

SPHAERIIDAE IN MOLLUSCA AND INSECTA:
COMMENTS ON PROPOSALS TO REMOVE THE HOMONYMY.
Z.N.(S.) 1892
(see Bull. zool. Nom. vol. 32, pp. 60–62, 201–204)


I am at present preparing an article on the ‘minute bog beetle’ family SPHAERIIDAE, SPHAERIIDAE, MICROSPORIDAE, or whatever name is eventually applied to them. Also I will soon be describing one or more new species of ‘Sphaerius Waltl’ from South America. These studies have led me to the proposal on the homonymy in family-group names in the Bull. zool. Nom. and have prompted the following comments.

Because it seems clear that SPHAERIIDAE for the Mollusca has priority over its use in Insecta, my comments are directed at a replacement name for the beetle family. I am opposed to using the family name SPHAERIIDAE (Insecta) versus SPHAERIIDAE (Mollusca) for the following reasons:

(1) The name SPHAERIIDAE would be grammatically incorrect and thus a perpetual error; (2) both names will inevitably be mis-spelled in the literature from time to time in the future and will be a recurring nuisance from that standpoint; (3) both spellings are already very similar to others in general use, such as Sphaeridium, SPHAERIIDIDAE, Sphaerites, SPHAERITIDAE, etc. Emendations such as SPHAERIDAE, SPHAERIUSIDAE or SPHAERIURIDAE would not alleviate this excess of names based on similar stems.

Therefore I believe that the suggestion that ‘it is better to rename the beetle family after a genus other than Sphaerius, if one exists’ as suggested by Professor Tortonese (Bull. zool. Nom. vol. 32, p. 60, 1975) and seconded by the late Dr Reichardt (vol. 32, p. 203, 1976) has considerable merit. In this case another name, Microsporus Kolenati, 1846, Meletemata entomol., fasc. 5, p. 64 (type species of nominal genus, M. obsidianus Kolenati ibid., by monotypy) exists as a synonym of Sphaerius Waltl. Although Microsporus was originally proposed for a subgenus of Georyssus Latreille, 1809, it was treated as a synonym of Sphaerius by Matthews, 1899, Monograph of the Coleopterous families Corylophidae and Sphaeriidae (London) and this synonymy has been accepted by subsequent coleopterists. I therefore support Reichardt’s suggestion that Microsporus be made the
nomenclaturally valid name of the genus and that the family name be changed to MICROSPORIDAE. This action would (1) solve the homonymy problem between the Mollusca and the Insecta and differentiate the beetle family name from the many names derived from similar stems, (2) eliminate the grammatically incorrect name SPHAERIDAE, (3) provide a highly descriptive generic and family name for the beetles involved, and (4) provide final stability for the beetle family name after many years of uncertainty. Furthermore, since Article 79c excludes the citing of precedents on the basis of earlier Opinions, analogous requests should be few and the final decision would still lie in each case with the consensus of the Commission and the zoologists concerned.

Undue delay in stabilising this problem of homonymy will only increase the problem. For example, since the question was first laid before the Commission, Abdullah (Zool. Beitr. vol 19, pp. 24, 26, 1973) has established a ‘Series Sphaeriformia Abdullah, nov.’ based on Sphaerius Waltl in the coleopteran suborder PISIDIIDAE. Abdullah further stated (p. 41) that the molluscan family name PISIDIIDAE had been approved by the Commission. Perhaps most of the damage has been done, but a prompt decision should stop the proliferation of incorrect citations. In addition, contributors to the new Catalog of Coleoptera of North America north of Mexico, which is well under way, would benefit from a prompt decision.

[Note by the Secretary.- The family name PISIDIIDAE Gray, 1857, was added to the Official List in Direction 27 (Ops. Decls. int. Comm. zool. Nom. vol. 10, pp. 481–492) ‘for use by any worker who may consider that the genera Pisidium Pfeiffer and Sphaerium Scopoli, 1777, the type genus of the taxon SPHAERIDAE, belong to different family-group taxa’. That ruling clearly does not preempt a ruling placing SPHAERIDAE on the Official List.

Dr Spangler’s comment involves the following proposals to the Commission:

(a) use of the plenary powers to suppress the generic name Sphaerius Waltl, 1838 and all subsequent uses for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy;

(b) placing Microsporus Kolenati, 1846 (gender: masculine), type species, by monotypy, Microsporus obsidianus Kolenati, 1846, on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology;

(c) placing obsidianus Kolenati, 1846, as published in the binomen Microsporus obsidianus (specific name of type species of Microsporus Kolenati, 1846) on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology;

(d) placing the family name MICROSPORIDAE Reichardt, 1976 (type genus Microsporus Kolenati, 1846) on the Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology.

R.V.M.]

(2) By Dr Y.I. Starobogatov

(Letter received 24 August 1979): In 1798 Bruguière introduced Cyclas without description or species included by name, but accompanied by an illustration of Sphaerium rivicola of recent authors. In the following year Lamarck referred the sole species Tellina cornea Linnaeus, 1758 to the genus. But Lamarck’s species is a composite, including Cyclas rivicola Lamarck, Sphaerium scaldianum