

## **Change the English name of Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*)**

### **Effect on the Check-list:**

Approval of this proposal would result in a new English name for Scott's Oriole. We recommend that the committee adopt either Yucca Oriole or Golden-tailed Oriole as the new name.

### **Background:**

The American Ornithological Society (AOS) Committee on Classification and Nomenclature: North and Middle America (NACC) issued the most recent update to the Guidelines for English bird names on 3 June 2020 (NACC 2020a). Section D part 1 of these guidelines provides a brief introduction to eponyms followed by two subsections (NACC 2020a). We believe Scott's Oriole presents an excellent candidate for meeting the criteria described in subsection 1.1, and meets or exceeds the expected criteria described in section 1.2. It is for these reasons that we evoke the Section D Special Considerations guidelines to change the English name of Scott's Oriole.

### **The species named for Scott, and other ornithological contributions:**

Darius Nash Couch was born in New York in 1822 (Searles 2020). He graduated from West Point in 1846 and was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery, embarking on nearly 20 years of US military service (Searles 2020). From 1846-1848 Couch fought in the Mexican-American War, and from 1849-1850 he was stationed in Florida, battling the Seminole (Searles 2020). After this he was stationed in garrisons across the US (Searles 2020). In 1853, at the encouragement of Spencer Baird, he was granted a one-year leave of absence from the military to lead a Smithsonian-funded expedition to document the natural history of northern Mexico (Fischer 2001).

It was during this expedition that in 1853 while in Neuvo León, Mexico, Couch collected an oriole, which he thought was new to science (Conant 1968, Fischer 2001). He gave this bird the scientific name *Icterus scottii*, after Winfield Scott, the Commanding General of the US Army at the time, and the Whig candidate in the 1852 presidential election. Couch wrote, "I have named this handsome bird as a slight token of my high regard for Major General Winfield Scott, Commander and Chief of the U.S. Army" (excerpt from Fischer 2001).

*Icterus scottii* was not retained, as Couch was not the first, nor even the second, European to describe the oriole (Proceedings of the ANSP 1867). Charles Lucien Bonaparte described the oriole 17 years prior in 1837, issuing the scientific name another eponym, *Icterus parisorum*, after the "Paris brothers" (first names unknown) who helped finance several collecting expeditions in Mexico (Fischer 2001). Two years later in 1839 Rene Lesson described the oriole as *Icterus melanochrysur* (Proceedings of the ANSP 1867). Despite these earlier descriptions the common name issued by Couch remains in use.

In terms of Scott's ornithological contributions, we are unable to find any at all. The lack of ornithological contributions is not unique to North American eponyms. However, we additionally cannot find any evidence of Winfield Scott as a naturalist, as an individual with family members or known friendships with any naturalists, or as someone who contributed funds to natural history. In short, we are unable to find any connections directly, indirectly, or by association through friendship, marriage, or blood relation, or through financial contributions, to any aspect of natural history. We also find that he did not express any documented passing interest in nature.

### **A brief synopsis of the life and military career of Scott:**

Note: The military career of Winfield Scott is perhaps the most extensive of any individual serving between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. The following paragraphs follow Agent of Destiny by John Eisenhower and attempt to briefly describe Scott's most impactful campaigns.

Winfield Scott (1786-1866) was born into a family that owned a plantation near Petersburg, Virginia (Eisenhower 1997). Scott's lifelong military career began in 1807 under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, when British troops attacked a ship off the coast of Virginia, and Virginia's governor called for men to enlist (Eisenhower 1997). Scott captured 8 sailors that had landed ashore (Eisenhower 1997). During the War of 1812, Scott was stationed at the New York border with Canada, experiencing combat with British, Canadian, and Mohawk forces (Eisenhower 1997). He saw combat in this same area throughout the War of 1812, following which he was promoted to general as the commander of the Northern Military District (Eisenhower 1997). He was stationed in New York City during his time as a general (Eisenhower 1997).

In 1832 under Andrew Jackson, Scott oversaw the Black Hawk Purchase, also known as Scott's Purchase, which was the repercussion for the Sauk, Fox, and Kikapoo Indigenous tribes for defeat in the Black Hawk War of 1832 (Lewis et al. 2013). Following tribal defeat at the Bad Axe Massacre, which culminated in fleeing Indigenous warriors, as well as women and children, being shot dead and scalped, Scott purchased 6 million acres of Iowa from the tribes for 11 cents an acre (Sabin and Sabin 1900).

In 1836, Scott began his involved role in the Trail of Tears (Eisenhower 1997). He gained command of the US troops in the Second Seminole War, fighting one of the most difficult Indigenous tribes for the United States to remove from their native land, and Scott's troops were ultimately defeated (Eisenhower 1997). Without progress against the Seminole, Scott was moved to Alabama, where he defeated the Muscogee in the Creek War of 1836 (Eisenhower 1997). This led to the forcible removal of the Muscogee through the Trail of Tears.

Scott's bloodiest involvement in the Trail of Tears came when he was appointed to command Cherokee removal from the southeastern United States to present day Oklahoma. Scott's forcible removal saw Cherokees removed from their land at gunpoint,

often with no time to gather possessions, and relocated to concentration camps (National Park Service 2020). In 1838, Scott ordered the event known as “*nu na hi du na tlo hi lu i*” (“the trail where they cried” in Cherokee) to take place (Rozema 2003). Over 15,000 Cherokee were forcibly removed from their land, and on the 1,200 mile long journey to present day Oklahoma, an estimate 4,000 died (Nance 2001). During the June removal, death on this Trail of Tears was so rampant that Scott ordered removal to stop (Nance 2001). He placed the remaining Cherokee in internment camps, where they remained for the next 4 months (Nance 2001). Over 350 Cherokee died in the unsanitary conditions of the camps, many of dysentery (Jones 1984, Nance 2001).

Following his command of the Cherokee Trail of Tears, in Scott negotiated the border of Maine with the United Kingdom (1838) (Eisenhower 1997). In 1841, John Tyler appointed him to the Commanding General of the US Army, a position he held until 1861, and concurrent with the time that Couch travelled to Mexico (Eisenhower 1997). As Commanding General under James Polk, he oversaw the invasion of Mexico during the Mexican-American War (Eisenhower 1997). In 1847 he travelled by sea to eventually capture Mexico City, crucial in negotiations for the Mexican Cession (Eisenhower 1997).

Scott continued to serve as Commander General, running for president in 1852 on the Whig party ticket. The Whig party was divided at this time, with southern Whigs opposed to Scott, leading to a landslide defeat by Franklin Pierce (Holt 1999). Scott was promoted to lieutenant general in 1855, and continued to serve under James Buchanan, and served to guard Lincoln’s 1861 inauguration (Eisenhower 1997).

In the Civil War, Scott oversaw the Union Army during the First Battle of Bull Run, leading to defeat (Eisenhower 1997). This defeat brought Union criticism of Scott, and he resigned from his position and retired in 1861 (Eisenhower 1997). He died in 1866 at West Point (Eisenhower 1997).

### **A consideration of “Scott’s Oriole” against the background of today:**

Winfield Scott, as described briefly above, has cemented a definitive place in the history of the United States. Many historical studies of pre-Civil War 19<sup>th</sup> century United States military operations undoubtedly place Scott in the front and center. Our argument here is that Scott’s Oriole has no justification for being named after Scott based on the Special Considerations guidelines described by the NACC (NACC 2020a). The NACC provides two specific subsections for addressing eponyms: Section D, part 1, subsection 1.1, and Section D, part 1, subsection 1.2 (NACC 2020a).

In subsection 1.1, the NACC states that “affiliation with a now-discredited historical movement of group is likely not sufficient for the NACC to change a long-established eponym. In contrast, the active engagement of the eponymic namesake in reprehensible events could serve as grounds for changing even long-established eponyms” (NACC 2020a). Clearly, the Trail of Tears is widely regarded as one of the most atrocious acts committed in the history of the United States, and an act of forced genocide. The act obviously removed Cherokees from their land, was a grueling and tortuous journey, and

resulted in mass death, but it also succeeded as an act of cultural genocide, destroying aspects of Cherokee culture reliant on their land and in their traditional homes. This atrocity is so grave that it inappropriately overshadows Scott forcibly removing the Muscogee, Sauk, Fox, and Kikapoo, and the attempted removal of the Seminole, as described above.

In our interpretation, subsection 1.1 acts to (1) classify relevant historical events as reprehensible versus non-reprehensible and (2) distinguish affiliation versus active engagement. Clearly, here, Scott acted as the commanding officer directly responsible for overseeing the US forces carrying out the Trail of Tears. He issued statements directly to the Cherokee ordering them to evacuate (Scott, 1838). Due to (1) the level of atrocity that was committed and (2) Scott's direct authority and involvement, we believe Scott's Oriole meets the requirements described in subsection 1.1.

Subsection 1.2 reads "the NACC will also consider the degree of historical association between the eponym and the species it describes" (NACC 2020a). The NACC writes that "some eponyms are purely honorific in that they refer to an individual with no close association to their namesake species or to ornithology in general" (NACC 2020a) and specifically states that these type of names receive a lower level "of merit for retention" (NACC 2020a). We believe that of all extant North American English eponyms, Scott's Oriole may perhaps be the top candidate for the criteria described in subsection 1.2. In a comprehensive search we find that all other extant North American English eponyms are assigned to an individual with a documented minimal passing interest in the natural world, or a family member with such an interest, or were somehow related to expedition that discovered the species.

As described in Proposal 2020-S-01, ornithology is not exempt from racism (NACC 2020b). The Special Guidelines of the Guidelines for English Bird Names clearly describe a path for defining an eponym as problematic (NACC 2020a). We have considered the criteria heavily and selected the best possible candidate species name given these guidelines. We believe that the removal of the eponym and its replacement will act as a message by the AOS to alert ornithologists, birders, and naturalists to barriers in the community towards Indigenous Peoples and other underrepresented minorities, and the acknowledgement of the society's dedication to change.

### **Recommendation:**

In light of the 2020 updates to the Guidelines for English Bird Names and the increased awareness of perspectives of underrepresented minorities in the birding and science communities, as well as in United States culture at large, we consider the following factors to be of the greatest importance in this nomenclature change: (1) Scott oversaw the forced removal of at least 5 Indigenous tribes, and was the top commander leading to the torture and death of thousands of Cherokee through the Trail of Tears, a candidate for one of the most disgraceful episodes in American history (see subsection 1.1). (2) Scott has no affiliation with Scott's Oriole, ornithology, natural history, is not a family member of a naturalist, and has no role as a financial donor in natural history (see subsection 1.2).

His namesake adorning the oriole is entirely based on Darius Couch holding a “high regard” for him.

### **Alternative English names:**

*Names based on appearance.*—In appearance, Scott’s Oriole is superficially similar to a number of other orioles, including Audubon’s Oriole, but with a black mantle and more excessive black on the breast than other orioles. After finding few alternative English names that have existed for Scott’s Oriole, we focus on the underside of the tail, the proximal half of which is pale gold to olive-green, a unique feature. In proposal 2020-S-01, an English name was selected by translating the Latin name (NACC 2020b). Here, Lesson’s *Icterus melanochrysur* is literally “black” (melan) “gold” (chrysos) “tail” (ura). Given that the pale gold portion of the tail is more diagnostic than the black portion, we select Golden-tailed Oriole as the English name.

*Names based on distribution or habitat.*—Scott’s Oriole is closely tied to yucca trees, and a survey of 214 nests found that 213 were in yuccas (Flood, 2020). It also largely forages for invertebrates on yuccas (Flood, 2020). Roosting sites, territory size, and nesting density are also associated with yucca prevalence (Dixon 1959, Kozma and Mathews 1997). We believe that Yucca Oriole is the most appropriate name.

We recommend Yucca Oriole, for the reasons cited above. Golden-tailed Oriole would be a second possibility for a plumage-based name. We are also open to the committee vetoing these names in favor of a write-in name.

### **Literature Cited**

Conant, R. 1968. Zoological exploration in Mexico-The route of Lieut. D. N. Couch in 1853. *Am. Mus. Novit.* 2350:1-14.

Dixon, K. L. (1959). Ecological and distributional relations of desert scrub birds of western Texas. *Condor* 61:397-409.

Eisenhower, J. S. D. 1997. *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott*. New York: The Free Press.

Fischer, D. L. 2001. *Early Southwest Ornithologists 1528-1900*. USA: The University of Arizona Press.

Flood, N. J. 2020. Scott’s Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*), version 1.0 in *Birds of the World* (A. F. Poole and F. B. Gill, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.

Holt, M. F. 1999. *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jones, B. 1984. *Cherokees: An Illustrated History*. Muskogee, OK: The Five Civilized Tribes Museum.

Kozma, J. M. and N. E. Mathews. (1997). Breeding bird communities and nest plant selection in Chihuahuan Desert habitats in south-central New Mexico. *Wilson Bulletin* 109:424-436.

Lewis, James. 2013. Black Hawk War. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Hawk-War/>

Nance, B. C. 2001. The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: a study of the routes used during the Cherokee removal of 1838.

National Parks Service. 2020. What Happened on the Trail of Tears? Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. <https://www.nps.gov/trte/learn/historyculture/what-happened-on-the-trail-of-tears.htm>

North American Committee on Classification and Nomenclature (NACC). 2020a. Guidelines for English Bird Names. <https://americanornithology.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Guidelines-AOS-English-names-2020.pdf>.

North American Committee on Classification and Nomenclature (NACC). 2020b. Proposal Set 2020-S. <https://americanornithology.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-S.pdf>.

Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences Volume 19. 1867. USA: Philadelphia

Rozema, V. 2003. *Voices From the Trail of Tears*. Durham, NC: Blair Press.

Sabin, H., and Sabin, E. L. 1900. *The Making of Iowa*. Chicago: A. Flanagan Co.

Scott, W. 1838. Proclamation to the Cherokee People. Access:  
<https://www.tngenweb.org/cessions/18380510.html>

Searles, H. 2020. Darius Nash Couch. American History Channel. R.Squared Communications, LLC. <https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/darius-nash-couch/>

**Submitted by:** Robert Driver, East Carolina University, and Jessica McLaughlin, University of Oklahoma.

**Date of Proposal:** 5 February 2021