The names of European mosquitoes: Part 1

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This article is the first in a series to be published in the Bulletin to add meaning to the names of European mosquitoes. For each entry the name of the taxon is given together with the author and date and the reference to the original description. Next, where appropriate, a brief explanation of the etymology is provided. There is also either a quotation from the original description, translated where necessary, or a résumé indicating the author's reason for using the name in question. In some cases the explanation is not clear and correspondence to the author is invited and additional information will be included in future issues of the Bulletin as letters to the editors.

The names European mosquitoes have been coined for a variety of reasons. Some describe a precise or general morphological characteristic e.g. geniculatus and cinereus respectively; others their nuisance and biting qualities (e.g. molestus); several are patronymics (e.g. labranchiae). Localities from which the types were described also feature (e.g. caspius) while some names differentiate them from near-relatives e.g. Neoculex. Some names indicate the habitat in which the type was located (e.g. mariae); some describe the sound that they produce (e.g. pipiens), and there are names indicating common occurrence (communis) and that they are simply gnats (Culex).

These scientific names are a mixture of descriptive terms in Latin, sometimes from Greek origins, and Latinized versions of the names of people and places. Of the descriptive names some are straightforward Latin words e.g. pipiens (piping) while others are of Greek origin e.g. Aedes (troublesome). Some names are more complex, being derived from several Latin or Greek words. Examples of such compounded names are atroparvus from the Latin ater (black) and parvus (small) and Orthopodomyia from the Greek orthos (straight), podos (of foot) and myia (fly). Names dedicated to people and places are varied in their construction. Thus a variety of suffixes are used following the names of people, from the expected masculine genitive richiardi showing that the species was named after Richiardi to the feminine genitive ending of messeae for a masculine Italian, Alessandro Messa. Likewise connections with geographic areas are often denoted by the use of "-ensis" suffix (e.g. alaskaensis).

Here are a few for this issue:

Anopheles Meigen, 1818

Greek, anopheles = useless, troublesome
Meigen defines his genus in the last line of his description on page 10 saying that the name Anopheles means troublesome "Der Namen Anopheles bedeutet beschwerlich". He titles the description "Gabelmücke ANOPHELES", literally forked or bifurcate gnat, used in the sense of describing the mouthparts.

Anopheles algeriensis Theobald, 1903

Theobald describes his species on page 21, but his only references to Algeria are "Habitat-Algeria (Dr. Sergent)." and the caption to his Figure 9 "Wing of Anopheles Algeriensis. n.sp. Algeria."

Anopheles atroparvus van Thiel, 1927

Latin, atro (ater) = black; parvus = small
On page 389, van Thiel names his variety "je propose pour le type de Bolsward (Friesland, Holland) le nom de Anopheles maculipennis, MEIGEN var. atroparvus nov. var." He notes that the Bolsward population are small, "...
plus petite que le type ..." and that there is a colour difference, "la couleur est plus foncée que chez le type ..." and (page 385) "les segments (partie ventrale) sont grisetâtres avec les parties postérieures plus foncées, souvent noires."

Anopheles beklemishevi Stegni & Kabanova 1976

On Page 198 this species is dedicated to the Russian scientist Vladimir Nikolaevitch Beklemishev "in honour of the distinguished Soviet scientist and malarialogist V.N. Beklemishev, the authors name the new species Anopheles beklemishevi Stegni and Kabanova sp.n." V.N. Beklemishev (1890-1962) was a distinguished malarialogist in the former Soviet Union and a member of the WHO Expert Committee on malaria.

Anopheles claviger (Meigen, 1804)

Latin, clava = club; -ger, suffix = bearing, from gerere = to bear
Originally described as Culex claviger. On page 4 Meigen describes the club-shaped palps of the male in both Latin and German: "... palpis maris claviformibus ... and Freisspizen des Männchens keulförmig".

Anopheles hyrcanus (Pallas, 1771)

Pallas describes Culex caspius and Culex hyrcanus on page 475 saying "of the former "Versus mare Caspium in paludosis salsis, cum sequenti infestissimus" and of Cx. hyrcanus "Comes privis, rarior sed Ferocior". He makes no other reference to the Caspian Sea but clearly has the ancient land of Hyrcania in mind in naming the species. Today this area corresponds with an area in northern Iran, bordering the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea.

Anopheles messeae Falleroni, 1926

Falleroni described messeae as a variety of An. claviger, the name misapplied to An. maculipennis s.l. by Italian workers at that time. Falleroni dedicated the species to Count Alessandro di Federico Messea, a notable Italian public health administrator who conducted campaigns against tuberculosis, cancer and malaria. In the same paper he also dedicated An. claviger, Mg., var. labranchiae Falleroni to Antonio Labranca. On page 564 he states: "Le ho dedicate ad A. Messea, direttore Generale e A. Labranca, Capo Divisione della Sanità Pubblica, in omaggio alle loro benemerenze nella lotta contro la malaria nel nostro Paese".

Anopheles plumbeus Stephens, 1828

Latin, plumbeus = leaden, lead coloured
This species was described by Haliday (1828) but he did not name it. Haliday described it on page 501 as "3. A. __? A smaller species. Thorax lead colour, the sides with a blackish line ..." In the following article Stephens states "... The addition of a third species of Anopheles, proves incontestably how limited our knowledge of species remains..... the above may be called An. plumbeus ..."

Reference