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Bird Names for Birds

by Rick Wright

It's going to happen, and there's nothing we can do about it. The American Ornithological Society, *olim* American Ornithologists' Union, is going to change the English names of all North American birds named for people, whether bad people or good, ornithologists or political figures, women or men.

The treacherous waters were first tested in 2000, when *Clangula hiemalis* was rechristened the long-tailed duck, adopting a venerable alternative name already in use in the rest of the English-speaking world. Then, in 2020, what we then knew as the McCown longspur came under the loupe. The longspur case was a clever choice, given the clear criminality of the bird's eponym, who had betrayed his country in the 1860s to fight for maintaining slavery; the committee erred gravely, though, in ignoring the other English names already available for the species and instead coining a neologism: it is now called the thick-billed longspur, rather than black-breasted or bay-winged, names in use for more than a century.

As some of the movers and shakers behind this shaky movement have rightly observed, "brainstorming new name possibilities is certainly fun." Now, though, that old parlor game is about to become doctrine, and I am afraid that we can expect much more misguided novelty, swelling the synonymy of species for which alternative names are readily at hand. To forestall such otiose "creativity," here, under duress, is a list of North American birds named in English for people and some of the other, usually older vernacular names that could be revived (in some cases with slight modification), easing the burden of future indexers and birders alike.

Note that a number of species, especially tropical species and those of only accidental occurrence in the Americas, appear to have always had only one English name. In those cases, I have had recourse to the names in other languages, many of which have already dealt with the issue. Norwegian offers a particularly helpful store of names, most of them referring to the habits, habitats, colors, or other intrinsic features of the bird. Even when such borrowings are perforce neologisms in English, they at least have the advantage of sustaining some interlinguistic stability.

(C) indicates names recorded in Elliott Coues, *Key to North American Birds*, fifth edition, 1903.

(M) indicates names translated, in whole or in part, from the name(s) in use in other languages.

(R) indicates names recorded in Robert Ridgway, *Birds of North and Middle America*, 1901 ff.

(SN) indicates names translated, in whole or in part, from the scientific name.

< indicates that the name has been altered slightly, to reflect modern usage or for other reasons.

Ross goose — horned goose (< C)
 Steller eider — spotted eider (< SN)
 Stejneger scoter — Siberian scoter (< M)
 Barrow goldeneye — mountain goldeneye (< Rocky Mountain goldeneye, C)
 Gambel quail — Arizona quail (C)
 Montezuma quail — black quail (C)
 Erckel francolin — bare-throated francolin (Roberts, *Birds of Southern Africa*, 6th ed.)
 Clark grebe — white-faced grebe (< M)
 Zenaida dove — love dove (C)
 Vaux swift — gray-bellied swift (< M)
 Chapman swift — Cayenne swift (< M)
 Sick swift — cinereous swift (< M)
 Rivoli hummingbird — refulgent hummingbird (C)
 Anna hummingbird — red-headed hummingbird (< M)
 Costa hummingbird — desert hummingbird (< M)
 Allen hummingbird — green-backed hummingbird (< C)
 Brace emerald — New Providence hummingbird (< M)
 Canivet emerald — fork-tailed emerald (< M)
 Xantus hummingbird — Baja hummingbird (< M)
 Humboldt sapphire — sapphire-fronted hummingbird (< M)
 Ridgway rail — California rail (SN)
 Wilson plover — thick-billed plover (< M)
 Temminck stint — moor sandpiper (< M)
 Baird sandpiper — golden-breasted sandpiper (< M)
 Wilson snipe — American snipe (C)
 Wilson phalarope — tricolor phalarope (C)
 Kittlitz murrelet — short-billed murrelet (C)
 Scripps murrelet — California murrelet (< M)
 Craveri murrelet — Mexican murrelet (< M)
 Cassin auklet — Aleutian auklet (C)
 Sabine gull — fork-tailed gull (C)
 Bonaparte gull — Canada gull (< M)
 Ross gull — wedge-tailed gull (C)
 Franklin gull — prairie gull (< M)
 Pallas gull — great black-headed gull (BOU *Checklist* 10th ed., 2022)
 Belcher gull — Pacific band-tailed gull (< M)
 Heermann gull — white-headed gull (C)
 Forster tern — prairie tern (< M)
 Salvin albatross — silver-headed albatross (< M)
 Wilson storm petrel — bright-footed storm petrel (< M)
 Swinhoe storm petrel — Japan storm petrel (< M)
 Leach storm petrel — white-rumped storm petrel (C)
 Townsend storm petrel — Socorro storm petrel (< M)
 Ainley storm petrel — winter-breeding storm petrel (SN)
 Markham storm petrel — sooty storm petrel (< M)
 Tristram storm petrel — Hawaii storm petrel (< M)
 Murphy petrel — Tuamotu petrel (< M)
 Fea petrel — gongon petrel (< M)
 Zino petrel — Madeira petrel (< M)
 Cook petrel — bat-like petrel (< M)



Canada Gull?

Stejneger petrel — thin-billed petrel (SN)
 Bulwer petrel — columbine petrel (C)
 Jouanin petrel — sharp-tailed petrel (< M)
 Parkinson petrel — Barrier Island petrel (< M)
 Cory shearwater — yellow-billed shearwater (< M)
 Buller shearwater — gray-backed shearwater (< M)
 Townsend shearwater — Revillagigedo shearwater (< M)
 Bryan shearwater — Midway shearwater (< M)
 Audubon shearwater — broad-winged shearwater (< M)
 Brandt cormorant — pencil cormorant (< pencilled cormorant, C)
 Cooper hawk — blue hawk (< big blue hawk, C)
 Gundlach hawk — Cuba hawk (< M)
 Steller sea eagle — great sea eagle (< M)
 Harris hawk — saguaro hawk (< M)
 Swainson hawk — prairie hawk (< M)
 Ridgway hawk — Hispaniola hawk (< Haitian insect hawk, R)
 Baird trogon — blue-backed trogon (< M)
 Lesson motmot — diademed motmot (< M)
 Lewis woodpecker — collared woodpecker (C)
 Hoffmann woodpecker — garden woodpecker (< M)
 Williamson sapsucker — black-breasted sapsucker (< black-breasted woodpecker, C)
 Nuttall woodpecker — California woodpecker (< M)
 Strickland woodpecker — transvolcanic woodpecker (< M)
 Fernandina flicker — Cuba flicker (< M)
 Northern schiffornis — Verapaz mourner (SN)
 Russet-winged schiffornis — straight-billed mourner (SN)
 Nutting flycatcher — hui flycatcher (< M)
 La Sagra flycatcher — Cuba flycatcher (< M)
 Couch kingbird — Maya kingbird (< M)
 Cassin kingbird — noisy kingbird (< M, SN)
 Euler flycatcher — brown forest flycatcher (< M)
 Hammond flycatcher — dirty little flycatcher (C)
 Say phoebe — brown phoebe (< M)
 Zeledon antbird — commensal antbird (< M)
 Bell vireo — thicket vireo (< M)
 Hutton vireo — kinglest vireo (< M)
 Cassin vireo — California vireo (< M)
 Steller jay — mountain jay (C)
 Woodhouse jay — Interior scrub jay (< M)
 Clark nutcracker — American nutcracker (C)
 Blyth reed warbler — thicket reed warbler (< M)
 Pallas grasshopper warbler — Siberia grasshopper warbler (< M)
 Pallas leaf warbler — kinglest warbler (< M)
 Bishop oo — Kau'i oo
 Sumichrast wren — thin-billed wren (< M)
 Nava wren — karst wren (< M)
 Cabanis wren — cinnamon wren (< M)
 Boucard wren — harlequin wren (< M)
 Bewick wren — long-necked wren (< M)
 Bendire thrasher — Arizona thrasher (C)



Brown Phoebe?

LeConte thrasher — Yuma thrasher (C)
 Townsend solitaire — flycatching solitaire (< fly-catching thrush, C)
 White thrush — golden thrush (< M)
 Bicknell thrush — Adirondack thrush (< M)
 Swainson thrush — brown-cheeked thrush (< M)
 Naumann thrush — red-spotted thrush (< M)
 Sprague pipit — Missouri pipit (< Missouri tit-lark, C)
 Pallas rosefinch — carmine rosefinch (< M)
 Cassin finch — red-capped finch (< M)
 Lawrence goldfinch — California goldfinch (< California canary, C)
 Smith longspur — painted longspur (C)
 McKay bunting — white bunting (< M)
 Pallas bunting — rush bunting (< M)
 Botteri sparrow — Arizona sparrow (C)
 Cassin sparrow — valley sparrow (< M)
 Bachman sparrow — pinewood sparrow (< pine-woods sparrow, C)
 Brewer sparrow — pale sparrow (< M)
 Baird junco — Baja junco (< M)
 Harris sparrow — mourning sparrow (< mourning finch, Nuttall, *Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and Canada*, 2nd ed.)
 Bell sparrow — California sage sparrow (C)
 LeConte sparrow — gray-cheeked sparrow (< M)
 Nelson sparrow — pintail sparrow (< M)
 Baird sparrow — prairie sparrow (C)
 Henslow sparrow — fallow sparrow (< M)
 Lincoln sparrow — gray-browed sparrow (< M)
 Abert towhee — gray towhee (C)
 Cabanis ground sparrow — white-bridled ground sparrow (< M)
 Montezuma oropendola — Aztec oropendola (< M)
 Bullock oriole — orange-browed oriole (< M)
 Audubon oriole — black-headed oriole (C)
 Scott oriole — black-and-yellow oriole (C)
 Brewer blackbird — blue-headed blackbird (< blue-headed grackle, C)
 Bachman warbler — yellow-fronted warbler (< M)
 Swainson warbler — canebrake warbler (C)
 Lucy warbler — mesquite warbler (< M)
 Virginia warbler — pinyon warbler (< M)
 Semper warbler — steely warbler (< M)
 MacGillivray warbler — sump warbler (< M)
 Belding yellowthroat — Baja yellowthroat (< M)
 Kirtland warbler — jack pine warbler (Pearson, *Birds of America*, vol. 3)
 Blackburnian warbler — hemlock warbler (C)
 Adelaide warbler — Antilles warbler (< M)
 Grace warbler — ponderosa pine warbler (< M)
 Townsend warbler — spruce warbler (< M)
 Wilson warbler — black-capped green warbler (< green black-capped flycatching warbler, C)
 Carmiol tanager — olive-green cardinal (< M)
 Lesson seedeater — beardgrass seedeater (< M)
 Morelet seedeater — black-breasted seedeater (< M)



Aztec Oropendola?