

## **Comment on NACC Proposal 2015-B-5**

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"Adopt American spelling of words in bird names for which British and American spellings differ" is the name of this proposal, and its very name seems to indicate inherent ethnocentrism and bias if not a misunderstanding of the English language in North America (as covered by the AOU NACC).

Spellings such as "grey", "colour", "sulphur", and "moustache" are indeed standard British English spellings. They are also standard Canadian English spellings. So are the "-re" nouns, like "theatre", "centre", "sabre", and (one would surmise) "ochre". See

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian\\_English#Spelling\\_and\\_dictionaries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_English#Spelling_and_dictionaries) and <http://www.mohawkcollege.ca/Assets/Communications+Centre/Helpful+Facts+Sheets/Canadian+vs+American+Spelling.pdf>

These spellings are also presumably standard in Belize, Jamaica, The Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. These are independent nations within the NACC Area. And lest one forget, Bermuda, the Caymans, the Turks and Caicos, Anguilla, Montserrat, and the British Virgin Islands are also in the NACC Area; they are British Overseas Territories. That makes 11 independent nations plus a smattering of British territories for which the American spelling promoted in this proposal is likely nonstandard.

For this proposal to make sense we believe it should be in conjunction with a clear statement from the NACC that AOU publications use American spellings because they're published in the US, and that alternative spellings are equally valid as "official" NACC names, in deference to local traditions. People may then publish things with differing local spellings and not have the stigma of an "incorrect" name looming overhead. "Grey Jay" would be correct in Ontario, and "Gray Jay" would be correct in Minnesota. (Note that the IOC already does this: <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/english-names/spelling-rules/british-vs-american/>)

We note that as written, this proposal--should it pass--probably most affects Belize among the NACC Area's English-speaking countries (Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Ochre-breasted Flycatcher, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Violet Sabrewing). Only two species found in the U.S. would be affected (Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and Mitred Parakeet). Yet more would change in Spanish-speaking countries (Moustached Antwren, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, more sabrewings).

We find it very difficult to believe that anyone would be confused to the point of mispronunciation when encountering any of these words with the exception of “mitred”, but is really “mitered” any better in this regard? Usage of these spellings isn’t quite “incorrect” in the US, either, as evidenced by their appearance as alternate spellings in US dictionaries and, among other examples in the ornithological field, the Sibley and National Geographic field guides both using “(sub)moustachial”. (Sibley uses both, in fact.)

It seems prudent to tread lightly here, and if any changes are made, to use carefully chosen wording to explain why, so as to offend the least number of Canadians, Belizeans, Jamaicans, etc., as possible. Of the 13 English-speaking nations of which all or part is in the NACC area, the US is just one, so humility is warranted, in our opinions.

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