

# Rediscovery of the syntypes of California Quail *Tetrao californicus* Shaw, 1798, and comments on the current labelling of the holotype of California Condor *Vultur californianus* Shaw, 1797

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Received 18 July 2014

**SUMMARY.**—The two syntypes of California Quail *Tetrao californicus* Shaw, 1798, were deposited in the British Museum in the 1790s, but were last documented as present in the late 1860s and had subsequently been presumed no longer extant. In 2004, they were re-discovered in Nottingham Natural History Museum, to which they must have been inadvertently passed as ‘duplicates’ in the late 1800s, and have now been returned to the Natural History Museum, Tring, on extended renewable loan. During research regarding these Archibald Menzies specimens, new insight was gained into hitherto confusing reference details on the label of his type specimen of California Condor *Vultur californianus* Shaw, 1797

Archibald Menzies (1754–1842) was surgeon and naturalist on Captain Vancouver’s ship *Discovery* during its voyage between 1791 and 1795 to the north-west coast of North America (Galloway & Groves 1987, Groves 2001, McCarthy 2008). Although primarily a botanist, he became the first scientific collector of Californian birds during periods between November 1792 and November 1794, when *Discovery* visited various points on the coast of the future state (Grinnell 1932a, McCarthy 2008, Wilbur 2012). Among the birds he collected, two new species were described by George Shaw from specimens deposited in the British Museum<sup>1</sup> (BM): California Condor *Vultur californianus* Shaw, 1797, and California Quail *Tetrao californicus* Shaw, 1798 (Fig. 1) (authorship and dating follows Dickinson *et al.* 2006); following Dickinson & Remsen (2013), these two species’ current names are, respectively, *Gymnogyps californianus* (Shaw, 1797) and *Callipepla californica* (Shaw, 1798).

Menzies’ own voyage journals had a chequered history after his death (Groves 2001), but based on less than definitive statements in the sections relating to California in the journal up to 14 February 1794, whose whereabouts was then known (Eastwood 1924), Grinnell (1931, 1932b) concluded that the type locality of the California Quail was almost certainly Monterey and that the specimens were very probably taken on 5 December 1792. This conclusion is generally accepted, despite McCarthy’s (2008) suggestion that the date was probably 6 January 1793, which is based on an erroneous ascription of date to his quoted sections of Menzies’ journal. With less certainty, Grinnell (1932b) reached the same conclusion regarding the type data for the California Condor specimen, but based on the intervening rediscovery of the section of Menzies’ journal up to 18 March 1795, this was challenged by Wilbur (2012), who suggested that either November 1793 at Santa Barbara or November 1794 at Monterey would appear more probable.

<sup>1</sup> A brief clarification on changes to institutional nomenclature and location may be helpful at the outset. The British Museum (BM) in Bloomsbury, London, was founded in 1753, but its natural history departments became the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH) following their move to South Kensington, London, in 1881, although full legal separation did not occur until 1963. The BMNH’s bird collections were subsequently moved to Tring at the start of the 1970s. In 1992 the BMNH changed its name to the Natural History Museum (NHM).

Grinnell (1932a) reported that in 1930 the single type specimen of California Condor was still present at BMNH, whereas both type specimens (male and female) of California Quail had disappeared. Based on Sharpe's (1906) comment that all specimens acquired by the BM up to the 1860s tended to be mounted for display, with the result that many became faded or broken and were consequentially often replaced by newer specimens, Grinnell (1932a: 251) inferred that they 'doubtless were thrown away'. However, although many early specimens certainly did suffer this fate, it is also true that, as the BM's representation of many bird species vastly increased during the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was a proactive policy of assisting provincial and colonial museums through donation to them of both older, often data-poor, specimens and newly acquired unwanted and unregistered material, both often annotated on their labels as 'duplicates' (Günther 1912, Knox & Walters 1992). Although each older specimen donated elsewhere should in theory have had its departure noted against its register entry, in practice this did not always happen, probably because staff were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of incoming and, to a lesser extent, outgoing material at this time.

The two Menzies specimens of California Quail came to BM in the late 1790s, well before the current specimen registration system was introduced in 1837 (Wheeler 1996, Thomas 2012). Their presence was, however, noted in a slightly earlier BM attempt at cataloguing bird specimens by species, i.e. the Vellum Catalogues, which were initiated in 1835 and then utilised on a very partial basis until 1843, when they were discontinued, probably because the first attempt at publishing catalogues of BM bird specimens was beginning (Thomas 2012). Within the Vellum Catalogue system, the two specimens were recorded as 72a and 72b in vol. 34 (which sex corresponds to which number is not clear), one of two volumes containing the order Gallinae according to the system of Temminck, which was followed for all non-British birds (Thomas 2012). Their continuing presence in the BM can be traced through unambiguous mentions in two early published catalogues by Gray (1844: 44, 1867: 79). However, when Ogilvie-Grant (1893) published the relevant volume (22) of the comprehensive *Catalogue of the birds in the British Museum (Cat. Birds BM)*, it contained no reference to them, providing strong evidence that they were by then either no longer in the BMNH's collection or had already been consigned to duplicates before he began preparing it. Unfortunately, their Vellum Catalogue entries have no annotation as to their fate.

On a visit to Nottingham Natural History Museum in early 2004, DGDR made notes on an array of bird skin specimens with BM labels, some with registration numbers and some unregistered. Having long been puzzled as to the fate of Menzies' California Quails, RPP-J immediately recognised that the data accompanying the two Nottingham specimens



Figure 1. Illustration accompanying the original description of the male syntype of *Tetrao californicus* Shaw, 1798 (Harry Taylor / © Natural History Museum, London)



Figure 2. The male (a) and female (b) syntypes of *Tetrao californicus* shown above their BM labels (front and back) (Harry Taylor / © Natural History Museum)

(V0855B and V0854B) showed them to be the missing male and female respectively (Fig. 2a,b). Each has 'Pres. by A. Menzies' on its BM label, with the male also having 72a and the female 72b in the space for 'Brit. Mus. Reg.', a style typical for Vellum catalogue numbers when the specimen had not also received a registration number; each further has 'Dupl.' written on its label, indicating they had been deemed surplus to requirements. A further inscription in



Figure 3. The BM label from the holotype of *Vultur californianus* (Harry Taylor / © Natural History Museum, London)

tiny writing on the reverse of each label enables the period when they left BMNH to be defined more precisely: the male has 'No. 24, Burton 17.xi.84', whereas the female has 'No. 12, West 1.iii.86'. These give the dates on which the BMNH sent each specimen to one of the 'stuffers', who from the 1870s through 1890s it contracted to de-mount older mounted specimens (Knox & Walters 1992). A set of 17 notebooks, numbered 1–19 (8–9 were blank), still exist that summarise batches of specimens sent out (Knox & Walters 1992), and de-mounting details for the male and female are corroborated in vols. 7 and 16 respectively. Neither specimen can therefore have been given away earlier than 1885/86, nor probably later than c.1892, prior to finalisation of the text for Ogilvie-Grant (1893).

A search of a couple of BM registers from the 1870s reveals notes regarding specimens therein that were passed to Nottingham Museum in both April 1882 and January 1895, but not during the period 1885–92. Seemingly there may have been at least one additional donation of 'duplicates' to Nottingham that was not properly recorded. As indicated earlier, this is not surprising. A direct parallel exists in three exchanges that the BMNH conducted with the collector Gregory Mathews in the early 1900s, two of which had the outgoing specimens correctly annotated as such in their registers and one which did not (RPP-J pers. obs.).

As to why the significance of the Menzies specimens as types for the name *Tetrao californicus* was not recognised, the general importance of type material present in the BM bird collection was only properly documented for the first time from the start of production of the 27 volumes comprising the *Cat. Birds BM* (1874–98). The Menzies California Quail specimens were clearly consigned to duplicates shortly before work got underway on the relevant volume for gamebirds, and therefore had presumably yet to be investigated in this regard.

The two California Quail specimens are in remarkably good condition for their age and, notwithstanding the comments of Grinnell (1931), the male (Fig. 2a) is in reasonable agreement with the illustration in the 1798 type description (Fig. 1). Following recognition of the find, agreement was reached between Nottingham Museum and the NHM in 2009 that the specimens would be returned on an extended renewable loan to the NHM, where they would be stored with NHM's large collection of avian type specimens and made available for study. Following a delay linked to extensive renovation work then taking place in the building housing the NHM bird collection, the transfer was effected in 2012.

During research into the status of the Menzies California Quails, a new insight was gained into the present labelling of the Menzies California Condor. As Grinnell (1932a,b) noted, the only label now attached to this is a BM one that is clearly of much later origin than the specimen itself, though it does also bear a small metal tag of a type often used, with a scratched-on identifying number, on early 1800s BM bird specimens; unfortunately nothing is now discernable on this tag. In the space for 'No.' on the label (NB—not the space for 'Brit. Mus. Reg.') is written '10. 5a' (Fig. 3). As the specimen is no. 2 in vol. 5 of the Vellum Catalogue, this number clearly does not refer to this, and Grinnell (1932a: 252; 1932b: 265) assumed it was 'probably a taxidermist's memorandum'. In fact, it relates to the specimen's entry in the first volume of *Cat. Birds BM* (Sharpe 1874), in which it is specimen *a* of the fifth species (*californiana*) of the tenth genus (*Oenops*) included therein.

The entire inscription on the Menzies California Condor label is in the same handwriting, and the label was clearly produced by Sharpe, or a clerk acting on his behalf, during preparation of this volume. This assertion is supported by the use of *Oenops californiana* on the label, the genus being one not only introduced by Sharpe (1874: 20 *et seq.*), but also synonymised by him in the *Addenda* (p. 455) of the same volume! The statement 'Type' is also written on the label, and Sharpe (1874: 29) indeed flagged the specimen as



such. The issue of a label number linking a specimen to its *Cat. Birds BM* genus/species/specimen entry is not something that we are familiar with, and its scope and implications merit wider investigation. What label, if any, that the Menzies California Condor may have been accompanied by at the time Sharpe attached the current one remains unclear—very possibly it was one from a display stand, as the specimen had certainly been mounted and displayed from at least as early as 1816 (Thomas 2012), but this is speculation.

In conclusion, our relatively cursory examination of ex-BM specimens held by Nottingham Museum turned up several exciting finds, including two even more historic specimens than those mentioned here, to be documented by Russell & Wright (in prep.). The scale of the BM's disbursement of old specimens during the 1800s and early 1900s, not all of which were properly documented, means that numerous other important discoveries may await systematic investigation in the bird collections of provincial museums and even schools.

#### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Graham Walley, Andrew King and the late Michael P. Cooper for assistance during this investigation and to Mary LeCroy and Frank Steinheimer for comments on the submitted manuscript.

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