

Statement of the SAB on taxonomic vandalism for the Reptile Database

The Reptile Database attempts to make balanced decisions on reptile taxonomy and nomenclature based on available and science-based published data. However, the database occasionally has to make decisions between contradictory opinions or conclusions, usually in consultation with experts.

While the RDB normally follows the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, this does not provide rules for every possible case. This sometimes requires us to take decisions outside the letter of the Code that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) is unwilling or unable to make. For instance, the ICZN has ruled on April 30, 2021 that it will not suppress the Australasian Journal of Herpetology or any of Raymond Hoser's published names (ICZN 2021). However, the Reptile Database decided that it will not accept his publications and has chosen to follow the arguments of others (e.g. Kaiser et al. 2013, Krell 2021) in ignoring these works and their names. It has become common practice in herpetology to overwrite names coined outside the scientific literature with science-based names (aspidonyms sensu Wüster et al., 2021). In such cases, we only use the science-based name in the Database. The overwritten unscientific names are currently not used in the database although they may be mentioned in comments, just to make these decisions more transparent.

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| <p>This statement is supported and approved by the following SAB members (listed alphabetically):</p> <p>Allen Allison Luciano J. Avila Frank T. Burbrink Salvador Carranza Guarino R. Colli Brian I. Crother Tiffany M. Doan L. Lee Grismer S. Blair Hedges Robert C. Jadin Ulrich Joger André Koch Sebastian Lotzkat Shai Meiri Hidetoshi Ota Paulo Passos R. Alexander Pyron Peter Paul van Dijk Miguel Vences Laurie Vitt Wolfgang Wüster</p> | <p>These members abstained:</p> <p>Glenn Shea</p> |
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(all remaining SAB members did not cast a vote or did not comment)

Literature cited:

ICZN. 2021. Opinion 2468 (Case 3601) - Spracklandus Hoser, 2009 (Reptilia, Serpentes, Elapidae) and Australasian Journal of Herpetology issues 1-24: confirmation of availability declined; Appendix A (Code of Ethics): not adopted as a formal criterion for ruling on cases. The Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature 78:42–45.

Kaiser, H., B.I. Crother, C.M.R. Kelly, L. Luiselli, M. O’Shea, H. Ota, P. Passos, W.D. Schleip, W. Wüster. 2013. Best practices: In the 21st Century, taxonomic decisions in herpetology are acceptable only when supported by a body of evidence and published via peer-review. Herpetological Review 44:8–23.

Krell, F-T. 2021. Suppressing works of contemporary authors using the Code’s publication requirements is neither easy nor advisable. The Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature 78:61–67.

Wüster W, Thomson SA, O’Shea M & Kaiser H. 2021. Confronting taxonomic vandalism in biology: conscientious community self-organization can preserve nomenclatural stability. Biological Journal of the Linnean Society: blab009. In press.

Further reading

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Denzer, W., Manthey, U., Wagner, P. & Böhme, W. (2016) A critical review of Hoser’s writings on Draconinae, Amphibolurinae, Laudakia and Uromastycinae (Squamata: Agamidae). Bonn zoological bulletin, 64(2): 117-138.

Oliver, P.M. & Lee, M.S.Y. (2010) The botanical and zoological codes impede biodiversity research by discouraging publication of unnamed new species. TAXON 59, 1201–1205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.594020>

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