The name Synallaxis whitneyi Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995, is not a synonym of Synallaxis cinereus Wied, 1831
(Aves: Passeriformes: Furnariidae)

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Abstract

Synallaxis whitneyi Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995, was described from specimens collected in Bahia, Brazil. Some years later, following analysis of the specimens used by Wied (1831) to describe Synallaxis cinereus, Whitney and Pacheco (2001) considered S. whitneyi a junior synonym of S. cinereus because three of the specimens in Wied’s series were identical to those collected in Bahia by Pacheco and Gonzaga (1995). They also designated a lectotype for Synallaxis cinereus. Our analysis of the description of Synallaxis cinereus reveals that Wied was merely providing a new name for Parulus ruficeps Spix, 1824, to avoid problems of homonymy (Wied 1831). The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature is explicit in such cases, stating that if an author proposes a new species-group name as a replacement (nomen novum) for an earlier available one, then the two names are objective synonyms and have the same name-bearing type. Thus, the syntypes of S. cinereus are the specimens previously used by Spix in describing Parulus ruficeps and not those used by Wied (1831) in his description (and subsequently referred to as syntypes in the literature). The lectotype of Synallaxis cinereus proposed by Whitney and Pacheco (2001) is invalid, as it is not a former syntype. Therefore, the correct name for the Bahia Spinetail is Synallaxis whitneyi Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995.

Key words: Synonymization, Synallaxis cinereus, Synallaxis whitneyi, Parulus ruficeps

Resumo

Wied (1831) descreveu essa espécie como um novo nome para *Parulus ruficeps* Spix, 1824, para evitar problemas com homônimos. O Código Internacional de Nomenclatura Zoológica é muito claro nesses casos, estabelecendo que se um autor propõe um novo nome de grupo específico expressamente como uma substituição (*nomen novum*) para um nome antes disponível, então os dois nomes são sinônimos objetivos, e ambos os táxons que eles denotam têm o mesmo tipo (holótipo ou série-tipo). Dessa forma, os síntipos corretos de *S. cinereus* são os espécimes utilizados previamente por Spix (1824) na descrição de *Parulus ruficeps* e não os espécimes utilizados por Wied (1831) na descrição de *S. cinereus* (e posteriormente chamados de síntipos pela literatura). O lectótipo de *Synallaxis cinereus* proposto por Whitney e Pacheco (2001) é inválido, assim como fica inválida a sinonimização de *S. whitneyi* em *S. cinereus*.

**Palavras-chave:** Sinonimização, *Synallaxis cinereus*, *Synallaxis whitneyi*, *Parulus ruficeps*

**Introduction**

The Bahia Spinetail is a long-overlooked species confined to montane southeastern Bahia, Brazil (where principally known from Boa Nova). It was described by Pacheco and Gonzaga (1995) as *Synallaxis whitneyi*. The same authors recognized that the name *Synallaxis cinereus* Wied, 1831, which had been long considered a synonym of *S. ruficapillus* Vieillot, 1819, might pertain to their “new” species, but were uncertain of its application.

Subsequently, Whitney and Pacheco (2001) reanalyzed the nomenclatural issue and, found that Wied’s supposed type series of *S. cinereus* was, in fact, a composite of three species, including the Bahia Spinetail, from which Whitney and Pacheco selected a lectotype that resulted in *S. whitneyi* becoming a junior synonym of *S. cinereus*. This proposition was rapidly followed by the ornithological community (Ribon *et al.* 2002; Dickinson 2003; Remsen 2003).

However, it was not appreciated that Wied’s name, *S. cinereus*, was actually proposed as a replacement name for *Parulus ruficeps* Spix, 1824; thus his supposed series of syntypes lacks nomenclatural status, and the fate of *S. cinereus* is inextricably bound to that of *P. ruficeps*.

Our purpose here is to review the nomenclatural treatment of *Synallaxis whitneyi*, following the current rules of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999).

**Methods**

We analyzed all specimens related to this taxonomic issue, including Wied’s type series (syntypes of *Synallaxis cinereus*) held at the American Museum of Natural History, New York (AMNH 6811–6815 and 5204), the holotype and paratypes of *S. whitneyi* at the
Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MZUSP 74011–13), and photographs of the female syntype (ZSM 151) of Parulus ruficeps Spix, 1824 (the other syntype, a male, was lost during the Second World War), which also serves as one of the syntypes of Synallaxis frontalis Pelzeln, 1859.

We have also analyzed all original descriptions relating to the subject of Sphenura ruficeps Lichtenstein, 1823, Parulus ruficeps Spix, 1824, Synallaxis cinereus Wied, 1831, Synallaxis spixi Sclater, 1856, Synallaxis frontalis Pelzeln, 1859, and Synallaxis whitneyi Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995.

**Results**

Previous discussion of the status of Synallaxis whitneyi with regard to S. cinereus Wied, 1831 (Pacheco & Gonzaga 1995: 10; Whitney & Pacheco 2001: 34), has concentrated on Wied’s specimens, specifically that his series comprised more than one species (AMNH 6811–13 are Synallaxis whitneyi; AMNH 6814 and 6815 refer to the Synallaxis frontalis, and AMNH 5204 is a Synallaxis albescens Temminck, 1823).

In our perusal of the description of Synallaxis cinereus, our attention was immediately drawn to a reference to the plate of Parulus ruficeps Spix, 1824 (p. 85, pl. 86), made by Wied prior to the morphological description of his “new species”, to which a cross-reference is also made on Wied’s original specimen label (Fig. 1). In the final paragraph, Wied explains that “he was giving a new name to Spix’s species because he considered the name “ruficeps” inappropriate as it could equally ‘fit’ many other species. Wied goes on to state that, given Spix’s failure to take account of names erected by others, he (Wied) regarded it as a legitimate action to change the specific name in the present case (“Spix fails to consider himself compromised by names erected by others and ignores those proposed by other authors, such that I believe that I am entitled to amend the specific name because the name ruficeps fits several of these birds and is therefore rejected”).

Wied’s concern was valid because Lichtenstein (1823: 42) had just described Sphenura ruficeps, which would subsequently be considered a junior synonym of Synallaxis ruficapilla Vieillot, 1819 (Gray 1840: 23; Burmeister 1856: 39; Sclater 1856: 97, 1862: 150, 1890: 38; Cabanis 1866: 307; Cory & Hellmayr 1925: 75; Vaurie 1971: 520). As Parulus Spix, 1824, would also be merged with Synallaxis Vieillot, 1818 (e.g. Gray 1840), Synallaxis ruficeps (Lichtenstein, 1823) and Synallaxis ruficeps (Spix, 1824) would inevitably became secondary homonyms. This situation was avoided by Wied who proposed a new name for Parulus ruficeps Spix, 1824, namely Synallaxis cinereus.

The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999, article 72.7) states that if “an author proposes a new species-group name expressly as a replacement (a *nomen novum*) for an earlier available one, then the two names are objective synonyms; both the nominal taxa they denote have the same name-bearing type despite any simultaneous restriction or application of the new replacement name (*nomen novum*) to particular specimens or any contrary designation of type, or any different taxonomic usage of the new replacement name”.

![Figure 1](image)

**FIGURE 1.** Specimen of Bahia Spinetail *Synallaxis whitneyi* (AMNH 6813), erroneously considered to be a syntype of *Synallaxis cinereus* Wied, 1831. Wied’s original label (*Synallaxis cinerea mihi*) refers to *Parulus ruficeps* Spix, 1824. (Photo: Renata Stopiglia).

Consequently, the types of *Synallaxis cinereus* Wied, 1831, are the types of *Parulus ruficeps* Spix, 1824 and Wied’s specimens (AMNH 6811–15 and 5204), treated as syntypes of *S. cinereus* by subsequent authors (Allen 1889; Cory & Hellmayr 1925; Vaurie 1980; Pacheco & Gonzaga 1995; LeCroy & Sloss 2000; Whitney & Pacheco 2001) have no validity as name-bearing types. The lectotype of *S. cinereus* (AMNH 6813) designated by Whitney and Pacheco (2001) is also invalid, because “if it is demonstrated that a specimen designated as a lectotype was not a syntype, it loses its status of lectotype” (ICZN 1999, article 74.2). Therefore, the synonymization of *Synallaxis whitneyi* Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995, with *Synallaxis cinereus* Wied, 1831, proposed by Whitney and Pacheco (2001), is also invalid.

The type series of *Synallaxis cinereus* and *Parulus ruficeps* comprised two syntypes, one male (destroyed during the Second World War), identified as *Synallaxis spixi* by Sclater (1856, 1862, 1890) and one female, which is also one of the syntypes of *Synallaxis frontalis* Pelzeln, 1859, held at the Zoologische Staatssammlung München (ZSM 151, Fig. 2).
It is worth mentioning that from a morphological perspective, *S. whitneyi* is easily distinguishable from *S. spixi* and *S. frontalis* by plumage characters (Remsen 2003).

There are a number of other names available in *Synallaxis* whose application to existing species appear not to have been satisfactorily resolved so that it is possible that some other name may antedate *S. whitneyi*, but until such time as this can be demonstrated, *S. cinereus* does not apply to the species and the correct name for the Bahia Spinetail will have to stand as *Synallaxis whitneyi* Pacheco and Gonzaga, 1995.

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Literature cited


