Case 2715

*Lepomis* Rafinesque, 1819 (Osteichthyes, Perciformes): proposed fixation of masculine gender for the name

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Abstract. The purpose of this application is to fix as masculine the gender of *Lepomis* Rafinesque, 1819, for a genus of fish, including important food, game and laboratory research species. This is in accordance with Rafinesque's original intention and almost universal usage until 1988 when the gender was amended to feminine on etymological grounds with which the authors disagree.

1. In 1819 Rafinesque (p. 420) established the generic name *Lepomis* and designated *Labrus auritus* Linnaeus, 1758 (p. 283) as the type species; he established two new species which he called *Lepomis cyanellus* and *L. macrochirus*. Although he did not state that the gender of *Lepomis* was masculine, it is clear from the ending of the three specific names that this was his intention.

2. Rafinesque did not specify the derivation of *Lepomis*, but this can be inferred from his two subgenera, *Pomotis* and *Apomotis*. He characterized *Pomotis* as having 'opercule auriculé' (an ear on the opercle) and *Apomotis* as 'opercule sans auricle'. Since *Pomotis* and *Apomotis* both use the Greek *poma* (n., a lid or cover) to mean the operculum or Gill cover, we conclude that the ending of *Lepomis* stems from the same Greek root. That this interpretation is correct is confirmed in that Rafinesque characterized *Lepomis* as having 'tête et opercules écailleux' (head and opercles scaled). Furthermore, in a paper the following year, Rafinesque (1820, p. 30) stated that 'the name means scaly gills'. Jordan & Gilbert (1877, p. 102) also considered *Lepomis* to be derived from *lepis* plus *poma*.

3. *Lepomis* has almost universally been treated as masculine as in Rafinesque's 1819 paper. A notable early exception was Rafinesque himself who, in his 1820 paper, treated *Lepomis* as feminine as indicated by his use of the specific names *pallida, trifasciata, salmonea* and *notata*. More recently, Bailey & Robins (1988, p. 100) pointed out that Brown (1954, pp. 332, 683) considered the name to be derived from the Greek *lepis* (f., scale) and *omis* (f., a fish); in this Brown was not consistent since he gave as an example *Lepomis auritus* with a masculine ending. Bailey & Robins accepted Brown's derivation and treated *Lepomis* as feminine, 'correcting' a number of specific names to *Lepomis aurita, L. cyanella, L. gibbosa*, etc. They added that all these names were
incorrectly assigned masculine endings in the 1980 and earlier editions of the American Fisheries Society’s *List of Common and Scientific Names of Fishes from the United States and Canada* (Robins et al., 1980).

4. We do not accept Bailey & Robins’ argument that *Lepomis* should be treated as feminine on account of the etymology suggested by Brown (1954) and have sought the views of Professor H.D. Cameron (Professor of Greek and Latin, Adjunct Curator in the Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan). In a letter (29 January 1990) to the Executive Secretary of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, Professor Cameron wrote:

‘It is perfectly clear that *Lepomis* is not a properly formed Greek compound, no matter what Rafinesque thought he was doing. The rules of Greek noun formation would not permit such an invention. Rafinesque, by his inattention to philological nicety, created a problem which cannot be solved by appeal to etymology or grammar. I am convinced that they [the authors of this application] have rightly construed what Rafinesque thought he was doing, but still his result is grammatically unacceptable. It is for this reason that... I have come round to the opinion that the name must be legally considered an arbitrary combination of letters, and the gender determined by the original author’.

Professor Cameron added that, since *Lepomis* ended with the feminine suffix -omis, it could be argued under Article 30b of the Code that the name should be treated as feminine irrespective of Rafinesque’s original intentions on etymology and gender.

5. We consider that, irrespective of the derivation of the name *Lepomis* and since it is ‘almost universally regarded as masculine’ (Bailey & Robins, 1988, p. 100) in accordance with Rafinesque’s original intention, it would be in the interests of stability for it to be ruled by the Commission as masculine.

6. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

(1) to use its plenary powers to rule that the gender of *Lepomis* Rafinesque, 1819 is masculine;

(2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the name *Lepomis* Rafinesque, 1819 (gender: masculine, as ruled in (1) above), type species by original designation *Labrus auritus* Linnaeus, 1758;

(3) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *auritus* Linnaeus, 1758, as published in the binomen *Labrus auritus* (specific name of the type species of *Lepomis* Rafinesque, 1819).

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References


