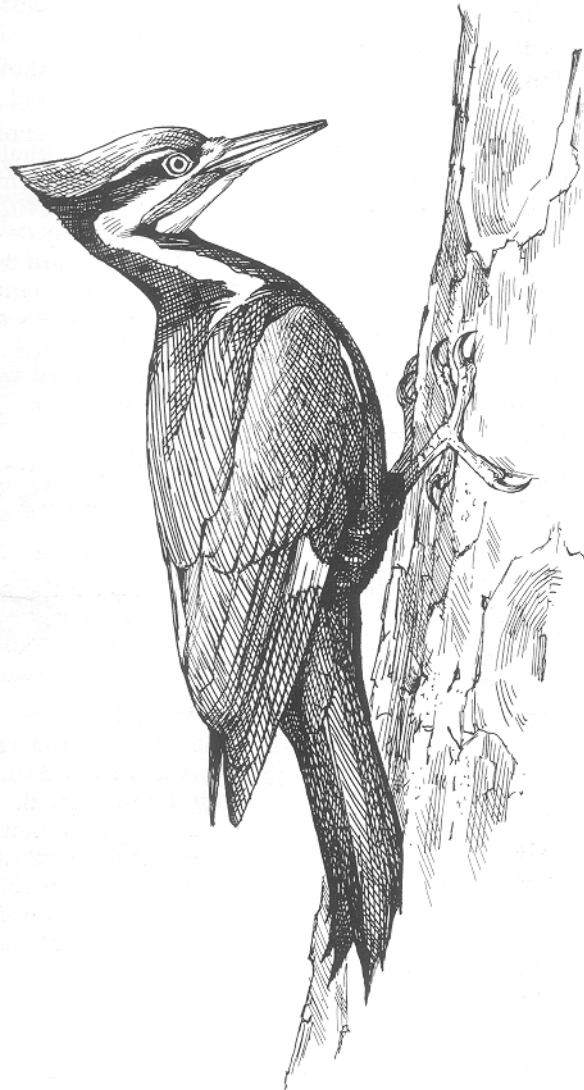


Pronounced Bûrd

by Kurt Radamaker * and Michael A. Patten †



JAMES COE

Pileated Woodpecker (Drycopus pileatus). The proper pronunciation of this species' name has long been the subject of argument.

The proper pronunciation of bird names has long been the subject of argument and controversy. In fact, we had reached a point where if either of us heard the word PILL-ee-ate-ed again, we intended to inflict bodily harm on the speaker. We decided, therefore, to consult a selection of dictionaries and bird books to produce a standard reference article for the pronunciation of English bird names. Simple. Or so we thought.

Our initial research produced more questions than answers and left many of what we considered the most controversial pronunciations without a single, correct "standard." Undaunted, we began to utilize other sources of information, primarily references to the etymology of the English language. Some of these sources proved helpful, but most raised even more questions. Nevertheless, we decided to establish our own standards by proclaiming a particular pronunciation, such as PIE-lee-ate-ed, correct while declaring all other pronunciations of that word incorrect.

Feeling quite proud and smug, we decided to have our work sanctified by the experts, in this case Merriam-Webster Incorporated, so that we might publish our standards with the blessings of authority.

Several weeks passed before the arrival of a communication

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from Dr. David Justice, editor of pronunciation at Merriam-Webster, and in the interim, we confidently corrected our birding companions and led them on the path of virtuous speech. Expecting a letter brimming over with praise for our being such keen, astute scholars of common bird-name pronunciation, we opened the letter quickly and read it eagerly. Our confidence was replaced by disillusionment, and our pride went down in a gulp.

Dr. Justice stated that, to a large extent, correctness of pronunciation is

simply the consensus of informed practice. So if you have half the birders saying *PILL-ee-ate-ed*, and half saying *PIE-lee-ate-ed*, there is no secure basis for declaring one half incorrect. . . . One might try to fall back on the quantity of the vowel in the lender language, but the influence of classical vowel quantity has long since lapsed. It is observed that were we to honor classical quantity, we would pronounce *agent*, *alien*, and *decent* with a short stressed vowel, and *comic* and *echo* with a long one.

Humbled, yet enlightened, we changed the focus of our research to incorporate the "consensus of informed practice." We discovered in the ensuing months of study that there exist many common bird names that may be correctly pronounced in more than one way, such as Osprey and Plover. Our goal of setting the birding world straight thus came to an end.

But do not misunderstand our effort: in a majority of instances, a

consensus pronunciation, which can be verified etymologically (from a dictionary, for example) does exist for a given English bird name. Furthermore, merely because a majority of the birding populace pronounces a common bird name in a certain way, that pronunciation is not automatically deemed valid (e.g., *jaçana*). This is particularly true when the common name is a mispronounced surname.

So, here we present our findings for your consideration. Before you begin, a brief note about the method we have used to describe the pronunciation of a word. Basically we have used what is commonly known as the "moo-goo-gai-pan" method, where the phonetic pronunciation of a syllable is spelled out and where syllables are separated by dashes. The syllable on which the stress falls is capitalized (e.g., *PLO-ver*).

ACCENTOR

ak-SEN-tor or *AK-sen-ter* (e.g., Siberian Accentor)

From the Latin *ad* "to" and *cantor* "singer," which evolved to *accentor*, "one who sings with another."

ANI

AH-nee (e.g., Smooth-billed Ani)

Of Indian (Tupi-Guarani) origin, carried over into Spanish and Portuguese. It refers to any of several black cuckoos of the genus *Crotophaga* having a compressed blade-like bill.

BAIKAL

by-KALL (e.g., Baikal Teal)

"Baikal" is the name of a lake in

the Soviet Union. It is the deepest lake in the world—5,714 ft deep—and has a surface area of 13,200 sq mi.

BECARD

BECK-erd or *buh-KARD* (e.g., Rose-throated Becard)

"Becard" is a French derivative meaning "large bill."

BENDIRE'S

BEN-die-ers (e.g., Bendire's Thrasher)

Charles Emil Bendire (1836–1897) collected birds in the American West while serving as an officer in the U.S. Army. Dr. Elliot Coues named this species in Bendire's honor.

BERYLLINE

BEAR-uh-lin, *BEAR-uh-line*, or *BEAR-uh-leen* (e.g., Berylline Hummingbird)

"Berylline" is an adjective derived from the precious stone beryl, usually green, but also blue, rose, white, or golden, and both opaque and translucent.

BEWICK'S

BUICKS (like the car) (e.g., Bewick's Wren)

Thomas Bewick (1754–1828) was an English author and wood engraver who wrote and illustrated a history of British birds. John James Audubon, a friend of his, named this wren after him.

BOTTERI'S

BOT-er-eyes (e.g., Botteri's Sparrow)

Matteo Botteri (1807–1877) was a Yugoslavian immigrant who moved to Mexico in 1854. Dr. P. L. Sclater named this sparrow, first collected in southern Mexico, in his honor.

CARACARA

KAR-ah-KAR-ah or *KARE-ah-KARE-ah* (e.g., Crested Caracara)

"Caracara" is a Tupi Indian word

carried over into Spanish and Portuguese. It is presumably imitative of the Caracara's call.

CHACHALACA

CHAH-chah-LAH-kah (e.g., Plain Chachalaca)

"Chachalaca" is of Spanish-Mexican origin. The word describes the vocalization of the species.

COLIMA

koe-LEE-mah (e.g., Colima Warbler)

"Colima" refers to a small, prickly, tropical American shrub, a state on the Pacific Coast of southwestern Mexico, and a volcano northwest of Colima in the state of Jalisco.

CRAVERI'S

krah-VAIR-eez (e.g., Craveri's Murrelet)

Craveri's Murrelet, first collected by Dr. P. L. Sclater off Baja California, was named by him in honor of Frederico Craveri (1815-1890).

CRISSAL

KRIS-uhl (e.g., Crissal Thrasher)

The word "crissal" is defined as

relating to or having a crissum, the region surrounding the cloacal opening beneath the tail of a bird.

FALCATED

FALL-kate-ed (e.g., Falcated Teal)

"Falcated," from Latin *falx* "sickle," means hooked or curved like a sickle, and refers to the long, sickle-shaped tertials of the male Falcated Teal.

GLAUCOUS

GLAW-kuhs rhymes with raucous (e.g., Glaucous-winged Gull)

"Glaucous" is derived from the Latin *glaucus*, and refers to a silvery, gray, or bluish-green color.

GOSHAWK

GAHS-hawk (e.g., Northern Goshawk)

"Goshawk" is derived from Old English *goshafoc* "goose hawk."

GYRFALCON

JER-fall-ken (as in New Jersey) or *JER-fal-ken* (fal as in pal)

"Gyr" evolved from *giri*, an Old High German term which means "greedy," i.e., greedy falcon.

JABIRU

JAB-ih-roo or *jab-ih-ROO*

"Jabiru" is a Tupi-Guarani Indian name for the bird.

JAÇANA

zhah-sah-NAH (e.g., Northern Jaçana)

"Jaçana" comes through French, Spanish, and Portuguese transcriptions of the Tupi-Guarani name, which was pronounced *zhah-sah-NAH*. A phonetic symbol known as the cedilla was used in the original spelling of the word. A cedilla (ç) is used in the French and Portuguese languages to distinguish the English "soft c" (the "s" sound) from the English "hard c" (the "k" sound). The proper (i.e., the original) pronunciation of the word is *zhah-sah-NAH*, despite the multitudes who cry *jah-KA-na*. There are also those who say *ha-KAH-na*, a curious Spanish translation. In all fairness, it should be mentioned that much of the misunderstanding revolving around the proper pronunciation of jaçana has been propagated by popular reference books, such as *A Field Guide to*

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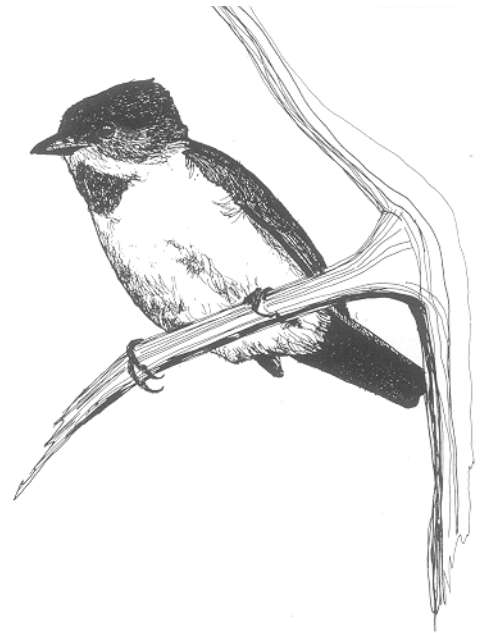
Mexican Birds, wherein Peterson and Chalif have omitted the cedilla from the word "jacana." (Interestingly, they preserved the cedilla on araçari, pronounced are-ah-SAH-ree.) And the conflict does not stop here. The two standard checklists for North American birds present different forms of the name: the third edition of the ABA Checklist (1986) and the fifth edition of the AOU Check-list (1957) have a cedilla on jaçana, but the sixth edition of the AOU Check-list (1983) does not! Correspondence from Burt L. Monroe, Jr., chairman of the AOU Committee on Nomenclature and Classification, indicates that the reason for the omission of the cedilla by the AOU is that they "adopted a policy for English names similar to that in the International Code for scientific names: all diacritic marks and letters not part of the normal English alphabet are not used. This [also] applies to the Spanish tilde and acute accent, the glottal stops in Hawaiian names, etc." Throughout most of the English-speaking world, ornithologists pronounce the word dzhah-KAN-ah or DZHAH-kan-ah (as in the names of the six African, Asian, and Australian species). So, zhah-sah-NAH, though correct, is becoming obsolete because almost no one says it that way anymore.

LAZULI

LAZH-uh-lie or LAZ-uh-lie (e.g., Lazuli Bunting)
 "Lazuli" refers to the colors of Lazulite—an azure-blue mineral.

MURRE

MUR rhymes with fur (e.g., Common Murre)
 "Murre" is of obscure origin. It may be related to *marrot* or *morrot*, dialect English words used to refer to these species.



Lydia C. Thompson

LYDIA C. THOMPSON

Rose-throated Becard—that's BECK-erd or buh-KARD.

OLIVACEOUS

AHL-ih-vay-shus (e.g., Olivaceous Cormorant)
 "Olivaceous" refers to a deep shade of green or olive.

OSPREY

AH-spray or AH-spre
 The word "osprey" may have been derived from the Latin *os-sifraga* meaning "bone-breaker," from *os* "bone" and *frangere* "to break."

PARULA

PA-ruh-lah (not pa-ROO-lah) (e.g., Tropical Parula)
Parula is a diminutive of *parus* "tit," hence meaning "little tit."

PAURAQUE

pah-RAH-kay
 "Pauraque" is a Mexican-Indian word used to describe this species by its vocalization.

PILEATED

PIE-lee-ate-ed or PILL-ee-ate-ed (e.g., Pileated Woodpecker)
 "Pileated" refers to the curved shape of the crest that covers the pileum. Pileum is a variation of *pileus*, a felt skullcap worn by the ancient Romans and Greeks.

PLOVER

PLO-ver or PLUH-ver (e.g., Mountain Plover)
 The word "plover" has its origins

in the Latin *pluvia* "rain," or *pluvius* "rainy."

POCHARD

POE-cherd (e.g., Common Pochard)
 No clear etymology is available. The best guesses are that the word is related to the old French word *pocher*, "to pocket" or "to poach," from the bird's popularity as game.

POMARINE

POE-mah-rine or PAH-mah-reen (e.g., Pomarine Jaeger)
 "Pomarine" comes from the Greek: *poma* meaning "lid" and *rhinon* meaning "nose."

PROTHONOTARY

pra-THON-ah-tary or pro-THON-ah-tary (e.g., Prothonotary Warbler)
 A prothonotary was a chief clerk or official in certain courts of law. Prothonotary Warbler is so called because its coloration resembles that of the robes traditionally worn by prothonotaries.

PYRRHULOXIA

PEER-ah-LOCK-see-ah
 "Pyrrhuloxia" comes from the Greek: *pyrrhos* meaning "red" or "fire," and *loxia* meaning "cross-bill."

SABINE'S

SAB-inz (e.g., Sabine's Gull)

Sir Edward Sabine (1788–1883), a British astronomer and physicist, named this gull that he collected in the Arctic in 1819 after his brother, Joseph. For reasons unknown to the authors, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Unabridged) lists the pronunciation as SAY-binz, whereas all of the biographical accounts of Sir Edward Sabine that we consulted indicate that his name was pronounced SAB-in; hence, SAB-inz Gull.

SCOPS

SCOPS (rhymes with drops) (e.g., Oriental Scops-Owl)

The term "scops" refers to an old English bard or poet.

SEMIPALMATED

SEM-ee-PAL-mated or SEM-i-PAUL-mated (e.g., Semipalmated Sandpiper)

"Semipalmated" refers to the partial webbing, or palmations, between the toes.

SKUA

SKEW-ah or SKOO-ah (e.g., South Polar Skua)

No clear etymology is available; however, *skua* is probably imitative of the bird's cry, and it possibly originates from Scandinavian *skufr*, the Old Norse name for the bird.

SMEW

SMEW (rhymes with few)

The smallest merganser, its name is of uncertain origin, possibly a corruption of the Middle English word *semawe*, "sea mew."

TEMMINCK'S

TEM-mingks (e.g., Temminck's Stint)

Named after Conrad J. Temminck (?–1858), a Dutch naturalist.

TYRANNULET

tie-RAN-you-let or tih-RAN-you-let

(e.g., Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet)

"Tyrannulet" is derived from the Greek *tyrannos*, meaning "tyrant" or "lord," indicating an absolute ruler. Hence: "small, small lord."

VAUX'S

VAWKS-iz (e.g., Vaux's Swift)

John K. Townsend named a swift he collected in the Pacific Northwest after his friend, William S. Vaux (1811–1882), member of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

ZENAIDA

zeh-NIE-dah (e.g., Zenaida Dove)

Named after Princess Zenaide Charlotte Julie Bonaparte, who was the eldest daughter of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain from 1808 to 1813.

Please note that this list is by no means complete; it is meant to be only a representative sample of what we felt to be some of the more commonly mispronounced bird names. Feel free to inform us of any you feel we neglected.

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