SPILOTES MELANURUS DUMÉRIL, BIBRON & DUMÉRIL, 1854
(REPTILIA, SERPENTES): PROPOSED VALIDATION UNDER THE
PLENARY POWERS. Z.N.(S.) 1535

By Hobart M. Smith (Department of Zoology and Museum of Natural
History, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, U.S.A.)

In 1941 Smith (Journ. Washington Acad. Sci. 31: 473-474) proposed the
name Drymarchon corais melanocercus as a substitute for Spilotes melanurus
Duméril, Bibron and Duméril, 1854 (Erp. Gén. 7: 224-225), a secondary
homonym of Coluber melanurus Schlegel, 1837 (= Elaphe melanurus [Schlegel])
by virtue of the inclusion of both names in Spilotes by Gray (Cat. Snakes Brit.
Mus., 1858: 97). This proposal was made in conformance with the then
accepted understanding that secondary homonyms, like primary homonyms,
are automatically dead upon occurrence.

2. Subsequent discussions, as in the Paris meetings of the International
Congress of Zoology (Bull. zool. Nomencl. 4, 1948: 123-124), made it apparent
that such a rigid interpretation of homonyms was not widely acceptable.
Accordingly the name melanurus continued in popular use after 1943 as it had
prior to 1941, even by the original author of the substitute name.

3. In the 1961 Code it is implicitly clear (Art. 59c) that names rejected as
secondary homonyms prior to 1961 are to remain permanently rejected.
By the automatic provisions of the Code, therefore, melanocercus Smith is the
valid name for the form commonly referred to as melanurus.

4. There seems, however, to be nothing in favour in this case of insistence
upon adherence to the automatic provisions and utilization of the name
melanocercus in lieu of melanurus, except for the maintenance of inflexibility of
application of the Code, and avoidance of disturbing the Commission for
preservation of a name not particularly important in non-taxonomic literature.
These considerations do not, I think, outweigh the desirability of the century-
long continuity of name for a very widely distributed snake which is indeed
a popular exhibit animal and is thus frequently referred to in the popular and
semipopular literature. Some forty references in the taxonomic literature have
occurred since 1854 in application to Mexico alone; surely a greater number have
occurred in application to the subspecies in other parts of its range, in Central
and South America. The deliberately-chosen similarity of the substitute and
original names does not materially alter the conclusion that it would be in the
best interest of nomenclatural stability to preserve the long-used name
melanurus.

5. Accordingly the Commission is hereby requested:
   (1) to declare under the plenary powers that the specific name melanurus
       Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854, as published in the binomen
       Spilotes melanurus, is not invalidated by its Senior secondary homonym
       Coluber melanurus Schlegel, 1837;
   (2) to place the specific name melanurus Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854,

(3) to place the specific name *melanocercus* Smith, 1941, as published in the combination *Drymarchon corais melanocercus* (a junior objective synonym of *melanurus, Spilotes, Dumeril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854*) on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology.