in a periodical usually referred to as 'Froriep's *Notizen*'. It was primarily an abstracting source. As the title *Notizen aus dem Gebiete bei Natur- und Heilkunde* indicates, these covered the fields of nature and medicine. For over a century the oldest source of the name of the Sooty Albatross has been credited to Hilsenberg (1822b: col. 74 [September]), which is an abstract by the editor, Ludwig Friedrich von Froriep (1779–1847), taken from a newspaper article by Hilsenberg, as indicated therein, published several weeks earlier (26–30 July).

The pages of both the *Notizen* periodical and the newspaper containing Hilsenberg's original article, are numbered by columns, two per page. In a small item labelled "Miscellen" in column 74 of issue no 49, also as vol. 3 no. 5, dated Septem-

1. Bojer was sent out to Mauritius for natural history collecting by Franz Sieber (1789–1844), and took his young friend Hilsenberg with him as an assistant.

Citing this publication:

Bruce, M.D. (2021) The source of the name of the Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca*: a correction. *Sherbornia*, 7(1): 1–4.

© the Author(s) and this is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0), which permits the copying, distribution, and transmission of the work as long as the original source is cited.

<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/dating/sherbornia/>

2. As the collecting focus was botanical, it is unclear what zoological materials also returned to Mauritius with Bojer and Hilsenberg in 1823, as well as with Bojer in 1824. Bojer remained on Mauritius for the rest of his life and continued collecting and writing on plants.

3. See <http://www.theplantlist.org/1.1/browse/A/Boraginaceae/Hilsenbergia/>; <http://www.ville-ge.ch/musinfo/bd/cjb/africa/details.php?langue=n&id=91414> (accessed 1 April 2020).

ber 1822, it is clearly indicated that the details therein provided were taken from a letter sent from Mauritius by Hilsenberg, dated 16 August 1821, and published in the newspaper *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, no. 144, of 1822. I first became aware of this citation within an abstract 40 years ago when I read it in Gregory Mathews's personal copy of the *Notizen* number⁴. At the time, investigating a German newspaper source of the 1820s would have been a time-consuming process and so it was put aside as something to look into some day. Now, with the widespread ongoing digitisation of such ancient publications, I finally searched for the newspaper online and found it. Access to the newspaper source is at https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitung_für_die_elegante_Welt.

The letter containing the albatross details was actually published in four parts, the first being in issue no. 144 of the *Zeitung*, as Froriep indicated, but the albatross name appeared in no. 146, being part 3 of Hilsenberg's letter. It is a long forgotten little narrative summary of Hilsenberg's adventures up to his arrival in Mauritius and no doubt a travel tale to publicise his experiences as a naturalist in what was then a little explored region for natural history collectors. The title given to Hilsenberg's letter promoted it as, literally, news just in from the East Indies, then a broad term for areas east of Africa.

The type locality of the albatross is usually given as the Mozambique Channel, but apparently: "The holotype was shot on June 23, 1821, not in the Mozambique Channel but somewhere south of Madagascar after sailing around the Cape of Good Hope (where they met two American ships, one of them having lost its rudder in the Mozambique Channel). On July 6 they saw several islands, among them Ronde (Round Island), Isle de Serpes (Serpent Island) and later Île de France (Mauritius). They passed the Tropic of Capricorn on 3 July (in the text on 3 June, but that must be a printers error)" (N. Bahr, *in litt.*, October 2019, summarised from parts of Hilsenberg's letter).

It is a testimony to how often anyone has ever checked the actual source of the name

Diomedea fusca, rather than copying it second-hand, that the detail of citing its earlier publication was overlooked, but also it was for some about bias against names published in newspapers. This is borne out by the discoverer of the overlooked name in the *Notizen*, Charles Davies Sherborn (*cf.* Sherborn 1926: 2601) in 1911, who passed on the details to Gregory Mathews. Mathews used the opportunity, presented by his work on Australian birds, to review the confused nomenclature of the sooty albatrosses and established *Diomedea fusca*, based on the *Notizen*, as the name for the darker birds (1912a: 206, 1912b: 299). Nichols & Murphy (1914) reviewed the genus *Phoebetria*, adopted Hilsenberg's name, following Mathews, and split the sooty albatrosses into two species. Peters (1931: 45) accepted the nomenclatural changes, including the split of two species of sooty albatrosses. Since then, while the two species have occasionally been merged, the general view is that of two monotypic species of sooty albatrosses (e.g. Gill *et al.* 2010: 77)⁵.

The correction of the original citation of the name for the Sooty Albatross, *Diomedea fusca*, can be made without any change to either authorship or date. Finally, a long standing oversight is resolved, despite Froriep, the editor of the *Notizen*, making no claim in his notice that his journal represented the original source of the name. Therefore we have:

Diomedea fusca, Hilsenberg, 1822, *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* 146: col. 1164. Type locality herewith adjusted to south of Madagascar.

If Bojer sent any specimen material to his patron, Sieber, in Europe, it is feasible that the Natural History Museum in Vienna could have been a repository for any type material of the albatross, but nothing was listed in the recent type catalogue and no possible material is otherwise present in the museum collection (Schifter *et al.* 2007; Justin Jansen *in litt.* February 2021). Charles Edward Telfair (1778–1833), also an active naturalist on Mauritius at the time, sent his collection to London but it was subsequently lost with the dispersal of the Zoo-

4. Now part of the Mathews Collection in the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

5. *Diomedea fusca* Audubon, 1839, no relation to Hilsenberg's name, was based on a lighter-coloured bird and renamed *Phoebetria palpebrata auduboni* by Nichols & Murphy (1914: 531); although sometimes listed as a new subspecies, e.g., Peters (1931: 46), *auduboni* was clearly intended as a replacement name for Audubon's *fusca*.

logical Society collections in 1855 [in the years just prior to his death Telfair also sent live animals to the London Zoo, most notably the Madagascan Fossa *Cryptoprocta ferox* (cf. Bennett 1834)]; meanwhile, a local museum connected to the newly formed Société d'Histoire Naturelle de l'île Maurice, was established in 1829 (Cheke 2003). Some of Bojer's (including Hilsenberg's) specimens may have been amongst Telfair's lost collection and also some may have been acquired by the local museum. However, if any zoological specimens presumed to be amongst what Hilsenberg left included part of the albatross type, if the whole of such a large bird specimen was not kept and preserved, it seems unlikely any of it has survived after 200 years.

Acknowledgements

I am especially thankful to Norbert Bahr for his assistance with translating relevant passages from Hilsenberg's letter. Special thanks to Julian Hume, Justin Jansen, and Neal Evenhuis, for helpful comments on this paper. One must always appreciate the convenience offered by the Biodiversity Heritage Library www.biodiversitylibrary.org for access to some of the early sources cited here. Also my belated thanks to the Petherick Reading Room (Mathews Collection), National Library of Australia, Canberra, Australia, for access to a copy of the *Notizen* in 1980.

References

Bennett, E.T. (1834) Notice of a mammiferous animal from Madagascar, constituting a new form among the viverridous Carnivora. *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London* 1 (2): 137–140, pl. XXI.

Bojer, W. (1837) *Hortus Mauritianus, ou énumération des plantes, exotiques et indigènes, qui croissent à l'île Maurice, disposées d'après la méthode naturelles*. D'aimé Mamarot, Maurice [Mauritius]. viii + 455 pp.

Bojer, W. (1842) Descriptions de diverses plantes nouvelles de Madagascar, des îles Comores et de l'île Maurice. *Annales des Sciences Naturelles, Botanique* (2) 18: 184–192.

Cheke, A.S. (2003) Treasure Island – the rise and decline of a small tropical museum, the Mau-

ritius Institute. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists Club* 123A: 197–206.

Gill, B.J., Bell, B.D., Chambers, G.K., Medway, D.G., Palma, R.L., Scofield, R.P., Tennyson, A.J.D. & Worthy, T.H. (2010) *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, Norfolk and Macquarie Islands, and the Ross Dependency, Antarctica*. 4th ed. Ornithological Society of New Zealand and Te Papa Press, Wellington. x + 500 pp.

Hilsenberg, K.T. (1822a) Unmittelbare Nachrichten aus Ostindien. *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* 144 [26 July]: col. 1145–1148, 145 [27 July]: col. 1155–1158, 146 [29 July]: col. 1163–1166, 147 [30 July]: col. 1169–1171.

Hilsenberg, K.T. (1822b) [Abstract from Hilsenberg's *Zeitung* letter], in 'Miscellen'. *Notizen aus dem Gebiete bei Natur- und Heilkunde* 49 [3 (5)]: col. 74.

Hilsenberg, K.T. [as C.T.] & Bojer, W. (1833) A sketch of the province of Emerina, in the island of Madagascar, and of the Huwa, its inhabitants; written during a year's residence by the botanists Charles Theodore Hilsenberg of Erfurt, and Wenceslaus Bojer of Prague, in Bohemia. (With an Appendix on the Tanghina Poison.). *Botanical Miscellany* 3: 246–277⁶.

Jackson, B.D. (1893). *Index Kewensis plantarum phanerogamarum*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. Vol. 1, pt 2: [i]–[vi], 633–1268.

Martial, Y. (2006) Wenceslas Bojer, bienfaiteur de l'humanité. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927215944/>; http://www.lexpress.mu/display_article_sup.php?news_id=66227 (Accessed 3 April 2020).

Mathews, G.M. (1912a) A Reference-list to the Birds of Australia. *Novitates Zoologicae* 18: 171–446.

Mathews, G.M. (1912b) *The Birds of Australia*. Witherby & Co., London. Vol. II, pt III: 237–356, pll 95–107.

Nichols, J.T. & Murphy, R.C. (1914) A review of the genus *Phœbetria*. *The Auk* 31(4): 526–534, pl. XLI.

Peters, J.L. (1931) *Check-list of Birds of the World*. Vol. 1. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., USA. xviii + 345 pp.

6. W.J. Hooker provided some background on Hilsenberg and Bojer in an extended footnote on pp. 246–247, noting that Hilsenberg "died during the voyage of Captain Owen, who surveyed the East Coast of Africa."

- Pritzel, G.A. (1872) *Thesaurus literaturae botanicae omnium gentium inde a rerum botanicarum initus ad nostra usque tempora, quindecim millia operum recensens*. Rev. ed. F.A. Brockhaus. Lipsiae [= Leipzig]. vi + 577 pp.
- Reichenbach, H.G.L. (1828) *Uebersicht des Gewaechs – Reichs, in seinen Natuerlichen entwickelungsstufen*. Carl Cnoblach, Leipzig. Pt 1: i–xiv, 1–295.
- Schifter, H., Bauernfeind, E. & Schifter, Th. (2007) Die Typen der Vogelsammlung des Naturhistorischen Museums Wien. Teil. I. Nonpasseres. *Kataloge der wissenschaftlichen Sammlungen des Naturhistorischen Museums in Wien, Bd 20, Aves, Heft 1*: 1–376.
- Sherborn, C. D. (1926) *Index Animalium sive index nominum quae ab A.D. MDCCLVIII generibus et speciebus animalium impositae sunt. 1801–1850*. Part XI: *funereus — gyzehensis*. Trustees of the British Museum, London. Pp. 2569–2880.