

## SHORT COMMUNICATION

***Vertigo andrusiana* Pilsbry, 1899, not “*Vertigo columbiana* Sterki, 1892”,  
*nomen nudum* (Gastropoda: Vertiginidae)**ROBERT G. FORSYTH<sup>1,2</sup>

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**Abstract.** The correct name for a common, temperate north-western North American land snail is discussed. In a 2018 revision of the genus *Vertigo* O.F. Müller, 1773, “*Vertigo columbiana* Sterki, 1892” was used for this species by its authors, who synonymised *V. andrusiana* Pilsbry, 1899 with it. However, *V. columbiana* Sterki, 1892 is a *nomen nudum* and, as this name is not made available until a publication in 1900 by Pilsbry and Vanatta, the earliest available name is *V. andrusiana*.

**Key words.** Nomenclature, Principle of Priority

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In the temperate forests of north-western North America, from Alaska to northern California (Nekola *et al.* 2018), the common forest-dwelling species of *Vertigo* (Cameron 1986) has been known as *Vertigo columbiana*, attributed either to Sterki, 1892 or Pilsbry & Vanatta, 1900 (Pilsbry 1948; Forsyth 2004). *Vertigo andrusiana* Pilsbry, 1899 was thought to be separate species (Pilsbry 1948), distinguished from *V. columbiana* by its shinier, darker shell, etc., until Nekola *et al.* (2018) synonymised them. In their paper, Nekola *et al.* (2018) recognized that *V. andrusiana* was an ecophenotype of *V. columbiana* living in wet habitats.

Nekola *et al.* (2018) used the name “*V. columbiana* Sterki, 1892” for this taxon, probably blindly following Pilsbry (1948) and without checking the original literature source. However, this use violates the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (hereafter “the Code”; ICZN 1999).

Reading Sterki’s (1892) publication, one can see that name was introduced without a description, definition, or indication, as required by Article 12.1 of the Code. He wrote: “*V. columbiana* Sterki mss. Wash., different places” (Sterki 1892: 5; italics added). There is no other mention of *V. columbiana* elsewhere in the article that might suffice

to provide more information, and Pilsbry (1948) was even aware of and noted this. As per Article 12.3, the mention of a locality—“Wash., different places”, for Washington State—does not constitute a description, definition, or indication addition. There is no bibliographic reference to a previously published description or figure (none exists prior to 1900); “mss” implies that Sterki used this as a manuscript name (perhaps on specimen labels), but these are, by definition, unpublished. Thus, *V. columbiana* Sterki, 1892 is a *nomen nudum*.

Pilsbry next used that name and wrote only “212. *Pupa columbiana* Sterki. Washington. Undescribed.” (Pilsbry 1898: 119; italics added). Again, the name is a *nomen nudum*.

The first time that the name *V. columbiana* is accompanied by a description is in a publication by Pilsbry & Vanatta (1900). There, the species is well described in detail and figured. Thus, *V. columbiana* was first made available by Pilsbry & Vanatta (1900).

*Vertigo andrusiana* was described by Pilsbry in 1899. With the synonymization of *V. andrusiana* with *V. columbiana* (Nekola *et al.* 2018), the earliest available name should be used for the species. And as *V. columbiana* Sterki, 1892

and *V. columbiana* Pilsbry, 1898 are *nomina nuda*, the next available name is *V. andrusiana*, published in 1899.

In summary, the partial synonymy (up to 1900) is as follows:

***Vertigo (Boreovertigo) andrusiana* Pilsbry, 1899**

*Vertigo columbiana* Sterki mss. Sterki 1892: 5, *nomen nudum*.

*Pupa columbiana* Sterki. Pilsbry 1898: 119, *nomen nudum*.

*Vertigo andrusiana* Pilsbry 1899: 315, fig. 3.

*Vertigo columbiana* Pilsbry & Vanatta 1900: 602, pl. 23 fig. 11.

It is a bit unfortunate that the well-known *V. columbiana* must be discarded in favour of the somewhat less-used *V. andrusiana*, but Article 23 of the Code, the Principle of Priority, should be followed. Some reviewers of an earlier version of the manuscript suggested that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature should be petitioned to suppress the valid name in favour of *V. columbiana* by using reversal of precedence under Article 23.9. However, the conditions of that article are not met in this case (P. Bouchet pers. comm. 25.ix.2024). Prevailing usage (Article 23.9.1) must be maintained when the *both* the senior synonym has not been used as a valid name after 1899 and the junior synonym has been used in at least 25 works, etc. (italics added; see ICZN 1999). The first condition (Article 23.9.1.1) is clearly not met. Both *V. andrusiana* and *V. columbiana* are frequent in the literature, although the latter is more often encountered because it was based on the more common ecophenotype of the species and *V. andrusiana* on the rarer form (Nekola *et al.* 2018).

When the use of an older synonym does “threaten stability or universality or cause confusion” (ICZN 1999), the Article 23.9.3 allows for matters to be referred to the Commission for a ruling under the plenary power, but these are exceptional cases, and, in this case, allowing the Code to function properly, as intended, in its simplest means is most desirable.

Some reviewers suggested that confusion would result in the change of name, but the act of synonymization of the two nominal taxa, which no one disputes, is just as disruptive but a necessity. An example of another land snail that has undergone a change of name is *Discus whitneyi* (Newcomb, 1864). This common, widespread species over much of North America was known as *D. cronkhitei* (Newcomb, 1865) until Roth (1988) found that *D. whitneyi* was an earlier name for the same species. In this case, *Helix whitneyi* Newcomb, 1864 was truly a long-forgotten and unused name that likely could have been suppressed. But it was not, and is now fully accepted without that much difficulty *D. whitneyi*, and the synonymized names easily traceable.

Another comment was that Pilsbry knowingly ignored

the *nomen nudum* status of *V. columbiana* Sterki, 1892 (Pilsbry 1919, 1948), so we should too, but we must remember that during Pilsbry’s time, the Code as we know it, did not exist.

And finally, two reviewers believed that the name of the common ecophenotype (*V. columbiana*) should be the de facto name for the species, instead of the rarer ecophenotype (*V. andrusiana*). However, whether a name is based on a common or rare form of a species has no bearing on which name is to be used.

This case shows the importance of checking the original publication to determine the validity of a name prior to publication.

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