

Comment on the type-locality and nomenclature of the Regent Parrot *Polytelis anthopeplus* (Lear, 1831)

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In Schodde's (1993) revision of *Polytelis anthopeplus*, two errors occur: he has on insufficient grounds shifted the designated type-locality of the species from New South Wales to Western Australia, and he has legalised this action by the invalid designation of a neotype from Western Australia. Similar nomenclatural mistakes occur in his later works.

“Fixierungen einer terra typica sollten ein für allemal unangetastet bleiben, solange ihre Unrichtigkeit nicht *bewiesen* werden kann: der Hinweis darauf, dass die gewählte terra typica der Herkunft des Typus *wahrscheinlich* nicht entsprochen hat, genügt nicht, um einem Autor das Recht zu geben, die Stabilität der Nomenklatur zu erschüttern (Stresemann, 1930: 642).”

The nomenclatural history of the parrot *Polytelis anthopeplus* (Lear) was discussed by Schodde (1993). It may be summarised as follows: the name *Palaeornis anthopeplus* originally appeared on a plate without text, hence without a locality of provenance. A second parrot, illustrated in the same work, with the name *P. melanura*, was soon recognised as belonging to the same species, but as it was issued a year later, there has never been any question about the validity of *anthopeplus*. (Lear's work was issued in 12 parts, in the period 1830-1832; *P. anthopeplus* appeared in part 8, 1831, *P. melanura* in part 12, 1832; for further particulars on this rare work, not seen by me, and its author, cf. Whittell, 1954: 418). Later it was established that the species occurs in southern Australia, in two geographically widely separated populations: one in the south-west of Western Australia, the other in the south-east in the border regions of Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales. Early in the 20th century, Mathews (1912) arbitrarily designated New South Wales as type-locality for the species. He further found that the populations inhabiting eastern and western Australia differ morphologically. As the original illustrations did not show the claimed subspecific characters, the type-locality of the nominate race remained New South Wales, and a name was provided for the western population: *Polytelis anthopeplus westralis* Mathews, 1915. In subsequent years the race *westralis* was not universally recognised. This was probably due to two factors. The first is that Mathews was not a gifted systematist and that it was generally acknowledged that subspecies described by him should only be accepted after independent verification (Serventy, 1950). The second, that lack of adequate material of both populations prevented most workers from carrying out this verification. In more recent years, however, workers who had access to material increasingly accepted the validity of *westralis* (Condon, 1975: 188/189; Forshaw, 1981: 158/159).

Note that although there was some uncertainty about the validity of subspecies, there was never any question that the type-locality of the species had been validly designated as New South Wales. There was no problem there.

Schodde accumulated an impressive amount of material from both western and eastern Australia and confirmed the validity of two subspecies. He further provided evidence that the (lost) type of *P. anthopeplus* could have originated from Western Australia, as well, or perhaps even more probably, than from New South Wales although agreeing with Mathews that the plate does not show subspecific characters either way. His statement that: "Lear's superb figures of *Palaeornis anthopeplus* and *P. melanura*, nevertheless, also [my italics - GM] match the western form", supports this. It should be recalled here, that a possible Western Australian origin of the type-specimen had never been denied: the uncertainty about its provenance was the very reason why a type-locality had to be designated.

Schodde's argument against an eastern Australian origin of the type-specimen is inconclusive. As he himself states, specimens from eastern Australia could have been received through trade channels, such as the famous firm Leadbeater, rather than from "official" exploration expeditions. The arguments and facts presented by Schodde clearly support the opinion that there is no strong evidence against an eastern Australian origin of the type.

From Schodde's reasoning, one would expect the conclusion that Mathews's restriction of the type-locality to eastern Australia was perfectly legitimate and that the nomenclature used in the preceding eighty years was right (always keeping in mind that initially there was some doubt about the validity of the race *westralis*). At this point, however, Schodde shifted the type-locality of the species to Western Australia. This made *westralis* a synonym of the nominate race and provided him with the opportunity to describe the eastern Australian population as a new subspecies (*P. a. monarchoides*). This is contrary to the Code. True, it says that: "A statement of a type locality that is found to be erroneous should be corrected" (ICZN, 1985: Rec. 72(b) and 1999: 76A.2), but the corollary of this is obviously that if a type-locality is not provably incorrect, it should not be changed, and this must be interpreted rigidly (Stresemann, 1930). Schodde's arguments fall short of providing such proof. Moreover, the sentence from the Code quoted above is not an Article but a Recommendation, which can only mean that when an author finds that a type-locality is erroneous, he is still left with some discretion, if he considers that the application of this Recommendation would lead to undesirable changes in established nomenclature.

Schodde must have been aware of the shakiness of his conclusions, for evidently he almost expected: "further arbitrary or argumentative association of the names *anthopeplus* and *melanura* with the eastern form", but to solve this he selected a neotype from Western Australia! The place of origin of a neotype becomes the type-locality, despite any previously published statement of the type-locality. This is how Schodde expunged New South Wales and had unassailably substituted his own nomenclature of *P. anthopeplus*. But had he?

The crux of the matter is, whether Schodde's neotype can be accepted as valid. From the Code current at the time of Schodde's publication (ICZN, 1985: Art. 75) I cite: "A neotype is to be designated ... only in exceptional circumstances when a neotype is necessary in the interests of stability of nomenclature; the designation of a specimen to

be a neotype other than in accordance with these conditions is not valid". Let us first consider the matter of stability: Schodde has used his "neotype" not to promote stability, but for exactly the opposite purpose: to support an otherwise unjustified change. This alone is enough to disallow his "neotype". More important are the "exceptional circumstances", repeated three times in article 75 of the Code. In the case of *P. anthopeplus*, no exceptional circumstances "that would justify the designation of a neotype" exist. On the contrary, the nomenclature is (or was before Schodde's involvement) very simple. Checking up on type localities and evaluating the validity of subspecies are routine matters for any systematist and cannot possibly be construed as exceptional. The Code expressly states that a neotype "is not to be designated as an end in itself, or as a matter of curatorial routine, and any neotype so designated has no standing in nomenclature".

The flaws in Schodde's publication are so obvious, that one would expect them to be evident even to the most casual reader, but, surprisingly, the erroneous nomenclature he introduced is becoming established in the world literature. Amazing in this connection is the claim by Higgins et al. (1999: 295), that "Schodde ... has shown the bird [the illustration by Lear] to be of the western form". Even Schodde himself did not make such a definite claim. Others who followed Schodde are Collar (1997: 397) and Forshaw (2002: 336-338).

So much for *Polytelis anthopeplus*, but there are wider implications. In two hefty volumes, Schodde & Mason (1997, 1999) designated several more "neotypes", as well as lectotypes, not a single one of which conforms to the conditions of the Code. Indeed, some of these conflict with it, upsetting, rather than preserving, established nomenclature. Curiously, none of the reviews I have read of these works suggests that these "neotypes" and lectotypes should be dismissed, together with the confusing changes they were supposed to legalise.

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