CONCERNING THE USE OF
ANODONTA ANATINA (LINNAEUS)

By Bengt Hubendick and Henrik W. Waldén (Naturhistoriska Museet, Göteborg, Sweden)

Linnaeus (Syst. Nat. (ed. 10) 1 : 706), described the pelecypod species Mytilus anatinus. Most authors have regarded this name as a prior synonym of the nomenclatorially unambiguous name Anodonta piscinalis Nilsson (1823). However, Hanley 1855, in his revision of the Linnean mollusk collection in London demonstrated that the only specimen there present belonged to the species usually known as Pseudoanodonta complanata (Rossmässler 1835). Hanley also figured this specimen (Ipsae Linn. Conch. 1855, Tab. 2, fig. 1), with which Linnaeus’ original description is fully consistent. Later, Odhner revised the Linnean shells in Museum Ludovicii Ulricae in Uppsala, which also formed a partial basis of the Systema Naturae, and found that the actual specimen there was conspecific with the London specimen. Again the conspecificity between Linnaeus’ Mytilus anatinus and Pseudoanodonta complanata was announced by Brander (Ark. Zool. (2) 9 : 6; 1956).

In the meantime the name Mytilus anatinus Linnaeus, 1758, Syst. Nat. (ed. 10) 1 : 706, had been placed on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology (Opinion 336, No. 426).

Evidently the discrepancy between the typologically unequivocal Linnean name anatinus and its relevant use in taxonomic practice is unsatisfactory. This has been actualized by Dr. H. Lemche of Copenhagen.

At this stage we can imagine two possible alternatives to solve this controversial situation. (a) the name anatinus on the Official List can be definitely connected to the Linnean type specimens, one of which (the London specimen) should be chosen as lectotype. (b) The name anatinus Linnaeus has to be removed from the Official List and the names piscinalis (Nilsson) and complanata (Rossmaessler) placed on the Official List. If so, lectotypes or neotypes for these species must be selected, to preclude further ambiguity. We must, however, draw attention to the fact that the taxonomic background for judging the relation of the name complanata to the older name minima (Millet, 1833) does seem far from clear.

A third alternative, (c) to drop the existing Linnean types of anatinus and to select a neotype, conspecific with piscinalis (Nilsson), seems to us entirely inappropriate from a formal standpoint. But, if this alternative should be preferred it seems advisable to select the neotype from the type-locality of Mytilus anatinus.

Though the alternative (a) is formally simpler, we do not decidedly favour it before alternative (b), as we are well aware that it involves complications with regard to the prevalent practise, and do not admit the Linnean names any sacrosanctity in themselves. On the other hand, alternative (b) is not free from inherent inconsistency. We therefore leave it to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature to make the decision as to which alternative is to be preferred, when the formal rules and the practical consequences have been considered.

It is obviously important that before a name is placed on the Official List the material on which it is based is thoroughly examined by experts with experience of the collection concerned. Evidently this was not undertaken to the necessary extent when Opinions 335 and 336 were prepared, with the consequence that these Opinions in a number of cases did not fulfill their intended purposes, but have served to conserve the nomenclatorial difficulties in a more rigid state than before. As far as the authors Linnaeus, Retzius, Nilsson, Lovén, Malm and Westerlund are concerned paratypic material, apart from the Linnean collection in London, is kept in Swedish museums.