

LATIN NOMENCLATURE IN THE WORLD OF FANCY PIGEONS

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Since time immemorial people have not been indifferent to the animal world. Zoologists and other scientists have always made it their familiar and ever growing work area. The history of animal science is classified in three large periods: from the antiquity to Linnaeus (1707-1778), from Linnaeus to Darwin (1809-1882) and from Darwin to now.

During those more than 2, 500 years, zoology developed from an initially static science, i.e. the pure description of types and components of individuals (system and anatomy) into an explanatory science (study into the causal connection).

Left: *Columba Livia* – Rock pigeon. Photo: Wikipedia

The Swedish doctor and naturalist Carolus Linnaeus was the founder of the zoological system and nomenclature; the 10th edition (1758) of his standard work 'Systema naturae', first published in 1735, serving as basic reference.

Right: Mondain, blue black barred.
Columba admista (zware duif) caerulea.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.



The common nomenclature (of the living beings) is in Latin and - generally - binominal, i.e. it exists from two successive names: the genus name and the species name. Some examples: *Mus musculus* (mouse), *Mus rattus* (rat); *Lepus europaeus*

(hare), *Lepus cuniculus* (rabbit); *Sus domesticus* (tame swine), *Sus scrofa* (wild boar); *Anser anser* (goose), *Anser domesticus* (domesticated goose); *Homo sapiens* (man), *Homo troglodytes* (orangutan).

Left: Frillback, white.
Columba pedibus plumosis crispata.
Photo: Mick Bassett.



The genus name is always written with a capital letter, the species name always with a small character.

To indicate subspecies or race to both names sometimes a third is added, e.g. *Felis tigris* (tiger) t.o. *Felis tigris Mongolica* (Mongolian tiger); this is called the trinomial nomenclature. Sometimes even a fourth name is added (quadri-nominal nomenclature).

One speaks of species when, in a certain group animals, forms distinguish in a remarkable manner and remain constant in successive generations.

Right: Bokhara Trumpeter, red.
Columba tympanisans, for Trumpeter.
Photo: D.J. Hamer.



The scientific classification is as follows: related genera form a family (which can have several sub-families); families are classified in orders; orders in classes and classes in clades.

Left: Jacobin, black tigered.
Jacobin/Capuchine: Columba cucullata.
Photo: Mick Bassett.



Clades belong to a phylum which can comprise several sub-phyla.

In zoology, all family names end in *-idae* (e.g. *Columbidae*, pigeons) and the sub-families in *-inae*.

In substitution for this binominal nomenclature for animals and plants by Linnaeus (the Linnaean Hierarchy) biologists have already been working for several years developing a non-hierarchical system to name the organisms, the so called fylocode. In the following I keep myself to the Linnaean system...

Right: Barbs, white.
Columba Polonica vulgaris.
Photo: Jan Buurmeijer.





Left: Lille Pouter, black pied.
Columba insulensis.
Photo: Jan Janssen.

Why an essay concerning the Latin denomination of fancy pigeons?

For some years Belgian pigeon fanciers have been frequently contacted by the Arab countries, South America, South Africa and China with the intention of selling and thus exporting fancy pigeons to these countries. What they feared actually happened; the customs authorities or other services of the relevant countries did not know the applying name of the relevant pigeon breed and getting an import licence for an

unknown bird was impossible. Finally only the Latin name of the race appeared to be the solution.

In case of export I here give you the Latin denomination of some breeds and race groups as mentioned in the work of Boitard et Corbié (1824).

Right: Thuringian Swallow, blue.
Columba hirundinina (for swallow pigeon) caerulea.
Photo: A.N.C. van Bente



Left: Antwerp Smerle, red.
Columba turbita Antverpiensis, rubra.
Photo: Piet Steeman.

Right: Scandaroon, Black pied.
Columba tuberculosa.
 Photo and breeder: Kees Verkolf.



Left: Nun, black.
Columba geleata Batava
 Photo: Aviculture Europe.



Mondain: *Columba admista* (also in common meaning 'heavy pigeon');

muffed pigeon: *Columba pedibus plumosis*;

small muffed pigeon: *Columba vulgaris pedibus plumosis*;

small muffed and crested pigeon: *Columba menstrua pedibus plumosis*;

Frillback: *Columba pedibus plumosis crispata*;

Trumpeter: *Columba tympanisans*;

Cropper: *Columba gutturosa*;

Lille Pouter: *Columba insulensis*;

Bagdad: *Columba tuberculosa*;

Runt: *Columba domestica*;

Jacobin/Capuchine: *Columba cucullata*;

Nun: *Columba geleata Batava*;

Swallow: *Columba hirundinina*;

Barb: *Columba Polonica vulgaris*;

Owl: *Columba turbita*;

Highflyer: *Columba tabellaria*;

Tumbler: *Columba gyratrix*;

Ring beater: *Columba gyrans*;

Fantail: *Columba tremula laticauda*.

And I almost forgot to mention the legendaric *Columba livia* being the Rock pigeon!



Above: Leuven Pouter. *Columba gutturosa Lovaniensis*.

Photo: Piet Steeman.

This will do as an example.

Next I will try to give you a more extensive denomination, in particular for the Ghent Pouter in its five varieties and various colours.



Left: Ghent Pouter, dominican black.
Columba gutturosa Gandavensis, dominicana nigra.
Photo: Piet Steeman.

The Latin name is always written in nominative.

Columba (female substantive) is for genus 'pigeon'; as species 'cropper/pouter' we say gutturosa (female singular of 'gutturosus', derivative of 'guttur' = throat). Thus a cropper sic is a *Columba gutturosa*. When we have more specific a Ghent Pouter, the trinominale name is *Columba gutturosa Gandavensis*.

According to the standard this Ghent Pouter is muffed, but as there is no clean legged

variety, I would say the addition 'pedibus plumosis' is not necessary.

However, if needed to emphasise the clean legged variety – as in clean legged Magpie Cropper, the appropriate specification is 'pedibus aplumosis'.

A classicist assured me that, in order to express the absence of something, the prefix a (alfa privans) was internationally more often used as the prefix in or imm (as in: inanis = empty; imperfectus = imperfect). Thus 'pedibus aplumosis'.



Right: Ghent Pouter, self white.
Columba gutturosa Gandavensis, unicolor, alba. Photo: Piet Steeman.



Left: Ghent Pouter, black tigered.
Columba gutturosa Gandavensis, maculosa tigris nigra.
Photo: Piet Steeman.

Probably the nomination *Columba gutturosa Gandavensis* will do to issue an import licence and health certificate.

Right: Belgian Ring beater, black.
Columba gyrans (voor Ringslager), nigra
Photo: Piet Steeman.

When the customs and/or inspection officers demand a more detailed nomination, the variety or colour has to be added next to the breed name.

If this is a dominican, the fourth word is *dominicana*.

The Sells are *unicolor* or *unicolorata*.

And the Tigereds? Well, taken with a pinch of salt we could say: *maculosa*. Strictly speaking the word "maculosus" (male) means 'speckled' but in the Latin dictionary of A. Geerebaert S.J. also the translation 'spangled' is added, as in '*maculosa tigris*'.



Speckled, spangled, tigered.... The National Standard Committee will distinguish the three words, but we don't think the authorities will bother when issuing an import licence.

Left:
Old Dutch Owl, blue black barred.
Columba turbita (for Owl pigeon), caerulea.
Photo: Mick Bassett.



However, when we want to nominate the variety 'Verhemelstaart', (no English name available) things are more complicated. The name of this colour variety was once bethought by the Ghent fanciers and concerns a spotless white cropper with only a 'flecked' or sprinkled head and tail. The word 'Verhemelstaart' cannot be found in any dictionary or official list and cannot be translated properly in other languages.

Right: Cologne Tumbler, black rosewing.
Columba gyratrix, maculosa tigris, nigra.
Photo: Mick Bassett.

The French pigeon standard simply leaves the word as it is. The German standard did translate, although their translation '*schwarzschwanz*' (= black tail) and '*blauschwanz*' (blue tail) according to the colour of the flecking, gives a totally wrong picture of the breed.

A French speaking member of the Belgian standard committee prefers the word '*étincellé*' as a French translation, giving the idea of a sparkle.



However, in a French catalogue I once read the description '*à tête et queue poivrées*', meaning 'with peppered head and tail' and this is not a bad description at all, thus in Latin this would be *capite et cauda piperatis*.

Again I use the ablative, being the same case as is used by Boitard & Corbié in their list of breed names.

'Verhemelstaart black' (with black peppering) thus would be *capite et cauda nigre piperatis*.

Describing the variety Pied (in Belgian: 'witlap', meaning with a white bib) as *discolor* is obviously wrong, as this term means: various coloured plumage; colourful (as in motley crowd).

How could this half-moon shaped white marking possibly be described in Latin? If the ablative is used, one could say: *pectore semilunare albedesignato*.

'Pectore', being the ablative of 'pectus' (=breast); 'semi' (= half); 'lunare' adverb from 'lunatus' (= moon shaped); 'albo' (= white) in a compound; 'designato' from 'designare' (= delineate, mark off).

All together: 'with a half-moon shaped white marked breast'.



Left: Fantail, yellow shield.
Columba tremula laticauda, fulva.
Photo: Mick Bassett.

And the colour? As *Columba* is female, singular and nominative, the colour description has to answer to the same grammatical demands.

Here we go:

candida or **alba** (white),
rubra (red),
caerulea (blue),
glauca (light blue),
nigra (shining black),
atra (dark, dull black),
flava (gold, yellow, blond),

lutea (orange-yellow),

fulva (red-yellow),

gilva (light yellow),

argentea (silver), in compound words like **caerulea argentea** (blue silver), **rubra argentea** (red silver),

lutea argentea (ash yellow),

squamata (spangled, chequered) and in compound words as **nigra squamata** (black chequered), **caerulea squamata** (blue chequered), etc.

So I think, when in the import licence also is asked for the colour variety, the above will be sufficient.

Right: Barbet of Liege, blue black barred.
Columba turbita Leodiensis, caerulea.
Photo: Piet Steeman.

For the sake of clearness, you could add *colore* or in short: *col.* An instance: *colore candido* or *col. candido* is white.

Also the variety can be specified by using *varietate* or *var.* as in: *varietate dominicana* or *var. dominicana*.



Want some extensive instances?

In Latin, a Ghent Cropper dominican black will be:

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis dominicana nigra or

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis varietate dominicana colore nigro or

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis var. dominicana col. nigro.

A self white Ghent Cropper will have the Latin name of:

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis unicolorata alba or

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis varietate unicolorata colore albo or

Columba gutturosa Gandavensis var. unicolorata col. albo.



As the Ghent Owl comes in the white colour only, an extra name is not needed: *Columba turbita Gandavensis.*

Left: Luttich Owl, silver dark barred.
Columba turbita Leodiensis, caerulea.
Photo: Piet Steeman.

In order not to be taken for a fanatic Ghent (must admit, I am!) I give you a few more examples on other pigeon breeds.

The Antwerp fanciers can name their Antwerp Smerle (coming in one 'variety' but in several colours) in Latin as: *Columba turbita Antverpiensis* followed by *rubra* or *nigra* etc. according to the colour of the bird, yes or not preceded by *colore* or *col.*

Another example: the simplest name for Leuven Pouter is *Columba gutturosa Lovaniensis.*

And some Wallonian pigeon breeds: the Luttich Owl could be named *Columba turbita Leodiensis* followed by the proper colour name.

Little problem though in how to name the Barbet of Liege, which is also an owl....!

Well, I think this will do. The Pigeon Fancy never was and probably never will be in the schedules of the Greek-Latin humaniora, although many authors from the classic Antiquity extensively described the pigeons and the columbaria (dove cotes).

However, with some thinking, drawing upon what was hammered in with the severe discipline of the colleges in the forties, I think I came up with some defensible denominations without sounding too much like Church Latin. Cerebration is from all ages and keeps the mind fit, sure at old age!

Still for more difficult names one should contact a classicist or zoologist to help out – when occasion arises – by giving you the correct Latin names to facilitate a successful export of your fancy pigeons.

Consulted sources:

Prof.dr. ir. J. van den Brand: Dierkunde

Ed. Della Santa: Biologie Animale

W. Deconinck – L. Vanhaverbeke: De Levende Materie – Algemene Biologie

A. Geerebaert S.J.: Beknopt Latijnsch – Nederlandsch Woordenboek

J.F. Aerts - K. Vangenechten: Nederlands - Latijns Lexicon

Magazine EOS

Plus tips from a colleague - retired teacher and...memorising my own college years.

Note from the editor, by Hein van Grouw:

Above text of Mr Markey gives a nice and informative picture of how scientific names are composed. As you see, we use the word 'scientific' names and not 'Latin' names, because these names are both in the Latin and in old Greek, thus not only in Latin. In zoology, animal knowledge, scientific names belong only to wild species. In the past, several authors indeed did name some domesticated breeds with scientific names. The reason for this was that at that time they thought they were separate species. In those years, we speak between 1700 and 1850, one had never heard of domestication nor colour mutations, thus it was not realised that these races were not original species. Once this was clear, these names fell out of use because in the taxonomy - the leading terms of the biological system - domesticated animals do not get their own scientific name.

Domesticated animals get the name of their wild ancestor, with possibly the additive that it concerns the domesticated form. In the case of fancy pigeons, the wild ancestor is the rock pigeon, with its scientific name 'Columba livia'. Thus our fancy pigeons can be indicated as 'Columba livia domestica' and this denomination will be sufficient to obtain an import licence without any problems. Even the name 'Domesticated pigeons' will probably do fine. Using 'self-made' scientific names will probably only cause extra problems because these names are not internationally known. One of the major reasons to introduce scientific names to be used internationally was in order to prevent misunderstanding. For this reason strict rules have been established by the International Commission for Zoological Nomenclature, which indicates how a name becomes valid and what requirements these must meet. These rules are written out in the 'International code of Zoological Nomenclature' and one of the rules is that a complete name cannot exist from more than 3 names. The first name (Columba) is the genus to which the species belongs. The second name (livia) is the species name. A possible third name (domestica) indicates the subspecies or race. Scientifically seen, the domesticated form of a species is nothing but a subspecies. The names which Mr Markey presents bears witness to much thinking and creativity, but unfortunately they do not conform to the 'rules' and thus will not contribute to a smooth dispatch of the export of pigeons.

For licence granting agencies it is of no importance to know to which race the domesticated pigeon belongs and/or which colour it has. They only want to know that it concerns a domesticated breed, and not a protected wild species.

Mr Markey is right that national breed names do not satisfy, but for this reason the official scientific names were introduced and these are international. Thus the name *Columba livia domestica* is the only correct name for our fancy pigeons, irrespective of the breed.

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