

Hodgson named the Spotted Linsang *Prionodon pardicolor* in 1841

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Abstract

The scientific name of Spotted Linsang *Prionodon pardicolor* Hodgson has variably been dated to 1841 or, mostly, 1842. Investigation of contemporary sources indicates that the former is correct.

Keywords: date of description, nomenclature, scientific name, year of publication

Brian Hodgson was a prolific zoological author who, as one of the first western naturalists to reside in the Himalayas, came across dozens of vertebrate taxa not then described to science (Cocker & Inskipp 1988, Datta & Inskipp 2004, Inskipp 2004). One of these is Spotted Linsang, for which the name in current use, *Prionodon pardicolor*, is generally credited to Hodgson, 1842 but sometimes to Hodgson, 1841. The present note untangles this inconsistency.

Hodgson lived in a remote area in an era of uneven communication reliability and efficiency, well before modern concepts of type specimens and name availability. He referred to the linsang in three articles with similar imprint dates. The original description, a tract devoted to the species in the *Calcutta Journal of Natural History* (*CJNH* 2: 57–60), is usually dated as 1842 (by, e.g., Blandford 1888, Sclater 1891, Wroughton 1916, Osgood 1932, Pocock 1933, 1939, Ellerman & Morrison-Scott 1951, Lekagul & McNeely 1977, Wozencraft 1993, 2005, Wang Yingxiang 2002, Gaubert 2009), but Ellerman & Morrison-Scott (1966), Corbet & Hill (1992) and Datta (2004) all dated it as 1841.

CJNH 2: 57–60 was in part 5 of the journal. This, the first part of volume 2, has an imprint date of April 1841. Four strands of circumstantial evidence suggest part 5 was indeed printed in 1841. (1) None of the above-cited sources dating it as 1842 provides even a footnote as to why a course contrary to the imprint date was taken. (2) Two other Hodgson names still in current use today and from the same volume of *CJNH*, the mole *Euroscaptor micrura* (p. 221) and Lesser Bamboo Rat *Cannomys badius* (p. 60), are generally dated as 1841, and in page sequence come after the introduction of the linsang's name; the mole was even in part 6. (3) Hodgson (1847: 40) himself wrote that “To this genus [*Prionodon*] no second species was added until 1841, when I described another proper to the Sub-Himalayas in the 5th No. of this journal [*CJNH*]”. (4) In the original description, he wrote that “in my catalogue of Nepalese mammals, drawn up for the Linnæan Society, and in my descriptions of new species in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, I have omitted all mention of a very beautiful little animal...”, which allows some indirect triangulation of the date of *CJNH* (2: 57–60).

In 1841, he wrote two more versions, in which he did mention the linsang, of his ‘Classified catalogue of mammals of Nepal, corrected to end of...’: to ‘1840’ for that published in *CJNH* (2: 212–221), and to ‘1841’ for that in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (*JASB* 10: 907–916). These versions were evidently not published by the time he wrote the original description, because in the latter he referred only to the earlier, Linnæan Society, incarnation of his catalogue. He signed off *CJNH* 2: 212–221 from the “valley of Nepal, March 1841”, and *JASB* 10: 907–916 (in high dudgeon over one of his detracting colleagues) from the “Valley of Nipal, Dec. 1841”. Both versions accompanied his name for

the linsang (*Prionodon pardicolor*) with essentially the same concise text, in the latter (p. 909) reading: “32. *Prionodon*.—1. Sp. new. Pardicolor Nobis, H. C. and N.”; 32 is the species's sequence number, ‘nobis’ indicates his authorship of the name, and ‘H. C. and N’ is a habitat and distribution coding. Although the use of ‘new’ makes the account look, to modern readers, like the first introduction of the name, this is not so. Hodgson used this word widely in his catalogues, and on p. 915 of *JASB* 10: 907–916, he summed up that “probably 55 to 60 [mammal species] are new. Their descriptions, with four or five exceptions only, are to be found in the Journal of Bengal Asiatic Society, and in that of Mr. McClelland [= *CJNH*]. The remaining four or five yet unpublished are forthcoming shortly”. He did not, however, cite in his catalogues the original descriptions for each name nor did he specify which names remained then unpublished; this leaves an ambiguity that *Prionodon pardicolor* might have been one of them.

Without doubt, therefore, Hodgson wrote *CJNH* 2: 57–60 first, then *CJNH* 2: 212–221, and finally *JASB* 10: 907–916; but it does not follow that they were published in this order, and it is the date of publication, not of writing, that needs clarification. Had *CJNH* 2: 57–60 been published in 1842, it must have had a nine (or more) -month delay in printing, and there must also have been a delay in *JASB*. The latter is quite possible: *JASB* 10: 907–916 falls in part 119, with an imprint date of November 1841, but this year has not universally been accepted as the year of printing. Peters (1940) suspected an actual publication date of 1842 for the directly following article (which includes the original description of ‘*Phoenicophaus longicaudatus*’ (= Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis*), and indeed *JASB* was often published later than the imprint date (Dickinson & Pittie 2006). These latter found no reasons to uphold Peters's suspicions over part 119, but E. C. Dickinson *in litt.* (2007) cautioned that they were unaware of Hodgson's date-line on the mammal catalogue. It seems unlikely that with this December sign-off in Nepal, part 119 could have been printed (in Calcutta) in that year, but the date of printing cannot be resolved without further investigation.

Such investigation is a major undertaking and does not always allow resolution (e.g. Dickinson & Pittie 2006). E. C. Dickinson (*in litt.* 2007) knows of no-one having explored *CJNH* for evidence of printing delays, but the circumstantial evidence, above, gives no grounds for an 1842 date of publication of the original description. The wide use of the latter may simply reflect that the final part of volume 2 of *CJNH*, part 8, had indeed an imprint date of 1842 (January): perhaps someone a long time ago (no later than 1888!) erroneously assumed that this date applied to the entire volume. Uncritical repetition then bedded in this error. In this context it is noteworthy that Corbet & Hill (1992: 12) checked the original sources for “bibliographic accuracy”,

a labour undertaken systematically by few other list compilers. Even more telling is that Ellerman & Morrison-Scott noticed the correct date between their first (1951) and second (1966) editions, and amended their text from 1842 to 1841 in both relevant places (both on p. 285); but they did not flag this change, and few have picked up on it.

As a final footnote, the original description (*CJNH* 2: 57–60) spelt the name as *Prionodon pardicator* in the only place in which it occurred, the title, and *CJNH* 2: 212–221 spelt it as *pardicolor*. These spellings give meaningless words, whereas *pardicolor*, as finally printed in *JASB* 10: 907–916, refers to the Leopard *Panthera pardus*-like colour and pattern of the animal. Subsequent authors, including Ellerman & Morrison-Scott (1951, 1966), Corbet & Hill (1992), Van Rompaey (1995: 10) and Datta (2004), all of whom noted the original form, have used the emended spelling and there are no grounds to reinstate *pardicator*, which was clearly a printer's error.

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