Vernacular name motivations of British birds

Michael Joseph McHugh

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School of Critical Studies, College of Arts and Humanities

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

Despite assertions to the contrary in the wider literature, a number of the vernacular names of British birds remain undeciphered or insecurely resolved. Some, like *Avocet*, are found to be borrowings from other languages, at which point etymologists end their enquiries; others, like *Barnacle*, have remained seemingly intractable because their word-history is convoluted and confused. Still others have been interpreted over long periods of time by folk-etymology, a powerful, persistent and obscuring force which tries to make sense of opaque or obsolete lexical items. The reputed 'rolling' flight of the *Roller*, the apparent predilection of the *Missel Thrush* for mistletoe berries, the supposed fondness of the *Chaffinch* for husks, and the presumed 'foolishness' of the *Dotterel* may be classic cases of this type, where plausible errors have endured, in some cases, for hundreds of years.

In this thesis the dataset consists of 51 vernacular bird names whose origins are described by the OED and other authorities as uncertain, unknown or obscure, or where the current motivations, in my view, are insecurely resolved. I have re-analysed the evidence, including the etymologies of the OED, Lockwood, Desfayes and others, and have taken into account the panoply of synonyms in English and Scots dialects and in related European languages, uncovering their underlying naming motivations to provide context.

In each case I have been able to anchor the motivations more securely in the evidence, or suggest new and more accurate motivations based on a reappraisal of linguistic elements in synthesis with a sound ornithology. An approach which balances both viewpoints is demonstrated here.

I have created a system of categories and more finely-tuned sub-categories which has enabled me to tabulate and graphically illustrate my findings. I draw conclusions from these results, for example that naming motivations are often combinations, reflecting the myriad impression made on the senses by observation of the bird in its habitat.

Finally I have set out some limitations in the thesis, which I hope will serve as a platform and a stepping stone to further research.

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Abbreviations

BCE	Before Common Era
CE	Common Era – *used only occasionally for very early dates, mainly pre-1000, for clarity*
c.	circa
cf.	compare
dial.	dialect, dialectal
D.	Dutch
E.	English
F.	French
G.	German, Germanic
Gk.	Greek
H	High
Ic.	Icelandic
L.	Latin
L	Low
M	Middle
ME	Middle English
O	Old
OE	Old English
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OF	Old French
OHG	Old High German
Port.	Portuguese
q.v.	which see
Sc.	Scots
Scand.	Scandinavian
vide	see
W.	Welsh

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I may not have embarked upon this formal study at all but for the intervention of my cousin John McMillan who encouraged me to turn my private studies into this research project, and Jeanette McClellan for her practical encouragement along the way. I am indebted to my father, John, for his support and guidance throughout my life, in particular for bequeathing to me – and to my siblings – a linguistic sensibility, which I have put to use both as a student and teacher. I thank my brothers and sisters, Frank, John, Anne and Patricia, their children and grandchildren, who have always attempted to keep me connected to the real world, with only occasional success. I have been loved and encouraged unconditionally by my mum, Anne, in all my personal endeavours, and have been blessed over my lifetime by the practical mentoring and spiritual guidance of my late uncle Fr. Francis McHugh, a great scholar, singer, writer and priest, for many years a familiar face around Oxford and Cambridge, now at rest in his beloved Donegal.

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My thanks are due to the team at RSPB Scotland, particularly the South and West Scotland regional office, where my friends and colleagues taught me so much about Scotland's birds and their conservation. In particular the late Norman Storie, Dr Paul Walton, Mike Wood, Neil O'Donnell and Pardeep Chand – these last two my birding companions from Mull to Norfolk and from Lithuania to the Pyrenees – made my years there seven of the most enjoyable and educational. Peter Holden of the early YOC encouraged many youngsters

like me to take up birdwatching with the educational magazine Birdlife, a life-changing hobby and a lifelong interest. I would like to thank my friends and family members, especially my cousins the Kilwinning McMillans and the Kilbirnie McHughs who kept me going when the work-life-study balance seemed to be almost at tipping point, and my close friends Paul and Siobhan, Paul and Rachel, Tariq, Angus and Joanne, and especially Trish McKeown in Newry who listens to me almost every day, but not as much as I listen to her.

I have been honoured with thoughtful and kind replies to my correspondence from John Kirk, Senior Research fellow (formerly Professor) of Linguistics at the University of Vienna, to whose work on Mapping the Digital Lexical Atlas of Scotland I informally contributed many notes on Scots names of birds; from Christine Jackson with regard to her valuable book on the provincial names of British birds; from Francesca Greenoak in relation to her own wonderful work on local vernacular bird names, their literature and lore; from Peter Kitson who kindly sent me additional articles I had been unable to locate; and from Professor Andrew Gosler who furnished me with personal comments on the work of Michel Desfayes. I am happy to accept full responsibility for all my workings and conclusions, and any omissions or errors which may have crept in.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to Rev. Charles Swainson, whose parish I recently visited in Old Charlton, and who set me upon this road paved with birds and words with his little book on provincial names and folklore from 1885.

Author's declaration:

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Michael Joseph McHugh

Signature:

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Deciphering and categorising name motivations

The generic, primary or group names of many birds - such as *Auk, Chat, Finch* and *Thrush* - derive from their call-notes or song. Previous works have categorised these as echoic, imitative, or acoustically-motivated names, including the OED, Grant (1951), Lockwood (1993), and Desfayes (1998, 2008). Few authors have explored how these and other names can be further distilled into more refined categories. For instance, *Cuckoo* is onomatopoeic, but *Nightingale* refers to the specifically nocturnal conditions of its singing. *Nightjar* embraces both the nocturnal season of the bird's eerie call, and the churring or spinning quality of the sound. In this thesis I seek to fine-tune these differences to give a nuanced and more accurate picture of 'accepted' English vernacular names for British birds.[1] These are mainly generic names, but a number of unresolved and intriguing specific examples are included, such as *Chaffinch, Dotterel, Fieldfare*, *Missel Thrush*[2] and *Roller,* where folk etymology and other forces may have led us quite astray through long periods of time and across a landscape of dialects.

Myriad elements remain to be reconsidered as evidence. The outlook is wide in scope and extends deep into our cultural past. The work is a kind of cultural archaeology: linguistic artefacts are revealed and deciphered in light of what we currently know about birds. It may also be thought of as a kind of architecture, in that we seek to rebuild what we may term *ornithonymics* on more solid foundations.

These are the origins of our attempts to uncover what names mean, what are the motivations inherent in them, through time and place. As we begin to discern these, perhaps at a distance of several hundred years, we also notice two realities emerging: that these names were at one time coined from oral descriptions; and that they evolved with every generation and across many landscapes, depending on how apt they seemed to observers. This process, which involves a kind of conversation with folk etymology, is still at play, and it is notoriously difficult to unravel.

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[1] Pennant (1768) among others chose one name from among many synonyms to stand as the 'standard' or 'accepted' English vernacular name, culminating in the BOU's *A List of British Birds*, 1883, which admitted one vernacular name to each species to be accepted in popular and professional usage on their authority.

[2] I use this spelling as there is good evidence that it was the original form of the name, as well as the form 'accepted' by Pennant in 1768 and almost universally used until at least Swainson (1885). The presently preferred form *Mistle* seems to be a more recent variant whose wide usage may have been influenced by folk etymology.

1.2 A re-appraisal of name motivations in the wake of Lockwood and Desfayes

I first became aware of local or dialectal English vernacular names when I was given my first field guide, the *Collins Pocket Guide* (Fitter, 1966) in 1976, the same year in which I joined the YOC.[3] I noticed there were alternative names listed for some of the birds, though not for others. Some were "sportsmen's slang" or "poachers' slang", some were from the North of England, some from North America, or elsewhere. All of them seemed colourful, quite unknown to me, and yet oddly familiar in that they seemed to describe aspects of well-known birds intimately through close observation.

I found Kirke Swann's (1913) *Dictionary* in Ealing Library in the late 1980s, and I returned to it week after week, as it provided a comprehensive list of vernacular and dialectal bird names. I located the source of his material in Charles Swainson's collection of 'provincial' bird names[4] and their related folklore (1885). I later discovered the model for this work, Rolland's *Faune Populaire de la France* (1879). As a student of Latin with a very little Greek, and as a student and teacher of French and Spanish, I was able to compare vernacular names across these languages and with a little more effort - and some learned support - also in Italian with Giglioli (1889, 1907), and German with Suolahti (1909). I was familiar with the Latin or Linnaean names of many of the birds, and with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other classical works which related the origins of their names and transformations. I wrote articles for *Songbird* [5] on the many 'misnomers' in that lexis, such as *Apus apus*, the Swift which has highly specialised feet, as well as on excellent descriptors like *Lanius excubitor*, the 'sentinel flayer'.[6]

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[3] The YOC (Young Ornithologists' Club) was the junior section of the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). I contributed my first article to its *Birdlife* magazine on the food-caching behaviour of Coal Tits in September 1978, complete with my own monochrome sketches!

[4] The call had gone out in J. E. Harting's *Preface* to *The Zoologist* (1st December 1878) series 3, vol. 2, for lists of local names of animals and birds, which he intended to compile and publish. This became a regular feature throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Rev. Charles Swainson picked up the gauntlet in 1885, publishing his book of provincial bird names at the behest of the English Dialect Society (1885) and the Folklore Society (1886).

[5] The staff journal for S. & W. Scotland RSPB.

[6] My own translation. The Great Grey Shrike and its relatives have long been known as 'butcher birds', from their habit of impaling prey.

I was inspired to discover more about the obsolete vernacular names once used to describe birds. I studied words associated with the names which might give a clue as to their opaque meanings and derivations. I saw that these vernacular names were not subject to formal restrictions, and in fact were proving to be as stable, and in recent years more stable, than scientific names (BOU, 2025). I was also inspired by their colour, their diversity, their vibrancy and their evident connection with the living birds and their characteristics. They had a familiarity, an authenticity, a spoken and timeless quality which made them real, alive, dynamic, and apt.

I discovered Desfayes (1998, 2008) whose system of sorting vernacular and alternative names into cognates and paradigms allowed him to compare names with other words across European languages by isolating the root. His use of comparative evidence from the European and British dialectal lexis of bird names, as well as related terms, was an intriguing innovation, and I have followed his example.

Lockwood (1993) was careful to trace the name-history as a first step, a stage Desfayes frequently omitted. Lockwood seemed to me to be the first to master the art of balancing linguistics with ornithology. I found a few questionable conclusions and some enduring mysteries in Lockwood, but I found so many errors, gaps and non-sequiturs in the works of Desfayes, that I felt there was certainly work to be done to build some bridges from the words back to the birds.[7]

1.3 Towards a right equilibrium of ornithology and etymology: a synthesised approach

In various locations and through long periods of time these bird names had evolved from accurate descriptions of what had been observed through the senses: striking colours, beautiful shapes and forms, remarkable features, arresting calls or songs, fascinating behaviour, oddly-marked eggs or intriguing nests. This is where the motivations behind every name lie: in the myriad impression left on the senses by the encounter with the observed bird. It has been implied, but seldom stated overtly, that a name should be descriptive, even distinctive, perhaps original, and certainly based on close observation. It

[7] Cabard and Chauvet (2003) adeptly and frequently throw Desfayes' etymologies and name motivations into relief, pointing up limitations and occasional absurdities.

is certainly the case that the most apt names reflect the uniqueness of a species, a name-characteristic which usually ensures wide usage and longevity. Name motivations derive from a pen-picture, encapsulating the myriad impression formed on the senses by direct observation.

In Newton's brief pen-picture of the Chaffinch lie interwoven all its name motivations from the present day back through Aristotle[8] and likely beyond:[9]

> This handsome and sprightly species, which is so common throughout the whole of Europe, requires no description. Conspicuous by his variegated plumage, his peculiar call-note, and his glad song, the cock is almost everywhere a favourite.[10] (Newton, 1986, p82).

Every name was originally a description of an observed experience in the language of the time and place. Even the greatest etymologists, starting with the word, have from time to time departed from this truism with odd and even absurd results.

Many authors on the subject of bird names repeat longstanding assumptions and folk etymologies, unchained from both the word-history and the natural history of the bird. Lockwood (1993) remarks in his Introduction (p.vii):

> Writers on ornithological subjects sometimes digress to insert remarks here and there on the meanings of obscure bird names. But, all too commonly, the speculation volunteered is worthless. It is evidently still not everywhere appreciated that the elucidation of bird names is as much an art in its own right as any other branch of linguistics…

I would add that it is a *sine qua non* of such work that the analyst of bird names should also have an excellent grounding in ornithology and be well acquainted with the diagnostic and other characteristics of the genera and species in question.

I found so many bird names described in the OED as of "uncertain" or "unknown" origin that I came to the view that a review of what we really know about bird names was

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[8] Aristotle (c.350BCE) gives the name Gk. *spinos* (L. *spinus*) to this species also known as Sc. and E. dial. *spink*.

[9] D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1936) reminds us that many ornithonyms found among the ancient Greeks and Romans may have entered their languages from earlier sources.

[10] In this brief pen-picture are discernible apt name motivations for the *Chaffinch* spanning at least 2,375 years across a panoply of European dialects and languages.

timely.[11] I felt I was well-placed to re-examine the literature in this field, and see whether some useful and original contributions might be possible, using language and ornithology in equilibrium.

I therefore set out to re-examine the ornithonyms bequeathed to us by generations of observers across the British Isles, beginning with the 'accepted' English vernacular names, both generic and specific.

In picking up these fragmented pieces, I found myself embarking upon a fascinating project that was part rescue-mission, part jigsaw, part cold-case detective work; an endeavour focused on reconnecting the common names of the birds with the original ideas we had about them when observing them with our five senses, and when describing and naming them in our local dialects.

[11] Of the 51 names included in this dataset, 54% were described in this way by the OED, and if those etymologies prefaced by "apparently" or "probably" are taken into account the figure rises to 59%. With an originally larger dataset of 81 names the figure was the same.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Research Questions

2.1 Overview

This section is a chronological review of the literature relating to the vernacular English names of British birds, highlighting

- the principal milestones in the evolution of vernacular English bird names;
- the principal authors contributing to our understanding;
- the relative strengths and weaknesses of key works to the present day;
- discernible trends in the literature;
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of various approaches to uncovering naming motivations;
- areas where further research may be indicated.

2.2 Celtic bird names

Bird names, specifically in Scottish Gaelic - together with superstitions, proverbs, poetry and folklore - have been collected by Fergusson (1885) for the Gaelic Society of Inverness, and have been added to by Forbes (1905) in his Gaelic-English and English-Gaelic lexicon of names.

More recently, Celtic bird names have been collated as part of a collection of Celtic cognates in Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and Breton in the online resource *Celtiadur*, assembled and maintained by Ager (2025). In many cases their etymology is also given, and many names are linked to informative articles comparing near-cognates and related terms.

2.3 Ancient Greek and Latin names

Latin is another root source of current bird names, and one which became increasingly important in scholarly circles in the Medieval period, although their sources were scholarly or classical Greek and Latin authors like Aristotle and Pliny.

The Natural Histories of Aristotle (c.350BCE) and Pliny (c.77CE) remained key sources for all knowledge of birds for many centuries throughout Europe and other parts of the world.

In 1220 Michael Scot was in Toledo translating not only the commentaries of Avicenna and Averroes upon the natural history of Aristotle from Arabic into Latin, but Aristotle's

Historia Animalium as well. In this way he introduced European writers on birds to the learning of the Arabs and ancient Greeks (Thorndike 1965, p.24). In particular the work of Albertus Magnus (c.1250CE) and the oeuvre of Frederick II Hohenstaufen on falconry and ornithology, also written c.1250CE (Wood and Fyfe 1943), were heavily influenced by these works. In the latter case, Frederick took great delight in contradicting the assertions of Aristotle from his own astute field observations, writing accurately and in depth about the seasons of migration and territory. His work is at least five hundred years ahead of its time. British ornithologists around the time of Gilbert White in 1770CE were still wondering whether Swallows at the onset of winter hibernated under water or migrated to the moon.

Thompson (1895, 1918, 1936) writes expertly about Greek names of birds, with a solid knowledge of both the language and the ornithology. He points out that many bird names used by Aristotle from his base in Athens or his later home on the isle of Lesvos may have been indigenous, but that other names may have originated in older neighbouring cultures. The motivations for these names might therefore lie with observers of birds in Egypt and surrounding cultures. Fisher (1954) traces the first bird 'records' – cave paintings – to c.16,000BCE at Lascaux, and the development of artistic or sacred impressions of birds through the Sumerians of Mesopotamia, building at Ur c.3100BCE,[12] the Egyptians making bird frescoes at Medum c.3000BCE,[13] down to ancient Greece and Aristotle in c.350BCE.

More recently Arnott (2007) provides a comprehensive update to Thompson's oeuvre, within which he incorporates the findings of many new works on the subject. The whole is a reliable reference book in the form of a dictionary with intriguing detail about both the birds and the classical writings. Although it is true that most Linnaean scientific names have been directly influenced by - or even formed from - these ancient classical names, many English vernacular names have been derived from them too.

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[12] Fisher (1954, p.12) states that in the oldest known Sumerian edifice in Mesopotamia was found an image of doves cut in white limestone in a mosaic frieze of stone and mother-of-pearl, and a life-size eagle grasping two stags (in copper relief). A later object, an alabaster relief from the First Dynasty of Ur, represents a goose in a boat.

[13] Fisher (1954, pp.12-13) recognised three distinct and recognisable species.

2.4 Medieval (and earlier) Latin names

Medieval (and earlier) Latin bird names were culled from glossaries, with sources reaching back to c.700CE, by Lindsay (1918), and a learned commentary upon individual Latin names and their Greek equivalents was appended by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson.

2.5 Old English names

Whitman's (1898) 'Birds in Anglo-Saxon Literature' is an in-depth survey of the literary landscape of OE bird names, of which he finds 140 names for around 67 species.

> The entire body of Old English literature abounds in references to birds, but the most fruitful source of material is the lists of bird-names in the glosses, in some of which there seems to be a rude attempt at classification. Moreover, the art of falconry…which was introduced into England not later than the middle of the 8th century, and was very popular among the Anglo-Saxons, presupposes a considerable knowledge of the haunts and habits of birds. (1898, p.149)

Relying on classic works of ornithology such as Macgillivray (1840), Yarrell (1871) and Seebohm (1883), he accurately identifies and describes the bird signified by each name, locating it in the literature. He furnishes additional details such as connection to place-names, and on occasion he gives the meaning or motivation for the name; for example for *hroc*, 'Rook' he gives "of imitative origin, meaning a croaker." He also gives ME, OHG, G., D., Icel., W., and L. equivalents.

Kitson (1997, 1998) a century later surveyed the field and gave two creditable accounts of all the OE bird names now known, and with good ornithological knowledge filled in many more gaps in the record, reconciling the ornithonyms with what they might mean in respect to the birds' natural history. Some insecure assumptions arise from occasional limitations in the ornithology, but as an overview of the field these papers are still reliable and perhaps unsurpassed. His assumption that OE *ragufinc* 'lichen finch' refers to the Chaffinch because of the colour of its breast fails to take into account the bird's natural history, in that this species remarkably decorates the outside of its nest with lichen; his assertion that the Great Snipe, which very rarely occurs in the British Isles, and the tiny Jack Snipe, a rare and extremely elusive winter visitor, may also have been referred to as OE *snīte*, 'snipe', or a compound thereof, is also likely to be wide of the mark. Neither shares the well-known and familiar Snipe's 'bleating' display flight, source of its *heatherbleat* and related names, the Great Snipe being "mostly silent" (Sterry 1997, p.100) and the Jack Snipe, which "will freeze till approached to within about 1m" having a display call reminiscent of "the sound of distant horses galloping" (Sterry 1997, p.101). These two species breed to the east and

north of Europe (Sterry 1997, pp.100-101) and would surely not have been familiar birds to the observers and namers of the times.

Fisher (1954, 1966) illustrates the early pre-history of birds, from the earliest known fossils and cave-paintings, through to the advent of what we might recognise as ornithology. He identifies the sources of early Old English names from *The Seafarer* onward, through Middle English to the present day.

Fisher's work is taken up by Yalden and Albarella (2008), and in particular they note and tabulate the emergence of bird names from the earliest manuscript sources.

The recent research of Hough into bird names in place-names is significant; her overview of the context can be found in Hough (2018). In papers which consider terms like *īsen, īsern,* (Hough 2008), *lark hall* (Hough 2003)*, pinch* (Hough 2004)*,* she embarks on in-depth reappraisals of the relationship between the ornithonym and the topographical elements in order to work out the likely naming motivations. Hough points out that in some cases, like *Dunnock* for example, the first record we have of this bird name is its existence as part of a place name, while the earliest records for other bird names is in the form of a personal name, like *Bullfinch.*

Gelling and Miles (1987) align the recording of Eagle names with the distribution of the birds (both indigenous species) across the British Isles.

Parsons and Styles (1996) take *amer* as an example, and expound upon the inevitability of folk etymology and its prevalence in works about the origins of bird names.

Poole and Lacey (2014) focus on Anglo-Saxon culture in relation to birds and words, in particular the significance of bird song and calls - which they refer to as 'avian aurality' - and other dimensions of the subject.

Rundblad and Kronenfeld (2003) examine in depth the persistent and almost imperceptible evolution of folk etymology and its impact on the search for meaning. This force is at play in almost all of the bird names I have analysed in this thesis and is remarkably difficult to identify and peel back, especially after long periods of growth. Like an ivy enveloping a healthy tree, it begins to enclose and obscure the living motivations at the heart of the original name.

2.6 Middle English names

Middle English, or Anglo-Norman names for birds are listed by Acker (1993).

Those found in Medieval manuscripts are more widely and deeply examined by Yapp (1981), especially the Bayeux Tapestry and the Sherborne Missal with its lifelike portrayal of everyday birds and their names in Middle English.

Warren (2018) focussed on the birds of Medieval English poetry as metaphors, realities and symbols of transformation. He later (2025) links bird names and place names.

2.7 Modern English names

From c.1500CE Modern English evolved and in 1544 we have the first printed book about birds from the controversial English cleric William Turner, writing in Cologne and in correspondence with John Caius and Conrad Gesner.

Turner (Evans, 2014) wrote in Latin and gave the ancient Greek and Latin bird names from the works of Aristotle and Pliny, as well as his identification of them in English and German. His observations of the birds are true-to-life, and his identifications of them are mainly accurate. Some wonderful anecdotes adorn the narrative, such as his conversation with a monk on the banks of the River Po near Turin, as they observed a fairly confiding Jay and discussed what its names were in Italian. On the other hand he suggests the *caeruleo* 'blue-bird' might be the *arling, smatch* or *clotburd*, obsolete local vernacular names for the Wheatear; in fact the bird in question may have been the Blue Rock-Thrush, not found in the British Isles and therefore a species he may not have been familiar with.

Aldrovandi (1603), based in Bologna, Italy, wrote in Latin and this was a summary of almost all that was known about birds at that time.

Latin and English vernacular names of British birds were also listed by Merrett in his *Pinax* (1667), from whatever notes he had rescued from the flames of the Great Fire the year before; and by his correspondent Sir Thomas Browne in his *Notes and Letters on the Natural History of*
Norfolk, written before1682 (Southwell 1902).

Ray (1675) included the Greek, Latin and English names of British birds in his little trilingual dictionary (facsimile published 1981), and in his seminal *Ornithology*, authored with his friend Willughby in 1678, he includes the Latin names of the birds as well as the English names, many of which he translates from the Latin, or coins in English. The English vernacular synonyms are also given wherever they are known, and the European equivalents.

Albin (1731-1738) provided 306 hand-coloured engravings (painted by himself and his daughter) in order to aid identification in pre-Linnaean times where one bird had many names, and one name could signify many species.

Welsh ornithologist Pennant (1768, appendix 1770) attributed one standard name for each species on the British list, in his *British Zoology.* There were further editions in 1776 and 1812.

In 1821 Bewick gave some vernacular names among his innovative woodcuts.

In 1802 Montagu compiled his *Ornithological Dictionary*, which gave many alternative names for each species as well as a brief name history from the time of Linnaeus' first edition of the *Systema Naturae*. The myriad bird names had become a maelstrom of synonymy and polysemy, with several species sharing one name, and one species having many names, many of them local or provincial. Despite Rennie's editing in 1831, it was not until the 1866 edition by Newman that most of the duplication was sorted out and many of the loose ends tidied up, such as the long-standing confusion caused by seasonal plumage transformations in gulls and waders. Even the juvenile starling was thought to be a separate species, the *solitary thrush*, though how any observer could fail to see its gradual plumage changes throughout August and September in any field or garden is almost beyond comprehension. This kind of error points to the lack of field observation among ornithologists, at the time still perhaps more interested in skins and labels.

Macgillivray (1840) suggests several changes to the accepted or standard names of common birds, but these are not generally taken up. From time to time these are revived – *Barred Woodpecker* and *Pied Woodpecker* re-appear in Fitter (1966) – but these never catch on among mainstream birders who prefer to use familiar, if more cumbersome names.

Morris' (1851-57) work included the Ancient British (Welsh) names of each species, but they are generally thought to be apocryphal, having no referenced sources.

In 1885 Charles Swainson[14] – inspired by Rolland's 1879 *Faune Populaire de la France* - published a collection of 2000 English and Scots 'provincial' names and folklore, much information coming from the *Zoologist* and *Notes and Queries*, with some meanings and derivations.

[14] Not to be confused with his well-known relative William, a leading ornithologist.

Newton confesses in his *Dictionary* (1896) that he has been obliged to leave out many local dialectal names for birds. Names he does include are in the main expertly dealt with, the author being one of the foremost scholars of his age, and the leading ornithologist of the era.

The early Oxford English Dictionary (1884-1928), together with the English Dialect Dictionary (1898-1905), by Joseph Wright – which incorporated Swainson's list of provincial names - was Lockwood's main source of names in his Dictionary (1993).[15]

Hett in 1902 published an unreferenced list of around 3000 local names, which included many variations.

Swainson's collection, and Hett's list, were included in Kirke Swann's comprehensive 1913 *Dictionary* of English folk-names of birds, which includes names in the Celtic languages. This expanded the number of collected vernacular bird names in English and Scots, some borrowed or derived from Welsh, Breton, Cornish, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, to around 5000.

In Bannerman (1953), a Celtic list of names was included in vol.12, one name for each species, provided by Wilhelm Nicolaisen (Scottish Place-name Survey).

Grant (1951, p.117) has "roughly grouped" 446 English vernacular or "common" names from an American perspective, considering what he terms "primary" or generic names as I have done in this thesis. His biggest category by far is 121 names which are borrowed or derived from other languages, which is double the size of the next biggest category. The borrowed words – from twenty-five other languages, in which he includes Old English - are not further analysed, so this large category of names appears to contain a panoply of motivations which are not considered. The next largest grouping he identifies is the set of names based on the bird's call or song, an important distinction which I have also made in this thesis, although I have further separated the onomatopoeic names. Grant continues with structural names, colour names, habitat names, action or behaviour names, food names, people names, geographical names and names based on an imagined resemblance to humans. There is a small category of names he was unable to trace, described as "lost in the past", in which he counts *Grouse, Gadwall, Godwit, Stint*. Lockwood has resolved

[15] Lockwood's Introduction, on his sources.

Gadwall and *Stint*; *Grouse* and *Godwit* are included here in Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion (p.61 and p.63 respectively).

Grant's categories are a good starting-point for this kind of work but the lumping together of all borrowed words without further consideration - fully 27% of his dataset - is a serious limitation. Taken with the names he has found intractable, we perceive that he has not come to any conclusion regarding name motivations for almost 30% of the set. He makes errors in the etymology which may have been common assumptions at the time, such as deriving *Jay* from *Gaius*, *Petrel* from *Petrus*, *Dotterel* from *dolt.* He cites a list of "nicknames" like Jack, Robin, Mag, Martin, and Guillaume, without considering what meaning they may have or what they might indicate in relation to the bird or its name. This also signifies a certain superficiality in the study. He has also added the names of introduced species like "chicken" and "turkey", so the study's relevance in terms of wild bird species is diluted.

Ernest Alfred Choate (1973) compiled the *Dictionary of American Bird Names*, and in it are found all the same etymological shortcomings as are found in Grant (1951). Choate seems content to rely on Macleod (1954) whose English etymologies, restricted to 'accepted' names and eschewing all local vernacular names, are brief and often wide of the mark. Choate also relies on Newton (1896), who, although he was considered the greatest ornithologist of his day, was not particularly interested in vernacular names of birds and did not apply himself to this branch of his wide subject.[16] Although Choate does list vernacular names such as *Auk, Buzzard, Dotterel, Godwit, and Guillemot*, he gives no clue as to the meaning or motivation of these names. In other cases he follows the errors and assumptions from folk etymology such as *avis* + *-etta* for *Avocet,* the sound of clicking stones for *Stonechat*, and perceiving either L. *gaius* 'joy' or L. *Gaius* the nickname behind *Jay*, or perhaps even 'gay' after its bright plumage. Concerningly, a recent article about

[16] Kirke Swann (1913) says in his Preface that "the first work approaching the scheme of this present volume was Swainson's *Folklore and Provincial Names of British Birds*, published in 1886, which contains nearly 2,000 local and other English names…compared to Swainson's work, Newton's *Dictionary of Birds* (1893-6) contains a great many less [sic] names, as might be expected from the scope of the book, which was too wide to allow the author to direct much of his great talent and research upon this limited subject." This is a generous appraisal and there may have been other motives and attitudes behind Newton's approach to this subject.

bird names in the BOU online journal *Ibis* quoted the etymology of Choate, in my view an unreliable and dated resource (Driver and Bond, 2021).[17]

Also from an American perspective, but with greater perspicacity and originality, Ernest Ingersoll (1883) gives the common names of American birds. Although in this article he is only able to take a few examples of bird names, and examine the vernacular dialectal alternatives, he does so with a sure touch and with a knowledge of and sensibility for his subject – both the words and the birds. At that time he would have had no recourse to Swainson (1885), Newton (1896), or Kirke Swann (1913) and yet in the Dipper's local name *Water Oriole* (p.76) he perceives a reference to "its brilliant song", a rare perception in the literature of *Oriole* having an acoustic motivation. Ingersoll went on to write *Birds in Legend, Fable and Folklore* (1923), and draws freely from Swainson (1885), Kirke Swann (1913) in a wide-ranging and original work, but adding little new about vernacular names or their history.

W. L. McAtee has left an unpublished collection of half a million dialect names for birds, in a manuscript titled *American Bird Names and their Histories and Meanings*, as recounted in Kalmbach (1968). McAtee is a highly prolific collector and publisher of local bird names, and of articles on related ornithological matters. He has a sensibility for name motivations, and although he draws his material widely (geographically) from many vernacular sources, he nevertheless interprets them with a depth of knowledge which makes his etymologies plausible and secure. His collections may have inspired the American Ornithologists' Union to compile its checklist in 1957, assigning one name to each species, perhaps fearing the proliferation of dialectal synonyms which taxonomists in other parts of the world had to face. He demonstrates his mastery of his subject in papers such as *Folk Etymology in North American Bird Names* (McAtee 1951), where he ingeniously unravels the forms and motivations of many obscure local bird names.

Macleod (1954) gave the meanings of the Latin scientific names in his *Key to the Names of British Birds*, but his treatment of English or common names is extremely brief and unsatisfactory, with very few useful pointers and much repetition. On p.12 he outlines five "classes" of "common" name and gives a few examples of names which might fit in each: appearance, call, habitat, food (in which he questionably includes *Chaffinch, Goshawk, Herring Gull,* and *Mistle Thrush*), behaviour and commemorative names. His *Key* inspired

[17] Robert Driver, in an otherwise engaging article from 2021, inexplicably chooses Choate as his source for bird name etymology. https://bou.org.uk/blog-driver-english-bird-name.

Jobling (1991) to analyse the Latin scientific names in his *Dictionary* and later global database.

Jackson (1968) took Kirke Swann's 1913 list, subtracted all Celtic names, and added 1100 of her own from local natural history publications, but gave no references.

Greenoak published *All the Birds of the Air* in 1979 (pre-Lockwood) and again in 1997 (omitting reference to Lockwood (1984, 1993)), a popular compendium of common and alternative names with some enlightened etymology, some folk etymology, and folklore. However, her omission of Lockwood's seminal work is an inexplicable limitation in terms of the meanings and motivations inherent in the names. Nevertheless, it is an excellent exposition of the panoply of local dialectal names which represent such a rich cultural heritage – albeit they were derided as a chaos by previous generations of scholars in their drive for standardisation.

In 1984 Lockwood published the *Oxford Book* (later in 1993 the *Oxford Dictionary*) *of Bird Names*, and at last we had an authoritative etymology for all accepted and provincial English and Scots names, with a small number from Gaelic and other sources. This is still seen as the finest work of its kind to date and may be relied upon in almost all cases for a plausible etymology and name-history. Nevertheless, Lockwood is not free from error, and leaves some doubts, absurdities and mysteries for the enterprising researcher to take up.

Desfayes (1998; 2008) explored the roots of words in European languages. At first sight, and even on further examination, this body of work is almost unimaginable in its scope, a mammoth undertaking of incredible breadth and depth. However, it is idiosyncratic, and the summary work (2008) I have used in this thesis not immune from error occasioned by the author's tendency to assert certainty and dismiss the suggestions of Lockwood in particular. In places he makes quite curt and even dismissive remarks about this principal etymologist and his work (pp. 13 and 56),[18] which are not justified by the evidence Desfayes appends to his own etymological interpretations, some of which undermines rather than supports the theories he propounds. In other places he appears to agree almost verbatim with Lockwood without demur.

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[18] On p.56 Desfayes cites Lockwood and writes: "Lockwood… takes *scoter* to be a misprint for a hypothetical *sooter duck* from *soot*. However the name *scoter* and its variants have been attested in England, Scotland and Ireland. The supposition of a misprint appears to be but an easy way to evade the question – and a thorough search. The names can logically be linked to the verb *scoot*, 'to dart'…" Here Desfayes is, in my view, correct about the motivation for the name, and Lockwood is, as I have noted, prone to assuming a misprint where there may be none. To impute this tendency, however, to evasion and laziness is unjustified.

Cabard and Chauvet (2003) work with Desfayes' etymologies but in many instances do not concur with his findings. Even so, the structure and approach of Desfayes' work sheds so much cultured light on the area of bird names (and many related fields) that it feels daunting and even a little sacrilegious to offer criticisms. In fairness Desfayes' cognates (or "pseudocognates")[19] suggest relationships between words or elements where there may be little or no affinity (such as in his treatment of *Avocet*, *Brent*, and *Chaffinch* inter alia), and he dismisses ideas (such as Lockwood's "brandling" for "brambling") which may deserve fuller consideration. So many names are reduced to a base apparently signifying "round, convex" that it seems to be a predominant motivation even among species not noted for such a form.

I was reassured to find that his more naturally iconoclastic French fellows had less hesitation about contradicting, questioning or even dismissing outright many of his rulings and *ex cathedra* pronouncements: the etymologists Cabard and Chauvet (2003) refer to Desfayes for almost every *oiseau* but very rarely find him convincing or authoritative. In most cases I align myself with their doubts. Reservations are also expressed by Olson on behalf of the American Ornithologists' Union (2001), regarding Desfayes' "idiosyncrasy" and "pseudocognates". EWAtlas (2025)[20] (whose ornithologists, including Gosler, make extensive use of Desfayes' (1998) *Thesaurus* which forms part of their site), have posted a notice on their website stating that "…the paradigmatic approach used by Michel Desfayes is rarely used by linguists today, and therefore etymologies derived by this approach might disagree with those based on other principles..." Intriguingly Desfayes' own friend and birding companion Jean-Claude Praz states in the Preface to Desfayes' (1998) *Thesaurus:*

> His propositions concerning the origins and meaning of so many terms compiled in some forty languages are at times original, and from their logic, stand apart from the dogma of specialists. These propositions are not the only aspect of Michel Desfayes' work, and should not keep specialists from drawing generously on this huge lexical collection… we are altogether aware that Michel Desfayes' work, despite its magnitude and wealth of information remains a grouping of topics which deserve further research. Rarely has a project been presented with so many terms and so little wording.

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[19] Storrs L. Olson (2001) in his review of Desfayes' *Thesaurus* used this term to express his reservation.

[20] The *Ethno-ornithology World Atlas*, a project of partnerships including Oxford University's Department of Zoology, the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, and Birdlife International.

Notwithstanding the idiosyncrasies in his etymologies, his system and organisation of ideas inspired me in setting out the principles and an original approach for my own work.

Myers (2022) collects the "common group names" (p.10) or "common generic names" (p.7, p.11) of world birds, in the English language, including all 'accepted' names in this category. Her firm grasp of ornithology and her in-depth linguistic sensibility make this a worthy resource, although its scope does not cover either species names or provincial names, their meanings or derivation. For *Starling* and *Sparrow*, she makes a fair summary of the knowledge to date, citing Newton, Lockwood and others, but she gives no meaning for either name, makes no new progress, and provides no hint of any provincial or European alternatives for either bird which may cast light on the matter. While the work impresses in its breadth, it seems content to describe rather than discover. Myers does state her purpose is "to consolidate and summarise the etymology and history of all the common generic names of birds", adding "discussion of the merits or otherwise of these names is not within the scope of this work" (2022, p.7). This ultimately feels like a lost opportunity for a writer with a firm grasp of both language and ornithology, as she demonstrates on the occasions when she ventures original comments on name motivations. One explanation for this might lie in the odd comment which concludes her Introduction (2022, p.11):

> …the etymology and stories of these common names[21] are now a matter of historical fact and, to that extent, are immutable.

Other publications have approached the subject but without the depth of linguistic knowledge and ornithological knowledge which must go hand in hand. They have almost all restricted themselves to Linnaean "scientific" names and official standard English or international English names, leaving the immense corpus of vernacular or provincial names - arguably far more culturally and semantically interesting - untouched.

In this category is Reedman's *Lapwings, Loons and Lousy Jacks* (2016). This work does stray into the realm of local dialectal names, as you would expect from the title, but the whimsical approach of the author, his admittedly limited ornithology and his lack of deep linguistic sensibility mean that he fails to get to the heart of any of the challenging lacunae in the corpus. He lists a small number of dialectal names in brackets in his index. Since his

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[21] Myers (2022) is referring to the "common names" in the eBird/Clements Checklist which she uses throughout her book, and seems to be making the point that vernacular names are relatively stable, whereas "the taxonomic arrangement of birds is in a constant state of flux so that some of these names, numbers and associations will change over time." However in her comment implying that their etymologies and stories are now set in stone, she overstates the case by some margin. This is unfortunately a very common assumption in the ornithological literature.

work is subtitled "*The How and Why of Bird Names*" we should perhaps not be surprised that this is not a book about the vernacular names themselves, their etymology or motivations, but about the process of naming and the ornithologists who bestowed names. It therefore deals mainly with Latin names, taxonomy and nomenclature, a task already undertaken by Macleod and recently by Jobling, and he cites Lockwood for almost every vernacular name he considers.

Mrs Moreau's Warbler – How Birds Got Their Names by Moss (2018) again focuses more on eponyms and the people behind them, their exploits and stories, and has little if anything new to say about the meanings of any of the names he discusses. For example, he focuses on the name *Robin* over several pages without touching on what it may mean, being of the view it is merely a nickname, without any sense of its relatedness to words and elements related to 'red'. He spends several pages recounting a 'royal underwear' story about the possible meaning of "Isabelline" (denoting a sandy colour) apparently without acknowledging that *sable* is French for sand, although the clue appears in his own footnote (2018, p.100). In another place (p.144) he attributes a quotation to Charles Swainson (author of *Provincial Names and Folk Lore of British Birds*, 1885) which is in fact a statement by William Swainson (a leading earlier ornithologist, after whom various species are named). Moss has a solid grounding in ornithology but is focused on storytelling rather than making any original attempt to find out what vernacular names may mean; he describes eponyms as the "most beguiling" of bird names, a subjective judgement, and he represents many ornithologists in this preference (p.2):

> Ornithologists have often been rather dismissive of 'folk names', as though they are somehow inferior to the official, authorised ones. Yet as French scholar Michel Desfayes points out…it is purely a matter of chance that, while some folk-names remained localised, others were adopted as the name we still use today.

Of course, forces other than pure chance are at play in the evolving of vernacular names, their longevity and 'acceptability', some of which we will explore in this thesis.

The contextual backdrop of European, Celtic and E. dial. names has been augmented by many Scots names, and Jamieson's (1867) *Dictionary of the Scottish Language* has been a valuable resource providing many clues to the motivations of hitherto almost intractable local dialect names which may have influenced the sense of more widespread vernacular names, and ultimately some which became 'accepted'.[22] *The Oxford Dictionary of Family*

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[22] Cf *scobby, scoppy, snabbie* and *taggy-finch* for *Chaffinch* (q.v.) all of which are unresolved in the literature.

Names in Britain and Ireland (2016) has given alternative angles to the senses of name-elements such as *Hobby, Jay, Jack, Mag, Magot, Martin, Merlin, Robert, Roberd, Robinet,* and *Robin,*[23] where these are no longer simply treated as fairly random 'nicknames', but as word elements potentially carrying meaning in their own right.

The *Avian Lexicon Atlas: a database of descriptive categories of English-language bird names around the world* (Morrison *et al.,* 2025) is an enormous undertaking analysing the specific descriptors of vernacular bird names. Focusing only on specific epithets, and not on the names or nouns, it has nothing to say about vernacular name motivations. They make no reference to Lockwood or Desfayes.

While giving credit where it is due for the progress made in the field of vernacular bird name motivations to date, the many insufficiencies and inconsistencies which proliferate in the literature leave scope for a re-appraisal of the evidence, which we may structure around three principal research questions.

2.8 Research Questions

- What are the motivations behind the vernacular names of British birds?
- What patterns or categories are discernible in these naming motivations?
- How might these motivations and patterns throw light on outstanding issues in the literature?

[23] *Rob-* names may carry a sense of red colouration deriving from L. *rubes* 'bramble' as is found in these personal names applied to red-breasted birds like the Robin (formerly Redbreast or Ruddock) and Chaffinch.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 The dataset: 'accepted' vernacular names

The dataset to be analysed emerges from Desfayes' (2008) summary list of vernacular English names of European birds, whose meaning he ventures, and of which he says:

> ..the names we are trying to elucidate are those that were in existence in British speeches before the advent of ornithology: lark, ammer, sparrow… we are not concerned with such [new] names [Cream-coloured Courser, Black-winged Pratincole] which are calques of scientific names, or coined and compounded from Greek words. It is therefore important to differentiate the names legitimately attested in the British Isles and used in local speeches, and the bookish names which are often loan-words. (2008, p.7).

I compared Desfayes' list with the names given in Lockwood's dictionary (1993), from which I extracted the 'accepted' vernacular names in current use.[24] There were a small number of anomalies – Desfayes includes *Accentor*, undoubtedly a book-name, but omits *Erne*, an attested vernacular name in current use, although not wholly 'accepted'. In such cases I have used my judgement to include a name which is only recently or partly obsolete, or to exclude a name which may have a recent history of 'acceptance'. In a dynamic picture of moving parts, the lines are not always fixed or straight. I have in all cases been guided by a judgement as to whether, given the evidence, there may be an original and enlightening contribution to be made.

The dataset in this thesis consists of 51 primarily monolexic names, genuinely attested in British dialect speech prior to the onset of ornithology, most of which are 'generic' or genus names (*Finch, Thrush*), with a number being specific or species names (*Chaffinch, Fieldfare, Hobby, Merlin*). A number of the latter type have developed from compounds, but have become whole names in their own right, being composed of a noun qualified by another noun, rather than including an epithet or adjective. Therefore *Greenfinch* is not analysed, being a compound of generic name *finch* and specific epithet *green*, a compound name which is transparent and securely worked out, but *Chaffinch* and *Missel* or *Mistle [Thrush]*, having an element of opacity and being insecurely worked-out to date, are reappraised here. In any case, 'generic' and 'specific' are taxonomic and ultimately biological terms, and in linguistic analysis are not the compass. *Chaffinch* in the British

[24] Pennant (1768) and others 'accepted' one vernacular name for each species from among a plethora of synonyms.

Isles is a species, but in a wider geographic context is a genus- or generic name, there being other Chaffinch species in the Canary Islands. Similarly, although Myers (2022) includes *Dunlin, Gadwall, Garganey, Merlin,* and *Whimbrel* in her category of 'generic', primary, family or group names, each is the only species in its 'group'. So the marker between what is 'specific' and what is 'generic' is not a clear one, and is ever-changing; in this study only names which are or have become nouns, or nomina, are included, and only if they seem to me to require re-analysis.

I have not re-analysed simple compounds (*Blackbird, Goldfinch, Whitethroat*) whose motivations are secure and have been considered by Macleod (1954).

I have not included names like *Pochard* or *Teal* as although these names fit into the dataset and do retain an element of opacity, in that they have not been satisfactorily resolved,[25] I have not as yet been able to put forward an original and enlightening contribution.

3.2 Etymology: origins and name-history

I have generally given most thorough consideration to names which are described as being of "obscure", "uncertain" or "unknown" origin by the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd and 3rd editions). Where an etymology has been proposed by the OED, I have usually compared its notes with the two principal etymologists in this field who also demonstrate the most secure ornithological knowledge, Lockwood (1993) and Desfayes (2008), in order to unearth agreements and differences. I have chosen Desfayes' summary list (instead of his *Thesaurus* 1998) as it comprises a dedicated attempt to isolate the motivation for each name, based on what he perceives to be its root or base element, with focused lexical evidence for each conclusion.

Where there is no consensus in the three principal etymologies, or where I find the consensus to be unsatisfactory, I have attempted to contribute a balanced judgement based on the linguistic and ornithological evidence which brings us closer to the original or deeper motivations.

[25] For *Pochard*, Lockwood has a fairly unconvincing derivation from 'poacher' and 'poker', but no further; for *Teal,* Desfayes has an even less convincing derivation from the general blackness of most diving ducks.

In some cases I also append relevant etymological or motivational comments and suggestions from Turner (1544),[26] Willughby and Ray (1678), Montagu (writing in 1802, with further editions in 1831 and 1866),[27] Rolland (1879), Swainson (1885), Newton (1896), Kirke Swann (1913), Macleod (1954), Greenoak (1997), Cabard and Chauvet (2003), Myers (2022), and other ornithologically sound etymologies. In addition I have referred to various articles on Old English bird names by Hough (works from 1995-2018), Kitson (1997; 1998), Poole and Lacey (2014), and Whitehead (1898). I have referred also to Yapp (1981) and Warren (2018) on Middle English and Medieval Latin names, Thompson (1895, 1918, 1936) on the Greek names of birds, and Jobling (1991) on their Latin or Linnaean names. Very occasionally I have made use of an original contribution from more general authors on the subject such as Reedman (2016) or Moss (2018), although neither ventures very often into the field of vernacular name motivations.

3.3 European language and dialect names

The 'accepted' European vernacular names of birds may be taken into account in my analysis of some names in this dataset in order to shed wider light on the impression left on the senses by observation of the bird in question, and therefore on the motivations behind the names. These are mainly taken from Sandberg (1983) and Keene (2008), primarily the French, Italian, German, Dutch, and Spanish equivalents, but I have also made extensive use of Rolland's French dialectal names collection (1879), Suolahti's German lexis of provincial names (1909), and Giglioli's collection of Italian local names (1889, 1907).

3.4 A backdrop of Celtic names

The more recently collected Celtic names, including Breton, Cornish, Manx, Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic names, have at times formed a contextual backdrop which I have also used to illuminate aspects of these names and their motivations. I have used Fergusson's (1885) list, Forbes' (1905) collection and some older dictionaries. The Celtiadur (2025) online resource, which also links to colour names, names of trees, parts of the body and

[26] Turner was writing in 1544, and it seems appropriate in the context of a discussion of his observations to date them accordingly; however the references are all to Evans' 1903 work *Turner on Birds*, which contains Turner's manuscript in Latin and English, with Evans' notes; and in particular to the 2014 paperback edition.

[27] In discussing the names used by Montagu in the first edition of his Dictionary I refer to his date of writing, 1802, for clarity of context. All references, however, are to his second edition (ed. Rennie 1831) or his third edition (ed. Newman 1866).

other terms relevant to the formation of bird names, has also been invaluable for this purpose.

3.5 A context of British dialect names

I have made use of the local dialectal English and Scots names of birds in order to search more widely among words, closely related to the names we are analysing, which may shed light on obscure motivations.[28]

The body of names gleaned from many sources by Swainson (1885), integrated into the *English Dialect Dictionary* by Wright (1898), added to by Hett (1902), augmented by Kirke Swann (1913),[29] reordered by Jackson (1968), later analysed expertly by Lockwood (1993), and idiosyncratically by Desfayes (1998; 2008), form the context out of which these 'accepted' names have emerged over time.

I have also used collections of Scots names by Jackson (1997) and of Ulster-Scots names by Braidwood (1965) and Robinson (2021).

3.6 Ornithology and linguistics in equilibrium: a search for meaning

In the case of each name, I weigh the linguistic evidence alongside ornithological knowledge of the bird in question, in order to judge what elements fit with what we know of the bird's characteristics.

I conclude with a summary of what the motivations most likely are for each name, whether acoustic (onomatopoeic names, names based on call or song, sound-names otherwise based on call or song, or on the times or conditions of vocalisations), behavioural (names motivated by habits or displays), chromatic (names referring to a colour-aspect or an overall colour), morphological (motivated by the form of the bird, its features, size or shape), kinetic (movement-names, including flight) or topographical (names pertaining to habitat).

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[28] I will follow the preference of Francesca Greenoak (personal correspondence) for 'local' instead of 'provincial', a word which may have assumed slightly pejorative undertones in Britain. I also use 'dialectal' for names which arose out of local speech which differs from area to area, and 'vernacular' to signify everyday informal speech.

[29] Kirke Swann (1913) includes Celtic names, which are later extracted by Jackson (1968).

I initially came across some of these categories through the work of Desfayes (2008, p.5), who says in his Introduction:

> Birds…like everything that surrounds us, have characteristics according to their shape (morphological), their colour (chromatic), their movements (kinetic), the sounds they make (acoustic or phonic), or to their various functions.

Desfayes links these "bases" or categories to the human senses:

> Each of the bases serving as the foundation of my method is the expression of one of our senses…
>
> *Sense of hearing*: acoustic impression; acoustic base. *Sense of sight*: optical impression; chromatic, kinetic and morphological bases. *Sense of touch*: tactile impression; morphological base (2008, p.5).

Desfayes suggests that cognates across languages can be found, but also within dialects. To this end he makes use of 100,000 local or dialectal bird names in his *Thesaurus* (1998) to trace links across the European lexis and to apply his examination of a root or element across 'filiations' of related words in various languages. In particular, he states that his method does away with the need to posit 'hypothetical' words. One major weakness of his approach is that he neglects the word-history in almost every case, tracing meaning only from the current form of the name. As we see in our analysis of this dataset, the word-history is crucial to the search for the original motivations behind each name.

Lockwood (1993) is careful to first trace the word-history, its various forms through time, usually through Middle English back to Old English in a bid to find the original motivations. He was among the first to identify the categories of names as habits, appearance, colour, and voice,[30] in which he has been followed by others:

> Our traditional bird names arose in a purely oral milieu. They were created by country folk, in the case of seabirds sometimes by fishermen, in times when people still lived on intimate terms with nature. The names have been variously motivated. Habits and appearance, especially colour, have been predisposing factors. But the most potent of all has been the voice – so many species are heard before they are seen – hence the plethora of onomatopoeic (imitative, echoic) names, in which the bird's call, or one of its calls, is reproduced in the name. (1993, p.10-11)

I have started with these categories arising from the senses, and I have broadened them and fine-tuned them in sub-categories as evidence has arisen from my analysis of the dataset.

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[30] Lockwood was preceded in this by Grant (1951) and Macleod (1954) albeit with differing categories. Jobling (1991, pp.xix-xxiii) constructs an advanced system of categorisation for 'scientific', or Linnaean, names.

This has led to the creation of a provisional top-down scaffolding within which to begin work, and the building of a new structure from the bottom up according to evidence arising from the individual analyses.

3.7 Categorising my findings

These motivations are categorised (A, B, C, E, F, K) and more finely-tuned in subcategories (A1, A2, A3 etc) and the results set forth in a spreadsheet which shows the combination of codes for each name. So for example, a name with an acoustic motivation will fall into category A, but if it is onomatopoeic (e.g. *Chiffchaff*) it will be subcategorised A1, if it is a call name A2 (e.g. *Coot*), or a song-name A3 (e.g. *Warbler*). A4 will be a subcategory of names which refer to the sounding-time or place, to the conditions of the sound-observation (e.g. *Nightingale)*.

The motivations can then be systematised as data, their frequency and patterns may then be illustrated, and the research questions can begin to be addressed.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion of Names

In this chapter each entry begins with a comparison of the etymology of the OED with the principal and other sources. My contribution as to the name's motivations is followed by a category code; the codes are mapped in the Appendix and the Results and Conclusions are considered. The category codes used are as follows:

ACOUSTIC

A1 Onomatopoeic from the call

A2 Onomatopoeic from the song

A3 Call

A4 Song

A5 Time or conditions of vocalisation

BEHAVIOUR

B1 Habits (deliberate, idiosyncratic or purposeful)

B2 Displays

COLOUR

C1 Overall

C2 Aspect

ENVIRONS

E1 Habitat

FORM

F1 Shape

F2 Size

F3 Feature

KINETIC

K1 Movement (usual, ordinary means of locomotion)

K2 Flight

Auk

OED finds this word is probably a borrowing from early Scandinavian, and compares it with Old Icelandic *álka*, and Norwegian *alke* 'Razorbill', "probably imitative of the bird's cry".

It gives *auk* as a northern English name recorded first by Ray (1674) for a *Rasor-bill, Auk, or Murre* (*Alca torda*) and later in Willughby and Ray's great *Ornithology* (1678).

Kirke Swann (1913) tells us it 'occurs also as *Alk*', and is a name for the Great Auk (now extinct) or for the Razorbill on the Yorkshire coast, as well as for the Guillemot in the Orkney Islands.[31]

Desfayes (2008) agrees with the OED that the name is of acoustic origin, adding that these are noisy birds on their breeding grounds. Scandinavian *alka, alke* being a seabird name, his conclusion is fair as many seabirds and water-birds make guttural calls and cries which may be heard and rendered in this way (e.g. *lag, claik, elk, gull, goeland, gwylem* et alii), making this very likely to be an onomatopoeic name. Desfayes links *alka, alke* to other European words and roots which also point in an acoustic direction and may share this onomatopoeic root, specifically describing geese, gulls and terns, such as *alkoi, alcyon,* and *alcione* (Desfayes, 2008, p.10-11). The ancient Gk. *alkuon* 'sea-bird, sea-gull' which he also appends may be a key to the identity of the mythical *halcyon*.

Greenoak (1997, p.114) elaborates on the voice of the bird principally referred to by the word *auk*: "The word *razor* has its origins in the L. *radere* to scrape, and the voice of the Razorbill resembles a grating or scraping noise".

Lockwood (1993) acknowledges Old Norse *alka* as the root of the name, which he says originally meant 'neck'. He does not equate the meaning to the throaty or guttural soundings of the bird, but takes a more literal view. He suggests that the bird's habit of twisting its neck as it returned to its rocky perch was likely to be the cause of this name, but there is little or no supporting evidence for his view.

In conclusion, although it is possible that there is a combined acoustic and behavioural motive here, the likelihood of this name being an onomatopoeic rendition of the Razorbill's call is a strong one, and, in my view, the primary if not the sole motivation for the name.

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[31] Kirke Swann attributes this last note to Swainson (1885).

A1

Avocet

OED gives this as a borrowing from the French *Avocette*, which is in turn derived from Italian *Avosetta*, but gives no further clue as to its meaning. Lockwood concurs that its etymology is unknown.

Macleod (1954) and Kirke Swann (1913) follow Newton (1896 p.23) who quotes Prof. Salvadori that *Avosetta* may be derived from L. *avis* 'bird' with a diminutive suffix -*etta*, which may also denote femininity and gracefulness.

This is correctly rejected by Desfayes (1998) as a book-name formed by compounding a Latin element with an Italian diminutive, not attested in any spoken dialect. However, his own interpretation also falls wide of the mark, as he discerns the name may be derived from -*boc*- which he says refers to its upturned bill. He appends some fairly unconvincing evidence around -*boc*-, -*bec*-, and -*bic*- roots but none seems to bring us closer to *Avosetta.*

Other local and European names have been motivated by its recurved bill, its scooping or mowing motion when feeding in water, and its striking pied plumage (Giglioli 1889, p.581; Rolland 1879, pp.362-363; Swainson 1885, pp.188-189).

Both Newton and Kirke Swann note in passing that *Avosetta* and *Avocetta* are both recorded as variants, and this becomes more significant as we turn to Giglioli to find both of these attested as Italian dialect forms, as well as *Vocetta* and other terms based on -*voc*-. This root would strongly suggest a vocal or acoustic motivation to *Avocet* and its derivatives, a possibility apparently unexplored in the literature to date. In my view this chimes well with the many dialect names given to this noisy bird in many parts of Europe. Examples of these are E. dial. *yelper, barker, clinker;* D. *kluit, kluut;* F. dial. *brett, clette, clepe* (Rolland, 1879).

The many-faceted evidence of Giglioli's dialectal Italian names favours a -*voc*- root element which suggests this acoustically-motivated name is primarily about the remarkable calls the bird makes.

A3

Barnacle

OED suggests this is a borrowing from F. *bernaque*, citing c.1297 E. *bernekke*. It suggests a possible "bare-neck, bear-neck" interpretation "of which the application is not evident". It adds that there is no connection with *barnacle* 'a shellfish'.

Both Lockwood and Desfayes unite in contradicting this interpretation. Lockwood (1993) suggests *bair-neach* is Gaelic for 'limpet', a kind of shellfish, and that the bird may be named after the shell. Desfayes (2008) is even clearer that this is not a bird name. but rather a shellfish name, although he omits to say what it means.

Macleod (1954) differs from Lockwood and Desfayes, concurring with the OED that the bird name came first. Departing from the OED's apparently groundless etymology, he suggests it is a *b-rn* name like *brent* and *brant* (burnt colours) referring to the bird's blackish neck.

Macleod, in my view, correctly aligns the name *barnacle* with *brent* and *brant*, names rooted in *br-n*, with the sense of the burnt colours of blackish and ash-grey, which are the overall colours of these birds at all seasons, and perhaps also patterns of colour suggested by words like *brinded*. Lockwood concurs these names were taken together as black goose names, adding that the two species (Brent Goose and Barnacle Goose) were not separated until relatively recently. In Gesner (1555) we find listed "*brantae vel berniclae Britannorum; alias…bernecae, aves e ligno putrescente crescentes*".[32] Such names are usually derived from their "burnt" colouring, or from the call, as Lockwood says.

In short, the evidence for a chromatic motivation for *bernacle* and *barnacle* (as for *brent* and *brant*) is very strong, and the evidence for an acoustic or onomatopoeic motivation far less so.

C1

[32] "Brants or bernicles of the British, also called…bernecs, birds which grow from rotting wood". My translation.

Brant, Brent

OED says this is of uncertain origin, adding:

> *brent* since Pennant c. 1768 is the accepted term, (Dr John Kay [Caius] in 1577 had *brend-gose*); previously 16th and 17th century the usual form was *brant*, derived from Swedish Icelandic *brandgas* 'shaldrake [sic] or bergander'.

In c. 1400 the Sherborne Missal (Backhouse, 2001) gives the name *bornet* to a white-faced Barnacle Goose, a Middle English word which may reach further back and may be a form of **burnet, brunette* or *burned* referring to its all-over dark or black plumage.[33]

Turner's *brant*, or *branta* (1544), is amended by Gesner (1555) to "brenta".[34]

Brant is later attested in 1597, when it is said to be a North of England term for *Barnakles*, then by Ray (1678), then accepted by Pennant in 1768 as *Brent*, who stated that Willughby and Ray, and Brisson, properly treat Barnacle and Brent Geese as different species.

Lockwood gives the ancestor of *brant* and *brent* as Old Norse *brandgas*, 'burnt goose', its blackened neck and head, and dark-coloured body, giving rise to this chromonym. Greenoak (1997) appends Brand Goose and Black Goose as local provincial names for this species, further evidencing a chromatic motivation.

Macleod aligns himself with this view precisely, finding *brandgas* to be the origin of the term and the motivation for the name being its burnt or 'charred' appearance.

However, Desfayes (2008) gives an acoustic derivation from the root *br-nt*, and appends a list of words referring to sounds as different as thunder, cackling of a goose, grumbling, lamenting, the sound of a bell, noise, and swinging on a squeaking seesaw. It is hard to accept that a common root might give rise to this varied panoply of sounds, and again no history of the word has been taken into account, only its current form, and the context of the bird's dialectal names has not been considered.

There is no reason to dismiss either the acoustic meaning of Desfayes (if it were onomatopoeic) or the chromatic meaning of Lockwood, Macleod and the OED, but it

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[33] Cf *prunella*, for **brunelle* or *brunette* as a Dunnock name (q.v.) in Swainson (1885), meaning "a wee brownie" or "little brown bird".

[34] Gesner may have thought to correct his friend and correspondent, assuming he was referring to Aristotle's unidentified *brenthos*, but Turner was not in error.

seems that Desfayes has very weak supporting evidence, whereas the latter group have a more solid evidential basis. The name almost certainly has a chromatic motivation.

C1

Bunting

OED states the origin of the word is uncertain, and is of unknown origin. It suggests a sense of 'plumpness': Scots *buntin* short and thick, plump.

Lockwood gives no etymology, but concurs with 'plump, thick-set, dumpy' in relation to the typical bunting, the Corn Bunting. Desfayes gives 'roundish'. Macleod suggests 'mottled', derived from G. *bunt*. All of these are apt and descriptive of buntings in general, and of the Corn Bunting (formerly the Common Bunting) in particular.

Desfayes isolates a root *bont-* 'convex' or roundish, and appends several European words which bear out his approach. He also uses the bird's provincial names, which, in the case of the Corn Bunting, are along the lines of *chub, bulk* and *lump* to paint the picture further that this name refers to the stocky, portly appearance of the bird.

Macleod derives the name from German *bunt*, 'mottled', a word which accurately describes the plumage of the Corn Bunting, and to some extent could be applied also to other buntings. This mottled aspect of its appearance gives rise to several provincial names, such as *bunting-lark* and *clod-bird*. Newton - without cause, in my view - dismisses this derivation in a footnote, describing it as "said to be most unlikely" giving Ger. *bunt* and Dutch *bonte* as 'pied, variegated'. The sense of 'mottled' is not so distant from the sense of 'variegated', both being apt in the case of most of the buntings. *Pied* (like *tartan*, in the case of the Brambling) is just one rather extreme, very concrete and less subtle shade of meaning at one end of the spectrum of terms like *bunt, sheld,* and *breacan*, which signify 'particoloured', 'pied', 'variegated', 'mixed', 'dappled', 'bright', 'smart', 'brisk' and other words describing birds as diverse as the Brambling, Chaffinch, Jay and Shelduck.

There is a "wheat" implication to G. *ammer, emmeritz, embritz*: OED gives OHG *amar, emmer* a type of wheat, and these words have come into English with the Yellow Bunting, or Yellowhammer, and into the family's Latin nomenclature with Linnaeus. I perceive also a "sifting" implication to *bunting*: OED gives *bunt* v^3, 'to sift meal', which may provide a clue to the original motivations for the name, now all-but-lost (this form of *bunt* is also "of

unknown origin"). These may have a behavioural motivation, as the buntings are granivorous; or chromatic, as they are almost all mottled with various browns and often yellow, fitting with their agrarian environment; or a habitat motivation, being mainly birds of farmland, hedgerows and wheatfields.

But for the present, the most likely motivation for *Bunting* is the sense of a plump and thick-set overall form-impression, with a subordinate sense of "mottled".

[C1] F1

Bustard

OED states this is a borrowing from French, and that the etymon F. *bistarde* is derived from classical Latin *avis tarda,* described by Pliny as the name of this bird in Spain.

Desfayes quotes English cognate *bistard* and *gustard* (the latter of which is Scots), and French cognates *bitard, bitarde, bistarde*, and in Provence *estardo*. His conclusion is that "bustard is formed on the root *tard-* of acoustic origin". However the words he appends to illustrate this point provide little evidence for this conclusion, as they are all words for Shelduck (*tardouno, tadone, tardone, anec de tardor*), Corn Bunting (*stardac, starden*), and Bustard (*outarde, estardo, austarda, abutarda*), none of which is particularly noted for the sound they make, except perhaps for the Corn Bunting, whose song is like the distant jangling of keys. In any case the acoustic motivation is far from demonstrated.

Macleod provides more history, stating that since Albertus Magnus (c.1250) it has been assumed that *tarda* is used as a feminine form of L. *tardus*, 'slow', for this bird. Macleod adds that Pliny describes *tarda* not as a Latin word, but one of Spanish origin, and not an adjective, but a noun.

Lockwood agrees, and says that this points to the original *tarda* being a pre-Roman Spanish provincial name for the bird. We may initially infer that the name reflected an acoustic impression made by the birds on the open plains, on Desfayes' evidence.

The calls of the great bustard *tarda* and of the shelduck *tardone, tadorna,* are very similar to each other, being a deep piping honk, more insistent and repetitive in the Shelduck than in the Bustard.[35] This may lend weight to the notion of an acoustic motivation. The calls of this species would have been very remarkable on the Spanish plains, still one of its European strongholds, and this may be where the element originated which is still in use

[35] The extensive library of sound recordings at xeno-canto.org allows vocalisations to be compared.

today. The similar call of the Shelduck would have been equally - if not more - familiar among the dunes of its European homelands, although perhaps less remarkable.

However the etymology may be quite different, and an unconsidered possibility is that *-ard* is simply a common (agent) suffix, derived from French, along the lines of *buzzard, wizard, drunkard, bastard*, etc. This would leave the root *bist-, bust-, gust-* as an element to be analysed in the most common forms of the name, perhaps an onomatopoeic or acoustic base, as *buzzard* is demonstrated to be; but there are perhaps other possibilities, as yet unformed.

For the present we may consider this to be an onomatopoeic or at least an acoustically-motivated name for the bird, albeit the evidence is not strong.

[A1] A3

Buzzard

OED gives this term as a borrowing from French, the etymon being F. *Busart*; in English an early quotation is c1300 *Busard*, and from 1616 *Bauld Buzzard*, which refers to another species.

Desfayes asserts that "the far-carrying, screaching [sic] call of the Buzzard earns it its name". The buzzard's call cannot accurately be described as a screech; it is singularly like a cat mewing, and is almost universally described as such in the literature, which gives rise to its names in many European dialects.

Desfayes traces this "from a root *b-s* to sound," but the words he appends as evidence from various languages seem only tenuously related: Bret. *Busellat* 'to moo'; It. dial. *busenar*'to make noise'; and other similar words which all mean 'buzzard'.

He states that the *-ard* suffix indicates a 'Gallo-Romance' [French-Italian] origin. This suffix is common in English, with a slightly pejorative overtone – *wise-ard* being wizard. *Bastard, Bustard,* and *Mallard* may also be words of that ilk.

Lockwood (1993) gives a word-history and concurs with OED that the name is derived from the French *busard* (see also *balbusard* or *Bald Buzzard* on p.26 in the context of Marsh Harrier and Osprey) and like its Latin roots (*buteo*, still current from Brisson through Linnaeus as its "scientific" name) it is based on the onomatopoeic syllable *būt*, which refers to the bird's "shrill, long drawn-out cry" which I think may be rendered "byuu" or "myuu" and accurately likened to the mew of a cat.

In short, a busard is ‘the bird that mews’, and *Buzzard* is its present E. form.

A3

Chaffinch

The OED etymology for this term is:

> apparently < *chaff* + *finch*, probably so named with reference to the bird’s habits, as the chaffinch can be observed foraging for grain left on the ground after harvesting or threshing.[36]

The etymology of the first element, *chaff* n., is given by the OED as:

> plant remnants removed from grain by threshing and winnowing, spec. the thin, dry husks covering individual grains of wheat and other cereals (or, in later use, seeds of other plants).

Kirke Swann (1913, p.44) quotes Kersey’s Dictionary, 2nd edition (1715) as stating that the bird is “so called because it delights in chaff”. In the same entry Kirke Swann adds that the bird is “a frequenter of barn-yards, etc”.

Lockwood (1993) paraphrases Kirke Swann’s quotation of Kersey, as does Macleod (1954), who adds that the name is from the bird’s habit of searching chaff for seeds.

Recent authors (Reedman 2016; Moss 2018; Myers 2022) repeat the received wisdom without demur; Greenoak (1997) omits consideration of this name altogether, yet considers the bird’s local names.

This interpretation of the element *chaf* or *chaff* as referring to ‘husks’ in the context of this bird name seems to have been almost universally accepted since at least 1715.

Swainson (1885, p.62) registers an intriguing reservation, saying the name derives “from a supposed fondness for chaff”. Kirke Swann (p.44) also hints at other possible derivations, such as < ME *chaufen* ‘to warm’, which he assumes refers to the “reddish or ‘warm’ breast of the male”.

Desfayes (1998; 2008) is the first to give an entirely different etymology, and seems supported by Cabard and Chauvet.

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[36] The etymology for the genus name *finch* (q.v.), the second element in this compound name, is secure and derives from the bird’s strident and familiar call.

Desfayes attempts to demonstrates the name's acoustic roots in *k-f* and *ch-f*. Cabard and Chauvet (2003) get immediately lost in the assumption that *chaff* means 'chat' or 'chatter', perhaps under the influence of Desfayes. Nevertheless Desfayes' acoustic considerations are to some extent justified by the fact that the bird is remarkably vocal at almost every season of the year. It has a quiet *'chiff'* flight-call, and a well-known spring song with a distinctly chattering quality.[37] Its eponymous *'pink'* call is diagnostic, and its monotonous and insistent *'weet, weet', ('dreep, dreep')* call, foretelling rain according to its folklore, is also very well-known (Swainson, 1885). However the evidence he appends to his interpretation tends to weaken his argument: E. *chaff* 'to scoff, jeer, banter'; E. *chaffer* 'to bargain'; E. *chafer* 'maybug (humming flight)'; E. *cough* 'cough'*;* Catalan *chafar* 'to smash'; Bret. *chif* 'sorrow'. On the whole this is an unconvincing foray.

Lockwood (1993) examines the word-history and cites OE *ceaffinc*, taking the OE element *ceaf-* to mean 'chaff'. The presumed connection with *chaff* may seem obvious in the present form of the name, which has been stable since c.1440, and in a similar form since Anglo-Saxon times, a provenance of at least eleven or twelve centuries. However, in my view the word-history and the history of the forms of this name pose many questions; other motivations, grounded in ornithological and linguistic evidence, have emerged which must be considered.

As well as citing OE *ceaffinc*, Lockwood also finds ME *chaffynche* and *caffynche* in Prompt. Parv. c.1440[38], but his enquiries into the early alternative forms of the name go no further.

The name is given by Turner (1544) as *Chaffinche*, and by Merrett (1667) and Willughby and Ray (1678) as *Chaffinch*. The 'accepted' name is listed by Pennant (1768) as *Chaf-finch*, by Montagu (1831) as *Chaffinch*, and by Montagu (1866) as *Finch, Chaf.*

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[37] Ingenious poetic renditions of this song (many recorded in Swainson 1885, Rolland 1879 inter alia) have given rise to many amusing and otherwise incomprehensible dialect names for the bird in European languages.

[38] *Promptorium Parvulorum*, an early English-Latin Dictionary.

Significantly, the word history reveals that this name has had various forms over time, since its earliest appearance as OE *ceaffinc*, and that around 1400 there were at least three different forms in use: ME *chaffynche,*[39] ME *caffynche,*[40] and ME *cay-fynch.*[41]

The first element of each of these terms would appear to be *chaf-*, *caf-*,[42] and *cay-*.

Aside from the possibility that *caf-, chaf-,* and *cay*-type names may all link back to OE *ceaf*, 'chaff',[43] its interpretation remains problematic as there may be other alternatives which chime more harmoniously with the bird's natural history.

The association with *chaff* as 'husks' is questionable: the bird does not eat chaff, which are its leftovers, certainly does not 'delight' in chaff, as Swainson suspected, and is no more associated with 'chaff' than any of the other common seed-eating finches, sparrows, buntings, titmice, pigeons, pheasants, quails, partridges, wagtails, starlings, dunnocks, grey geese and corvids observed around homesteads and farms.[44] The Chaffinch is not unique in this regard, and is not the only avian visitor to the barnyard or threshing-floor.[45] Many are also brightly-coloured, particoloured, voluble, amusing and confiding seed-eaters; why would the Chaffinch be remarkable in this company, set apart and named as the bird which delights in chaff?

Although the variants of OE *ceaf,* 'chaff' must be duly considered, 'husks' is not the only sense of the word; there are other meanings to consider.

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[39] The OED gives this as the α form of the name, and locates it in Middle English in Prompt. Parv. (c1440).

[40] The OED gives this as the β form of the name and locates it in Middle English in Prompt. Parv. (c1440).

[41] This form, apparently not remarked upon in the literature to date, is from the Sherborne Missal of c1400, (Backhouse, 2001); it is given twice, on illustrations of the male and female.

[42] The eOE term is given in the OED as *ceaf,* and the later OE terms are *ceafu* and *cafu. Caff* is given in the OED as a variant of *chaff*, n.[1], 'husks'.

[43] Variants given by the OED include ME *caf, caff, caffe, chaf, chaff, chaffe, chef, caiffe, kaf, kaff, schaf* etc.

[44] Thirty-seven species spring to mind, fairly common in most parts of the country.

[45] Montagu (1831, p.81) writing in 1802 states of this species "…in winter they become gregarious and feed on seeds and grain. They remain with us the whole year, and flock with other hard-billed birds in the colder months".

Although Hough (1997) acknowledges *ceaf* may refer to 'chaff' or even to 'rubbish, fallen twigs' in a place-name context, she rightly doubts whether such phenomena could lead to the naming of a place. In my view there may be leeway if 'rubbish' can be taken to denote litter (cut straw for animal bedding), leaf litter (especially fallen beech leaves where flocks of chaffinches and brambling will search for mast), a pile of detritus, sweepings, wood or even dung or manure. These may well have been features of settlements and would have been attractive to many bird species finding irresistible gleanings and tidbits especially in winter, as they do today in garden compost and log piles. The Chaffinch and its congener the Brambling share G. *Mistfink, Mistelfink* names (G. *Mist*, 'dung') and dialectal E. *horse-dung finch* names, perhaps for this very reason.[46] Other senses of *chaff* given in the OED include heaps or bales of cut straw for fodder or bedding for animals, or for brickmaking.

OE *ceaf*, 'bedeck, adorn' is suggested by Hough (1997) as an original alternative. She refers it to the breast feathers of the male, as does Kitson (1997, 1998). I suggest it might more closely align with the Chaffinch's diagnostic habit of bedecking or adorning the outside of its compact nest with lichen (Mullarney, 1999). OE *ragufinc,* 'lichen-finch', cited in the OED, is a name which almost certainly refers to this species and to this habit in particular. To my knowledge this connection is not noted by any previous author.[47]

There is little or no reference in the literature to the alternative root element OE *caf*, 'swift, quick' (Smith, 1956, p.76) or 'sharp, nimble, bold' (Wiktionary, 2025). This seems an apt description of the disposition and character of this bird, and the impression it makes on the observer. The corpus of its dialectal names include terms such as Sc. *brichtie* and *briskie*, affectionate diminutives meaning 'wee bright bird' and 'wee brisk bird'. Newton (1896 p.82) described it thus:

> This handsome and sprightly species, which is so common throughout the whole of Europe, requires no description. Conspicuous by his variegated plumage, his peculiar call-note, and his glad song, the cock is almost everywhere a favourite.

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[46] Cabard et Chauvet (2003) list other names from German, as dunghill-related names, such as *Schmutzfink, Mistfink, Schmierfink,* and *Dreckfink. Saufink* may have another motivation (cf "drunken sowie" renditions of the flourish at the end of its song, Swainson 1885).

[47] Montagu's editor James Rennie in 1831 expounds at length on the lichen used in his collection of Chaffinch nests.

This paragraph could serve almost as a summary of the naming motivations of the Chaffinch.

A derivative of OE *caf*, namely Sc. *caif*, is a southern Scots term meaning 'tame, particularly when referring to birds' (Jamieson, 1867; Wiktionary, 2025). Again, this is an apt epithet for this species, often encountered at close quarters and close to human habitations, particularly under seed feeders and bird tables.

A few terms spring to mind in relation to the various forms of the element under consideration here. Sc. *kae,* 'cow', may link with dialectal Chaffinch names connected with domestic cattle and horses, dung-heaps, and *chaff* as 'cut straw for animal bedding'.

OE *ca*, ME *cay*; Sc., E. dial. *ka, kae* 'Jackdaw, Jay' might connect with the visual impression made by the Jay, whose patterning resembles that of the cock Chaffinch: strikingly black and white in flight, but with a pinkish body and blue patches more visible when at rest.

ME *cay-, *chay-* could link to E. dial *Kate*, an onomatopoeic Brambling name. The Brambling is a close relative of the Chaffinch; they are frequently found in mixed flocks in some winters.

It. dial. *ciuf-* prefixes many local Italian onomatopoeic names for the Bullfinch, another pink-breasted finch (Giglioli 1889, p.89); this element may be related to the *chaff-* element. D. *scheld;* D., G. *schild;* E. *sheld*, Sc. Gael. *breacan* 'particoloured, variegated' mirrors the names of the Brambling and Chaffinch in Sc. Gaelic, *breacan-caoirainn* (little dappled one of the rowan) and *breacan-beithe* (little dappled one of the birch).[48] *Breacan* can mean speckled, particoloured or even "tartan", which formerly gave rise to "tartan" or "tartan-back" names for the Brambling, translations which are less subtle, and less descriptive. Pennant's (1768) choice of *chaf-finch* may be derived from one of the *Schildfink* or *shilfa* names, perhaps an unrecorded **shal-finch*, **shel-finch.*

We may conclude from the earliest evidence of spoken and written names that *chaf-finch, *shal-finch, ca-finch* and *cay-finch* evolved alongside each other; thus the sight of the

[48] My translations. The impression is of hundreds of ground-foraging birds suddenly flying up into the branches of the beech trees every minute or two, flashing white and black, pink and orange in the cold midwinter sunshine, as it breaks through the russet leaves and spreading branches of the wood. Scottish Gaelic is a highly impressionistic language and there are many senses to terms denoting colour, tone, and natural light.

bird's colours and patterning, combined with its diagnostic call-note, motivated its naming. It is additionally possible that its hunting for grain among the chaff remained a motivating factor.

A1 B1 C1

Chat

OED (last revised 2024):

> 1678 – [first recorded in Willughby and Ray as *Chat, Whin-chat, Stone-smich, Stone-chatter.*]
>
> Any of numerous small passerine birds …that typically utter short, repeated call notes. Most of these birds are members of the genus *Saxicola* and other genera of the family Muscicapidae.
>
> Etymology: Probably imitative of the birds' calls, although probably subsequently associated with chat *v.*[1]

The OED recognises that this is an onomatopoeic name, imitative of the birds' short, repeated call-notes. It raises the probability that it is associated with *chat, v.*, in the sense of "to talk idly or foolishly", but this connection seems very obscure. There is far more likely to be a link with *chatter, v.* which as the OED itself attests has been used descriptively since ante 1250 of birds' vocalisations, ranging from *birds* and *small birds* generally, to *jays* and *magpies*, *sparrows, jackdaws, redpolls, goldfinches, palm-birds* and *love-birds* specifically. This is quite apt, as *chatter* is an expressive term which has an inherent onomatopoeic element of 'chat*'* or 'tchit' within it, "short, quick, usually high-pitched sounds" likened to a "twitter". Magpies do have harsh chattering call-notes, and the Jay's 'talking' and 'mimicking' subsong can have a chattering quality; Sparrows certainly 'chirp' and 'chirrup', Swallows and Goldfinches have a jangling 'twitter', Redpolls a slightly hoarser one, and Jackdaws a 'chack!' or 'jack!' call which in a flock can sound like repetitive chattering or chuckling. Elements of the songs of the Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat (birds which previously were known as *Chat* and *Hay-chat* respectively) have songs which can be described as 'chattering' or 'chittering', as well as a "chat!" call-note.

Desfayes (2008), like the OED, derives the name *chat* from the verb *chatter*, and from this flow his lists of European words with root *ch-t* and *c-t* denoting various sounds. Many of these seem unrelated and irrelevant (E. *cat*, E. *cat-gull*, 'Black-headed Gull', F. dial. *cata*,

'buzzard'), and he misses the point that this is not simply an acoustic term but specifically an onomatopoeic name from the staccato quality of the bird's call.

Lockwood (1993) acknowledges *chat* as an "echoic word" and a name for the Sedge Warbler, "imitative of a characteristic call", but in my experience this call is infrequently uttered and not very well-known. Its song, however, is an extraordinary continuous medley of warbles, grinding sounds, Swallow and Sparrow mimicry, which is extremely varied and seems very loud for so small a bird. Lockwood adds that *chat* is also an echoic constituent part of other birds' names, like *Stonechat* and *Whinchat*, and he also cites *Wall Chat* as a local dialect name for the Spotted Flycatcher.

Many other birds, especially warblers like the Blackcap and Garden Warbler, as well as the Spotted Flycatcher and Whitethroat (E. dial. *Hay-chat*), also use this call, or its common variation sometimes rendered "weet-tucc-tucc".

That the name is purely onomatopoeic is first suggested by Swainson (1885) who says the Sedge Warbler has the name *Chat* "from its sharp cry". This is the first record of the name being related to the specifically *sharp* nature of the bird's call. Swainson goes on to cite the name in various forms for the Wheatear, "from its short, quickly repeated cry, resembling a slight blow". Names of this type are given as *Chock, Chuck* (Norfolk), *Chack, Chacks* (Orkney), *Check bird, Chickell* (Devon), *Chat* (Northants), *Horse smatch* (Hants).

Swainson (1885, p.9) continues that

> from the similarity between this note and the striking together of two pebbles it [the Wheatear] receives the names of Clocharet (Forfar) from the Gaelic *Cloich*, a stone; Steinkle (Shetland Isles), Stanechacker (Lancashire; Aberdeen; North of Ireland). Stonechat (Northants; Westmoreland; West Riding).

However the *Stone-* prefix, like the genus name *Saxicola*, is an indicator of the habitat of this white-tailed chat, now *Oenanthe*, which prefers stony upland.

Lockwood adds that although Willughby and Ray (1678) refer to the Stonechat as the '*Stone-smich* or *Stone-chatter*', these were all originally Wheatear names as its panoply of similar local dialectal names in Swainson (1885) and Jackson (1968) attests.

A1

Chough

OED (last revised 1889):

> A bird of the crow family; formerly applied somewhat widely to all the smaller chattering species, but especially to the common Jackdaw.
>
> Etymology: Probably an imitative or expressive formation. Applied especially to the common Jackdaw.

Recorded since 1305 in various forms, the OED traces this word to OE variants *cio, ceo, ciae*. Smith (1956) gives OE *ceahhe*, 'jackdaw', ON **ka*, 'jackdaw', ME *ca, co*, 'jackdaw'. He further cites OE **cadac* and ME *cadaw*, 'jackdaw'. He adds that the ON is assumed from Dan. and Norw. dial. *kaa*. The OED cites D. *kauw*, Sc. *kae*, Mid Low G. *ka*, and many other variants and equivalents for the same familiar species.

One E. variant has a different pronunciation and a different shade of meaning, which may have influenced the development of the bird-name over time, as it now represents the standard pronunciation through usage: *chough* n.: (1440 Prompt. Parv.), a *chuff*, a *choffe*, a *chuffe*, a 'rusticus'; (1715) a *chuff*, a 'country-clown'.

Desfayes devotes one line to this intriguing name, dismissing it as having the acoustic root *k-f* or *ch-f*, adding "see Chaffinch". Turning to his treatment of Chaffinch, we despairingly reacquaint ourselves with his odd assortment of sound-words like *chivy, chaff, and chaffer* (all very obscure English words 'for arguing or bargaining') with *chafer* and *chuff, chuffed* and *chuffle* all appended as very dubiously related terms. But *Chough* is not related to words with the root *ch-f* , and we must dismiss Desfayes' conjectures.

This is an onomatopoeic name, as its name-history - outlined by Lockwood and the OED - shows. Listening to the birds now known as *Choughs (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)* on Colonsay in the Western Isles it is difficult to isolate one or other of its possible name pronunciations, as the birds vary their calls between the former more staccato version "jack", "chack" or "chuck" (recalling *'choghe'*) and the latter more drawn-out version "daw", "caw" or "caa" (recalling '*cheo'* or '*chow'*). So both may be accurate, and we may settle on either pronunciation as a result.

Chough was a name originally used for the common and familiar Jackdaw, especially in the south of Britain, a counterpart to *kae* in the north. Turner (1544) cites "*Monedula, a caddo, a choghe, a ka"* – all Jackdaw names. To distinguish the *Pyrrhocorax*, a similar-sized cliff-dwelling black corvid, with a similar range of vocalisations, Turner named that species the 'Cornish Chough' (meaning Cornish Jackdaw).

We may therefore consider the name *Chough* to be settled - as an onomatopoeic name for the Jackdaw, now used only as a name for its relative the *Pyrrhocorax*.

A1

Coot

The OED (last revised 1893) gives this as a vague or generic term for swimming and diving birds, such as the *Guillemot*, also known as the *Zee-koet* or *Sea-coot*. It gives ME *cote, coote,* from D. *koet* (recorded c.1600) but finds no etymology for this word "borrowed from Germanic." It adds that Prof. Newton thinks that there is a connection between *Coot* and *scoot* or *scout,*[49] another name of the *Guillemot*, and allied sea-fowl; but the early history of the latter is obscure.

Swainson (1885) cites many Sc. and E. dial. terms of the *coot* or *scout* type for the Coot, Guillemot and Razorbill, but not for the Scoters; nor do any appear in Rolland (1879, vol. 2). It seems clear that these apparently related terms, covering the entire country from Orkney to Cornwall, may have something in common but apart from the general similarities between black and white low-flying diving water-birds we cannot come to any further conclusion at present.

In Lockwood's view, these *Coot* variants are onomatopoeic and are based on its extraordinary vocalisations: a staccato loud, sharp, piercing call, which is certainly a marker of this species and when first heard is quite arresting.

Desfayes concurs with this being an imitative name, also linking it to D. *koet.*

It is reasonable to concur with these two leaders in the field, even if the OED comes to no conclusion.

A1

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[49] The OED entry curiously quotes Prof. Newton who, in his great *Dictionary of Birds,* makes no mention of the word *scoot*. In fact Prof. Newton (1896, pp. 102-3) states: "The word Coot, in some parts of England pronounced Cute or Scute, is of uncertain origin, but perhaps cognate with Scout and Scoter – both names of aquatic birds – a possibility which seems to be more likely since the name *Macreuse,* by which the Coot is known in the south of France, being in the north of that country applied to the Scoter (*Oedemia nigra*) shews that, though belonging to very different Families, there is in popular estimation some connexion between the birds. The Latin *Fulica* (in polite French, *Foulque*) is probably allied to *fuligo*, and has reference to the bird's dark colour." Prof. Newton does not point out that L. *fuligo* refers to 'soot'. *Scout* is in fact a term applied not only to the Guillemot, but to other seabirds too. The extraordinary *Macreuse* myth to which he alludes refers to a seabird which is more fish than fowl and therefore able to be eaten during Lent. *Fulica*, a term found in Turner 1544, will not be analysed in this thesis, falling as it does outside the scope of this dataset.

Dotterel

The OED (last revised 2019) gives two senses:

> 1 bird; 2 a foolish or stupid person.

and adds:

> It is unclear which is the original sense. The bird appears to be so called on account of its trustingness or naivety, hence the underlying semantic motivation is probably much the same for both senses. Dotterels often allow close approach by humans, and have therefore been said to be 'tame' or 'trusting'.
>
> Apparently < *dote* v.[1] + *-rel* suffix; compare cockerel n., and also mongrel n., pickerel n.[1]
>
> Also called *dot plover.*

The earliest record is from c.1440 (Prompt.Parv.), which gives both meanings for the word Dotrelle: 'byrde' and 'dotard'. Early quotations (OED, 1611; OED, 1769) describe the bird as 'foolish' and 'taken in a snare'.

The OED conflates these two senses, yet they may be quite separate: the bird may be named for unrelated reasons and with different motivations.

While the word *dotterel* may have this 'doting' meaning, the bird name *Dotterel* may have different shades of meaning, specific to the bird and motivated by its characteristics. These other senses are borne out by the Dotterel's local and dialectal names and further evidenced by its names in neighbouring European languages.

As several indicators suggest, the root element of the name is most likely to be *dot*. In the earliest recorded forms of the name, the *t* has been doubled in spelling for emphasis in pronunciation, making the word definitely *dott-erel* and never *dote-rel.* (In fact Pennant's accepted term is *Dottrel*, which is even more emphatically a *dot*-term.) The OED itself appends the provincial or local name *dot plover* without analysis of the term or its meanings, or any reappraisal of the etymology. Preferring the element *dot* as the root of the bird's name would have the effect of rendering almost groundless all the 'foolish' implications of the element *dote.* In line with Poole and Lacey's (2014, p.400) findings on avian aurality in Anglo-Saxon times, *dot* as an echoic or imitative term gains further ground in any analysis of the name, adding weight to Lockwood's acoustic considerations.

Many plovers and larks feign injury around the nest-site to distract predators, trailing a 'broken' wing and staggering around and falling over, before flying away to safety, their purpose fulfilled. Some birds freeze when in danger instead of taking flight. None of these instincts, which humans as well as birds possess, equates to stupidity.

The Dotterel is described (eBird, 2021)[50] as "a handsome plover, with a gentle, dove-like face…a bold white eyebrow…". Its very large, round eye, set off against a white supercilium, gives this bird a very docile and innocent expression, possibly contributing to its 'dote' names, and to its perceived 'doting' attributes.

In addition the *dot* may refer to its large prominent eye and eye-pattern, as its French vernacular name *guignard*[51] implies, linking it to other similar plovers who have 'ox-eye' or 'bull's-eye' names; *dot* (and its variant *dote*) may also call to mind its confiding and curious nature, approaching humans in its environment in order to eye them.

Desfayes (2008, p.21) gives Dotterel as a generic name for plovers in North England. He defines Dotterel as a descriptive word for roundish birds, the name deriving from a base *t-d, d-t, d-d* meaning 'convex, rounded', and not from 'foolishness'. He adds many words from other European languages as evidence for this assertion.

Lockwood (1993, p.54) gives a word history tracing variant *dotrelle* to Prompt. Parv. (c.1440), where the word is defined as "1 dotarde and 2 byrde". No link was originally made between the two meanings.

Lockwood notes however the Norfolk synonym *dot plover*, recognising the imitative representation of the distinctive note 'dot!' often heard at the end of the soft fluting call. The Dotterel makes a series of quickly repeated strident call notes, often represented onomatopoeically as "dot dot dot" or in the way Lockwood describes.

Lockwood's interpretation is intriguing; listening to the bird's calls, one easily hears the staccato punctuated nature of the sounds. It may be that both Lockwood's imitative sense and Desfayes' 'rounded' sense may be inherent in the name motivation.

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[50] eBird is a vast ornithological resource, a "collaborative" enterprise managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This reference is at https://ebird.org/species/eurdot

[51] "One who gives the eye"; my translation. Cabard and Chauvet (2003, pp.162-163) expound ingeniously and credibly on this name and its motivation.

Provincial names such as *dot plover* and *land dotterel* may imply other kinds of Dotterel with other attributes or characteristics. In Montagu (1831) and in Browne (1902) the term *Sand Dotterel* appears for the Ringed Plover, and *Sea Dotterel* for the Turnstone. The provincial Dotterel name *Stone Runner* may better describe the Ringed Plover as it is closely associated with pebbly beaches where the bird's nest and eggs are well camouflaged, giving rise also to its local name *Stone-hatch.*

The Dotterel's other English provincial name, *Wind*, may be an acoustic term evoking its distant whistle on high moors and mountain-sides, a call redolent of the Golden Plover, a better-known and commoner bird more widely distributed, often in flocks with lapwings in winter. *Winderel* is a provincial variant of *Whimbrel*, both referring to the call (Lockwood 1993, p.162), both names taking the same form as *Dotterel*. Lockwood (1993, p.59) makes the observation that *-erel* is usually suffixed to acoustic elements, such as *Whim-* and *Cock-* which may be taken as further evidence that *dot* likewise has an acoustic sense in this name.

Morinellus, the bird's Latinised specific epithet,[52] may be derived from a dialect name for the species, but I have been unable to trace it in Portuguese, Spanish or Italian. However, Cabard and Chauvet (2003), drawing on Desfayes, identify this word as denoting brown, maroon or chestnut colouring, linking with such colours in these languages. Related words are It. *moro, mora*, Sp. *moreno*, E. *maroon* and F. *marron*, all of which relate to dark, brown or red-brown colours, all "sombre" to use a term favoured by Desfayes and Cabard and Chauvet. These brown and orange colours accurately relate to the bird's plumage, brighter in the female than in the male, whose nesting, brooding and parenting roles are also 'reversed'.

A close variant of *morinello* is Port. *moreno*, 'brown' which with its diminutive suffix becomes *morenello,* 'little brownie' (or little brown bird), and is the equivalent of English *dunnock* or *dunlin.*[53]

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[52] John Caius (in Evans, 1903, pp.203-205) describes the bird as easily caught by the fowler, and claims to have derived this name from two roots: from the Morini people of the north of France, among whom the bird is abundant, and from the Greek term for its foolishness.

[53] See also Giglioli (1889, 1907), It. dial. names are predominantly red names, solitary names, summer names, whistler or piper or plover names, fell or hill names, turtle-dove names, doe-eyed, small headed, fine featured names; no foolish names, no stupid reputation inferred from a putative Gk. *moros.* Desfayes (2008, p.21) also dismisses this 'foolish' meaning.

The whole literature on the doting, foolish, trusting and easily caught nature of the Dotterel may be folk-etymology dating back to the 1400s (and currently perpetrated by the OED), where two senses of the word *Dotterel* or *Dottrel* became conflated – 'dotard' and 'byrde' - where before they may have been quite separate. Ironically, the OED does give these two separate senses but immediately conflates them in its search for meaning.

Our *morenello* would therefore take its place in line with its closest relatives as the 'Little Brown Plover', alongside the Golden Plover and the Grey Plover, having recently been moved from the genus *Eudromia* back to *Charadrius*.

Further support for the chromatic aspect of the bird's names lies in its Spanish-specific epithet *carambola*, an orange-coloured fruit which reflects the orange chest and underparts of the Dotterel.

To conclude, the name *Dotterel* has a rich combination of motivations which have been put forward by etymologists and ornithologists since Gesner in 1555 without agreement among them as to which are the most fundamental roots. This name, which has remained almost unchanged for over six hundred years (vouching for the stability of vernacular names), and perhaps for longer, is rooted in the element *dot* whose various shades of meaning in this context reflect the characteristics of this species: its eye pattern, the facial expression this gives rise to, its overall plump and rounded shape, its diagnostic staccato call (a punctus, dot or stop), its brown and orange plumage tones, its protective behaviour sitting tight on its nest even at the approach of predators, its feigning injury to draw predators away from its eggs or chicks, its curiosity in the presence of human beings.

A1 B1 B2 C1 C2 F1 F2

Dove

OED states that this is "a word inherited from Germanic," derived from:

> Old English **dufe*, not found (unless as first element in *dúfe-doppa*: see dive-dap *n.*); = Old Saxon *dûƀa*, Old Frisian *dûve* (Middle Dutch *dûve*, Dutch *duif*). Old High German *tûba*, *tûpa* (Middle High German *tûbe*, German *taube*) … Perhaps a

> derivative of *duƀ-* to dive, dip (see dive *n.*): compare the analogous connection of Latin *columba* with Greek *κόλυμβος* diver, *κολυμβίς* diver (bird).
>
> In Old English the name was displaced by *culufre*: see culver *n.*[1]

Desfayes describes this as another name for *pigeon*, saying it is a name of acoustic origin from a base *t-b, d-v* which is at the root of the following terms: E. *tuba*, G. *hortubel,* 'bittern'*,* F. dial. *tobweyo* 'a rattle'*,* Sc., E. *tove* 'gossip, chat' and several variations of *dove, doo, dufva* which do not provide evidence of any motivation, but only a circular argument.

Lockwood traces the name's history via ME *douvet* to OE **dufe*, a name not actually found in the surviving records but confirmed by the corresponding D. *duif,* G. *Taube*, and ON *dūfa*; all of these terms are imitative of the cooing of *Columba*, more precisely of the Woodpigeon and Stock Dove, "the Rock Dove hardly coming into the ken of those who spoke Proto-Germanic". Kitson (1997, pp.495-496) concurs that the word likely referred to the wild Stock Dove, but makes no comment on the name's motivation.

Lockwood further notes the absence from OE sources of this otherwise common word. He suggests that there was a taboo on its name in contemporary religious literature, the Dove being traditionally a bird of death according to Germanic belief. Kitson (1997, pp.495-496) finds no evidence for this and dismisses it out of hand. Lockwood continues that the Anglo-Saxon church at that time preferred to use a different term, *culver.* By the 16th century he notes that the word *pigeon* (q.v.) has taken precedence.

The OED draws attention to the odd similarity between the E. *dove* and E. *diver* names, with their roots apparently in OE**dūfe* which is used for both kinds of bird.[54] It is strangely paralleled in Greek and Latin: *Columbus* (doves) and *Colymbus* (divers) as the OED sets out.

Further unexplained parallels exist in the dialectal names of diving seabirds like the Black Guillemot, also known as Doveky or Dovekie,[55] Greenland Dove, Rock Dove, Sea Dovie,

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[54] The kind of *diver* the 'dove' names refer to are diving seabirds of the Auk family such as Little Auk and Black Guillemot, but the Greek and Latin terms cover other divers too, such as the Grebes and Loons or Divers.

[55] Kirke Swann (1913) says this name is also misapplied to the little Auk (p.76), and adds the alternative spelling *Dovekee*. His entry seems to quote Newton (1896) almost verbatim, although the latter thinks *Dovekie* an "affected" spelling, preferring *Dovekee* (which I have not found in the literature). The OED's first recorded usage of the term is found in Alexander Fisher's *Dovekey* in his *Journal of a Voyage to the Arctic Regions* (1821), p.27.

Diving Pigeon, Sea Pigeon, Greenland Turtle, and Sea Turtle (Swainson, 1885, p.218). To my knowledge no serious attempt has been made to reconcile or explain this odd juxtaposition. It may be that there is no connection, and the similarity not only of the English but also of the Greek and Latin names may be a bizarre coincidence or an example of parallel evolution. It may be, however, that there is a lost connection or a common ancestor as yet uncovered.

We may conclude that the word *dove* is of acoustic origin.

A1

Eagle

OED (last revised 2011) says this is

> a borrowing from French, etymon F. *eagle*, < Anglo-Norman *eagle, egle, egill, eigle, aegle*, Anglo-Norman and Middle French *aigle* (compare Old French *aigle, egle, eigle*, etc.; F. *aigle*) image of an eagle used as a heraldic emblem or part of an armorial bearing (first half of the 12th cent. in Old French), eagle (late 12th cent.), image of an eagle used as the standard of a Roman legion (late 13th cent. or earlier), the constellation Aquila (early 14th cent. or earlier)…
>
> ultimately < classical Latin *aquila* eagle, image of an eagle used as the standard of a legion, post of legionary standard bearer, legion, the constellation Aquila (in architecture) gable or pediment … perhaps < *aquilus* dark brown, of unknown origin…
>
> The usual word in OE is *earn,* erne n.

The OED tentatively suggests L. *aquila* 'eagle' is derived from L. *aquilus* 'dark brown' adding that the origin of this term is unknown.

Macleod (1954) gives no interpretation of the word *eagle*, but refers us to L. *aquila* in his Latin section citing Festus[56] that *aquila* is the feminine form of *aquilus* 'dark', *aquilus* itself, according to Macleod, being derived from *aqua* 'water'. Macleod adds that Albertus Magnus found a derivation from *acumen*, keenness, with reference to the eagle's keen sight, keen spirit, and keen talons and bill.

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[56] Festus, Sextus Pompeius, *De Verborum Significatu,* a 2nd century Roman work which survives as an 11th century manuscript.

Charleton (1671) writes "*Aquila, (vel ab aquilo, hoc est, fuscus sive sub-nigro colore, qualis aquae esse solet…vel ab acute volando…vel ab acuto visu…*)"[57] which points to the same 'fuscous', dark or blackish colour of the bird, while he agrees with Albertus Magnus that the word *aquila* may derive from the acuteness or accuracy of its flight and of its vision.

Lockwood (1993) restricts his comments to the fact that the word *Eagle* came into British speech with the Normans in the late 11th century while Desfayes (2008) states it is a word formerly describing all large birds of prey, which seems an unsatisfactory generalisation.

The term *eagle* is not listed by Kirke Swann (1913), and his treatment of Golden Eagle and White-tailed Eagle gives no interpretation of the meaning of the name.

Neither Jobling (1991) nor Swainson (1885) gives the meaning of the word, though Swainson expands on its folklore and mythology.

Rolland (1879) lists eagle-names from different parts of Europe but no meaning of the word is offered.

Cabard and Chauvet 2003 (p.115) state that the F. word *Aigles* (the family name *Eagles*) has an Indo-European root *awietos*, from which the Greek *aétos* - usually written *aeetos* with three syllables - and Latin *aquila* derive. The derivation of *aquila* from either *aeetos* or *awietos* seems speculative and is unsupported by evidence or references. However their link to F. L. *Aquilon* [L. *Aquilo*], "le vent du nord", the North Wind, and their question as to its possible relation to *Aquila*, 'eagle' seems a reasonable connection, fitting well with the associations the bird has to rocky outcrops, northern remote and mountainous territories, and its mastery of the air in all weathers. They attribute this connection to the Latin grammarian Festus (who thought the "vol rapide" or rapid flight of both the wind and the bird was at the root of the connection), but add that present-day etymologists are sceptical; they also suggest these sceptical 'specialists' are even less convinced by the suggestion of Suetonius that *aquilo* [sic] may be related to *aquilus,* which they translate as 'brun sombre', dark brown.

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[57] "*Aquila*, (either from 'aquilo,' meaning dark or somewhat blackish in color, as water often tends to be... …or from its acutely focussed flight... or from its keen eyesight...)"; these last senses deriving not from *aquilo*, but from *acumen*, as suggested by Albertus Magnus. My translation.

In my own research the terms *Aquila* ‘eagle’, *Aquilo* ‘the North wind’, *aquilonius* ‘northern’ and *aquilus* ‘dark- coloured, blackish’, are almost certainly related to the idea of the Eagle and are good evidence for the naming motivations of the Latin-speakers who observed this bird in mountainous areas and in remote territories.

The immature Golden Eagle is known as the *black eagle* in Scotland (Jackson 1968, p.42), although Swainson (1885, p.133) does not restrict the name to juveniles or to Scotland; it is a term possibly referring to the plumage of immature birds, or to the silhouetted adults in flight over mountain-tops, barely visible to the observer. It is dark-brown, with reddish or ‘golden’ feathers around the nape. It is known to be naturally associated with northern highlands and with the north wind. The sun never shines from the north; it is the direction associated with relative darkness, gloomy, freezing or stormy weather, often with remote terrain. Symbolically, ornithologically, and linguistically, these ideas chime well together and may be seen as a set of naturally related ideas and motivations for the naming of this great bird, the King of Birds, Jove’s bird, which must have seemed to be master of the air and of the heights.

The suggestion that the root of these words lies in *aqua*, ‘water’, may be added as evidence, possibly from the rainy weather in the colder north, or perhaps that the prime bearer of the name *Aquila* might have been the White-tailed Eagle, known as the *sea eagle* or *erne*, a fish-eagle associated at all seasons with lakes and with the sea. The early form OE *earn,* as we learn from Gelling (1987, pp.174-176), refers to both the Golden Eagle and the White-tailed Eagle, both of which, we discern from place-names, had a wide distribution in England. Gelling associates the Golden Eagle with topographical features which reflect its mountainous habitat, and the White-tailed Eagle with place-names by the coast, or containing woodland and rivers, territories favoured by this species. Archaeological evidence has supported this research, as outlined in her Appendix.

Myers (2022) concurs with at least one of these conclusions (p.110) when she writes that

> the origin of aquila is uncertain, but it probably derives from the Latin aquilus, ‘dark-coloured, swarthy, or blackish’ as a reference to the plumage of eagles. As De Vaan wrote in 2008 “it is possible that eagle was derived from aquilus, ‘dark’, when this had received its colour meaning. It may not be the only dark bird, but it is certainly one of the biggest and most majestic of them”.

I suggest that the darkness implied in the name is one of the associations with the north and with the sunless direction out of which both the wind and the eagle were observed to come. More concretely the dark-brown overall plumage may have been the motivating factor.

B1 C1 E1

Egret

OED says this is a borrowing from French, whose etymons are F. *egret, egrette*, which signify 'tufts, feathers'.

Desfayes maintains that the Egret is named from its characteristic pointed crest from a root *h-g-r* or *-gr* meaning 'pointed'. He appends several European terms as evidence.

Lockwood states that the name is first attested in 1411 "Egrets". Pennant in 1768 used the term to denote "a species of Heron now scarce in this island". Lockwood continues that the name is French, occurring in Anglo-Norman (ME, c.1366) *egretin* and in early French *aigret, aigrette* literally meaning "little heron", the *-et* and *-ette* being a diminutive suffix. The French *aigron* is a phonetic spelling of **haigron* which is the form lying behind the word *heron*, the initial H in French being dropped from around the beginning of the 14th century.

In conclusion, since neither Desfayes nor Lockwood convincingly suggests a meaning for the root or the word, we may conclude that to a certain extent this term remains unsettled.

If we are to accept Desfayes' root significance, it is surely possible that the remarkable sharp pointed dagger-like beak and striking motion of the fishing heron is referred to in the name rather than the rather insignificant and usually quite unremarkable 'crest'. Since the Egrets share the name, the sharp bill, and the darting hunting methods of the Heron we may accept this interpretation for all the herons and egrets as the motivation underlying the name.

A3 F2 F3

Falcon

The OED gives this term as a borrowing from French, and the etymon as F. *faucon*, < late L. *falcōn-em*, *falco*, commonly believed to be < *falc-*, *falx* 'sickle', the name being due to the resemblance of the hooked talons to a reaping-hook.

Desfayes tells us that *falco* and its variants in the Romance languages are the collective terms for all small raptors. In ornithology it has become restricted to one genus. The word *falcon* is not attested in any vernacular language of the British Isles, having first appeared in the literature of falconry apparently borrowed from Italian or Spanish, neither is it attested in the vernacular language of France. In Southern France the attested forms are

falcou, faucou, faucoun and further North becoming *focho* and *fauche*. Thus the small birds of prey are the hawks that *fauche[ent]* ('mow') through the bands of small birds.[58]

Lockwood states that this name came to us in Norman times, the early attestations reflecting contemporary French; c.1250 *faucon*, c.1330 *faucoun* and other variants, which he tells us developed from late Latin *falcō*. He states the word was usually employed as a general term for any bird trained for falconry but often to designate the Peregrine Falcon. His research indicates that before c.300CE we do not meet with the Latin term *falcō*; it has all the appearance of a neologism arising with the then novel art of falconry. As it stands he concludes the name seems to be connected with *falx,* stem *falc-*, 'sickle' being understood as meaning 'sickle-bearer', where sickle could plausibly be a nickname for, say, the curved talon. On the other hand, Lockwood finds it equally possible that *falco* is not the original form of the name but rather the product of folk etymological adjustment to *falx*, in which case its origins remain obscure.

Both Desfayes and Lockwood give plausible derivations of the word when they describe the scythe or sickle-like talons (or hooked beak, as I would suggest) of the birds of prey described by the word *falcon*. However, Desfayes' notion of the mowing or dispersing hunting action of these birds is also a plausible alternative. This kind of behavioural naming motivation and the combination of motives is also frequently met within the corpus of bird names. It is therefore possible that the falcon is named after both its sharp sickle-like beak and talons (perhaps also from its sickle-shaped wings), and its mode of hunting. We may therefore conclude that this term has a behavioural as well as a morphological motivation, not only from the form of the 'sickle', but from its function and action.

F3

Fieldfare

The OED (2011 revision) states this name is

> apparently ultimately < *field* n.[1] + Old English **-fare* or **-fara* , an agent noun < the same base as *fare* v.[1] (compare Old English *gefara* 'fellow-traveller, companion')…

[58] There is a notable parallel with a F. dial. name of the Avocet, *faucheur* 'mower' (Rolland 1879, p.363) which, as the author explains, is motivated by the manner in which this wader feeds, sweeping its recurved bill from side to side as it advances in shallow water.

The sense of a 'field-farer' or one who travels over fields or open country[59] appears to be acknowledged by Turner (1544), Merrett (1667), Ray and Willughby (1678) and Sibbald (1684) who all use forms of the name *feldefare*, a ME term Lockwood has traced to pre-1300 (1993, p.61).

Newton (1896) gives "fallow-farer" as the meaning of the name which he lists as *Fieldfare*. Kirke Swann (1913) notes many local dialectal names and variations, which he takes directly from Swainson.

Swainson (1885) lists local dialect names of one, two, three and four syllables, such as Sc. and E. dial. *Felt, Felfit, Felfer, Felfaw, Velverd, Feltyfare, Fildifire,* and *Feltiflier*. Swainson gives 'field traveller' as the motivation for the name *Fieldfare*, which he links to OE *Feldefare*.

Ray and Willughby (1678) are of the same view, noting that the *Fieldfare*'s habitat is berry-bearing hedges, meadows and pastures in great winter flocks with Redwings and Starlings.

Montagu (writing in 1802)[60] describes these birds as visiting us "with the Redwing in large flocks, in October…til the beginning of April", and "with us its principal food is the fruit of the hawthorn and other berries, worms and insects." He notes also that "with us [it] roosts on the ground."

Montagu (1831, p.180-181) quotes the observer Mr Knapp at length describing in detail not only the habits of this winter migrant, but also its favoured habitats:

> The extensive lowlands of the River Severn, in open weather, are visited by prodigious flocks of these birds, but as soon as snow falls…they leave these marshy lands because their insect food is covered…visit the uplands, to feed on the produce of the hedges…as the frost breaks up, we see a large portion of these passengers returning to their worm and insect food in the meadows, …though a great many remain in the upland pastures…

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[59] E. *field* derives from OE *feld* (cf D. *veldt*) which denoted 'open country' which is not enclosed (Smith, 1956, Part One, pp.166-167). Over time the practice became to enclose areas usually with hedges and these enclosures were known as 'fields'. Fieldfares would have travelled over them in huge numbers even if they had to retire to berry-bearing hedges or bushes a little further away!

[60] This account also appears in subsequent editions: 1831, ed. Rennie, and 1866, ed. Newman.

Turner (1544) links Aristotle's *collurion* as the *Feldefare* or *Feldfare*, from its field-faring behaviour in winter.

Lockwood differs from this, suggesting a derivation from words denoting a 'grey piglet' giving an acoustic motivation from its grunting call, and a chromatic one from its grey colouration. But this handsome, parti-coloured bird[61] does not give an overall impression of being grey in any light[62] or from any angle, and its call cannot reasonably be interpreted as a grunt.[63]

Lockwood's suggestion is highly idiosyncratic, being unchained from the European and dialectal name-evidence as well as from the ornithology. In my view this theory fails on both counts, the linguistic as well as the ornithological, and on chromatic as well as acoustic grounds.

Desfayes also departs from the rational and long-standing consensus, but in a different direction. He dismisses Lockwood's suggestions. He sees the root *f-lf* at the heart of this name and, since this has a 'whistling' sense, he attributes the name *Fieldfare* to the Song Thrush, "the most loquacious thrush". This theory also seems highly idiosyncratic and is supported by no other evidence. The name *Fieldfare*, clearly attributed throughout history to a well-known species, has remained more or less stable and recognisable for at least seven hundred years and perhaps for longer. Nor does the name suit the even more familiar Song Thrush, a secretive and elusive bird which, far from faring over fields, prefers lawn edges and the cover of thick hedgerows and shrubbery. On the acoustic note, its call is a sharp metallic 'tic' and its song is incredibly versatile, almost infinitely varied and yet discernibly repetitive, structured in phrases and couplets. In my view it is our most beautiful and entrancing songster, outdoing by far the Nightingale[64] and all others. To

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[61] The Fieldfare is described as "the most colourful of the thrushes, with contrasting plumage pattern. Grey head, reddish-brown back, grey rump and black tail form a distinctive rear-view picture. Underneath the orange-buff of the breast contrasts with the white belly." (Cady and Hume, 1988, p.230).

[62] Lockwood here makes an error: the only grey-brown thrush is the Mistle Thrush, and all 'grey' names and variations are likely to belong to that species. Swainson (1885, p.5-6) under *Fieldfare* gives 'blue' names such as *blue tail, blue bird, blue back, blue felt*, and, denoting the 'blue-grey' patches, *pigeon felt*.

[63] The diagnostic call is described as "chak-chak-chak" and likened to "the sound from a large pair of garden shears" (Jonsson 1992 (ed. 2003, p.416)). Swainson (1885, pp.5-6) also gives E. dial. *jack-bird* as well as *chak-chak* (Luxembourg) and *Claque* (Normandy). Newton (1896) gives D. *veldjakker*.

[64] I recall standing at the intersection of the territories of three singing male Nightingales one evening in Provence, and having the singular thought that the solitary Song Thrush is still the superior songster.

reduce this ingenious and complex medley to a 'whistle' is wholly inadequate, and Desfayes' theory, apparently constructed to fit a preconceived conclusion, must also be dismissed.[65]

We rest in good company with Turner, Willughby and Ray, Montagu, Swainson, Newton, Kirke Swann, and the OED, as we conclude that this farer over fields has a behavioural name-motivation.

B1 E1

Finch

OED says this is a word inherited from Germanic. It cites the related OE *finc*, Middle Dutch *vinke* (Dutch vink), …German *fink,* French *pinson,* Welsh *pinc,* English dialect *pink,* Breton *pint, tint,* 'chaffinch'; adding that "it seems possible that at least some of these words are of echoic origin; the call-note of the male chaffinch is, in England, often represented as 'spink' or 'pink'."

Lockwood derives this name from OE *finc*, 'Chaffinch', suggestive of its "monotonous" and "typical" call.

Desfayes oddly equates the name both to its "shrill song heard everywhere in summer" (the name has nothing to do with the Chaffinch's familiar song, which can hardly be described as 'shrill') and to its "repeatedly uttered call-note", without specifying either as the motivation. He appends words in various languages which mean 'to talk volubly' and 'to sing (birds)' which widens the meaning unconvincingly.

The name is clearly onomatopoeic, echoic of the Chaffinch's "pink" call.[66]

A1

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[65] It is remotely possible that the *f-lf* 'whistling' root might be more applicable to the Redwing (whose thin, sibilant 'seeep' uttered during its night migrations in October signal the onset of the British winter), or to the Missel Thrush, Rolland's *Grive siffleuse*, 'whistling Thrush' (1879, p.239), whose high-pitched, anxious and monotonous song could be described (to my mind) in this way.

[66] In the same way, "chat" is onomatopoeic from the bird's call-note, and not likely derived from *chat* v. or *chatter* n. or *chatter* v., an error of the same kind made by Desfayes and the OED.

Godwit

OED says this is probably an imitative or expressive formation, adding that we might compare *peewit, tewhit*, similar forms for a different bird.

Lockwood (1993) traces the record of this name from Turner (1544) L. *godwittam*; later examples are 1552 *godwitte* and 1591 *godwit,* its present accepted form.

Merrett 1667 says the name is local to Lincs., and avers it is an onomatopoeic name modified by folk etymology.

Lockwood concurs and cites similar formations for the same birds (*Godwipe, Godwike, Yarwhip, Yarwhelp*). He lists *Barker* and *Shrieker* as local dialect names which corroborate his view that the *-wit* element at least is onomatopoeic.

Desfayes also describes this as a "noisy bird" that has "received many names pertaining to its voice, among them *godwit* of imitative origin", citing its name in Dan. *rodvitte*,[67] Sw. *vittring*, F. (Toulon) *vetoveto*, F. (Charente) *vetteu*, It. *vetola*, all of which show the echoic motivation in the *-wit* or *-whelp* element of its name.

Desfayes further suggests that the first element is synonymous with E. *gad*, 'to move restlessly from one place to another', a behavioural or kinetic term which he states is typical of this species' foraging manner.

Lockwood has nothing to say about the first element of the name. Macleod suggests that the entire name derives from OE *god wiht* (in Kirke Swann 1913, *god wihta*, which he derives directly from Swainson, 1885) meaning 'good creature', as its flesh is good to eat, but this seems a little general and perhaps implausible, as many birds were found to be good eating. Whatever the sense of the first element, the onomatopoeic sense of the second element is quite sure, as affirmed by the OED, Lockwood and Desfayes, and by the corroborating evidence of its local, dialectal and European names.

Bar-tailed Godwits breed in the Arctic region, in Scandinavia and Siberia; Black-tailed Godwits breed in northern Europe and since 1952 in the south-west of England.[68] Godwits

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[67] The Danish name *rodvitte* would seem to be the most likely source of the imported name *godwit*, which would then signify a 'red' bird that calls 'whit', or "wicka-wicka" as suggested in Cady and Hume (1988, p.160.)

[68] Black-tailed Godwits now breed in the Ouse Washes in Cambridgeshire, according to Cady and Hume (1988, p.160.)

may rarely or never have been observed in their chestnut-red breeding plumage[69] in the British Isles, and the name may have been borrowed from a northern European neighbour. It would appear to be a reasonable proposition that the Dan. *rodvitte* may have become E. *godwit* in translation and that the *rod-* 'red' was more or less opaque, the birds never being observed in Britain or Ireland in their chestnut garb; the meaning of this first element was therefore lost. It seems settled that the *-wit* element is onomatopoeic, and so we have a combined chromatic and acoustic name motivation.

A1 C1

Grebe

OED (1900) says this word is a borrowing from French, where the etymon is F. *grèbe,* of unknown origin.

Lockwood says this F. word appears to have become rather well known through the trade in skins, at the time widely used for muffs and collars. He avers its earlier history is obscure. As indicating a *Grebe*, the word is first known from Belon 1555; according to Gesner 1555, it was a Savoyard species of gull. Brisson used the term and Pennant accepted it as the E. name.

Desfayes suggests the name is from a base *gr-b* crested, of morphological origin.

Macleod agrees that the name comes from Breton *krib*, a comb, or crest.

The motivation from this physical attribute would appear to carry some weight, but only one Grebe – the Great Crested Grebe – has an obvious crest. The common Little Grebe, and the rarely met-with Red-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe and Black-necked Grebe do not sport obvious crests, although the last two do have feathery adornments behind the ears. Additionally, the early usage of the term may have referred to a kind of gull, none of which in Europe are crested. Rolland (1879) makes no mention of any such F. gull-name.

We may tentatively accept this morphological interpretation, but admit that this term remains insecurely resolved.

F3

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[69] The description of the Black-tailed Godwit in Cady and Hume is: "neck and breast red in summer". Their illustration of the Bar-tailed Godwit shows that "males in summer are all red below", p.160.

Grouse

OED says this name is of unknown origin, and that "it is uncertain whether the 16th century form *grows* is a singular or the plural of **grow*". It quotes from 1531 "Among fowl for the tables are crocards, winders, runners, grows, and peions." From 1545 it quotes the word "Grewes."

Lockwood says the name was formerly written *grous*. Since the singular and plural of this name are the same one may wonder if the final 's' was not originally a plural ending. He suggests the singular may be **grow*, and **grew,* these to all appearances coming from Old French **grue* deduced from late Latin *grūta* (an imitative term given the bird's powerful voice) described as *gallinae campestres* 'field hens'.

In my view L. *grus* 'crane' may well be linked in this way, a name deriving from this bird's loud harsh calls.

Desfayes concurs with Lockwood saying the term derives from a base *gr-s* and denoting crackling grating sounds.

Macleod suggests that the name derives from OF *griesche* meaning grey or speckled, but this seems very unlikely, grouse not being remarkable for either quality. In any case, *Pie-griesche*, a dialectal F. name for the Great Grey Shrike, was simply translated as 'grey'.

The sparse evidence points to an acoustic motivation in this case, and flushed grouse do make a startling 'go-back!' cry, but we must accept the matter is not securely resolved.

A3

Guillemot

OED gives this as a borrowing from French, where the etymon is F. *guillemot* (1555 in Hatzfeld & Darmesteter), "apparently a derivative of the name Guillaume = William. Compare *guillem* n. and *willock* n."

Lockwood says the name is known since Belon 1555 which stated that the name denoted the immature bird. He adds that it was introduced into English by Ray (1678) and by Pennant (1768), and is echoic in origin, the clear high pitched call of the juvenile bird being reproduced as "will". In his view, different imitations of the juvenile cry also occur, such as in the local names *Kiddaw, Skiddaw, Scoot, Skuttock, Weerit*. He concludes by saying that the names *Marrot* and *Murre* are onomatopoeic names based on the call of the adult.

The echoic motivation for this name seems fairly well supported here, although some of these appended words are far more likely to be behavioural or kinetic as we find in the analysis of similar names (cf *Scoter*).

Desfayes discerns in the base *w-l, gw-l* an indication of "convex" or rounded form, but this seems a weak and unremarkable feature in a bird which is not particularly rotund in appearance.

Macleod sees only a derivation from F. *Guillaume* as a nickname, which seems supported by the OED in its reference from 1555; but why this largely northern seabird would attract and maintain this particular French nickname is unexplained and seems quite unlikely.

The OED references to *willock* and *guillem* link this word to Celtic words denoting *gull* (q.v.) and other seabirds, all deriving from their noisy nature. This name therefore has an acoustic motivation, based on its calls.

A3

Gull

The OED (last revised 1900) says this name is "of uncertain origin" and that it is "perhaps a borrowing from Welsh or from Cornish; the etymons are Welsh *gŵylan*, Cornish *guilan*" which are equivalent to "Breton *goelann* (whence French *goëland*), Old Irish *foilenn* (modern Irish *faoileann*) < Old Celtic **voilenno*-" with which we may compare "Breton *goelaff* 'to weep'."

Lockwood prefers the Cornish provenance, and notes that this Celtic term finally replaced *cob* and *mew* as names for the larger and smaller gulls respectively. He adds Welsh *wylo* as a root of the current term, giving an appropriate meaning of 'wailer', a name which suits all the larger gulls.

Desfayes is in complete accord, giving the root *g-l, gw-l* as the acoustic base of the name, denoting loud or wailing sounds, of which 'wail' is one. He appends related words, such as F. *gueuler*, to call loud (sic), and F. (Aube) *gueulard* a Great Reed Warbler, a particularly loud singer. F. *goeland* 'gull' and the Breton *goula* 'to cry' are directly related.

Other senses of the word *gull* in OED suggest immature birds such as the gosling, naivety or foolishness, the gullet and its swallowing and guzzling fuctions. F. *gueule* means a snout, or animal's mouth, and in my view some of these F. words may be related more

directly to that idea; gullet, the throat, glottal, pertaining to the throat, and gullible - metaphorically swallowing anything - may also be at the root of this voracious and ravenous bird's name, a bird whose distended gullet is capable of swallowing a pigeon whole.

We might add *gale* 'to make a loud noise', as in nightingale, a night sound-maker, and *stanegall, staneyell*, dialectal names for a Kestrel, here named after its loud call and tendency to perch prominently on high.

We may conclude that the motivation of the name is principally acoustic, in particular referring to the wailing cries of the larger gulls such as the Herring Gull, the Lesser and Greater Black-backed Gulls; it may even be onomatopoeic in that many of these have a loud "gulluk-gulluk-gulluk" call which is typical and distinctive.

A1 A3

Harrier

OED states this term's etymon is *harry* v., with *-er* suffix, adding "see also *harrower* n."

Lockwood quotes the first usage of the name in Turner (1544) *Hen harroer*, 'Hen harrower', which he says is a variant of *harrier*, the term later used by Ray 1678 (for the male bird), the female being known as the *Ring-tail*. Later Ray's name was accepted by Pennant (1768).

Desfayes agrees that this is a name for 'hawks that harry domestic fowl',[70] in particular 'hawks' of the genus *Circus*.

Macleod states the bird is so-called from its harrying or destroying other creatures, particularly poultry.

In this the etymologists all accept the OED etymology and derivation from *harry,* v., in the sense of 'to harass',[71] but the original name *harroer* or *harrower* is more specifically derived

[70] Harriers of the genus *Circus* are, in fact, 'hawking' hunters, in that they 'seize' their prey on or near the ground (see *Hawk*); and although not generally thought of as true 'Hawks' - members of the *Accipiter* genus, like Goshawks or Sparrowhawks - taxonomically they belong in the *Accipitridae* as "hawk-like raptors", according to Jonsson (2003), p.27. Mullarney et al (1999) on p.70 describe the family *Accipitridae* as 'birds of prey' having "broad, 'fingered' wings, suitable for soaring and gliding". The term *raptor* is generally used of birds which seize their prey, from L. *raptus*, p.p. of *rapere*, 'to seize' (Cassells Dict. Word. Hist., 1999).

[71] This last is my own choice of word.

from the movement of the *harrow*, or plough, through the soil. This kind of epithet is common for birds of prey which chase their quarry at speed, cf 'mowing' and 'scything' epithets for falcons.

The name therefore has a kinetic motivation, from its usual mode of hunting.

K2

Heron

OED describes this as a borrowing from French whose etymon is French *heron* < a reduplicated form of an Indo-European base imitative of the bird's cry. Lockwood also discerns an acoustic root in pre-Germanic forms. We may add the evidence of many local dialectal names for the Heron in support of a motivation based on its harsh and remarkable call; names like *frank, crane, herald,* and even *Joan-na-ma-crank* (Jackson 1968, pp.48-49) are especially evocative. We might accept on these grounds that the name has an acoustic motivation, from the call.

On the other hand, Desfayes sees in the root *her-* the meaning "pointed", citing one of the characteristics of the Herons and Egrets – a 'pointed crest'. However the drooping feathers on the side of the head which flow down the back of the neck are not a "crest" in the usual sense of the term, which usually denotes raised feathers on the crown of the head (cf Goldcrest, Firecrest, Crested Tit, and the remarkable 'crests' of the Jay, Waxwing, Lapwing, Skylark, Hoopoe et alii). Nor can the Heron's head-dress be said to be particularly 'pointed', even when 'raised', which is rarely observed. Macleod gives no comment.

If we are to accept Desfayes' root significance, it is surely possible that the name refers to the remarkable sharp-pointed dagger-like beak and striking motion of the fishing Heron or Egret, rather than the rather insignificant and usually quite unremarkable 'crest'. Since the Egrets share the name, the sharp bill, and the darting hunting methods of the Herons we might accept this interpretation for all these related species as the motivation underlying the name.

Turning to Cabard and Chauvet (2003) for elucidation, we find the same two conclusions present themselves: that *Heron* derives from High G. *Heigro*, through Frankish *haigro*, via

twelfth century *hairon*, and later *aigron* becomes *heron*. They quote Desfayes' *h-r* 'pointed' root, and equate it to the plumes of the Herons and Egrets.

However on the other hand they cite other European names for the Heron, such as G. *Reiher*, D. *reiger*, Swed. *hager*, and OE *hragra*, all onomatopoeic, from the bird's cry, comparing the vulgar verb *reihern,* 'to emit'. Further finding Egret names It. *garzette*, Sp. *garceta*, from Low L. *gersaula*, they trace a root *karkia* which is onomatopoeic.[72] The authors compare these to crow and raven names, all onomatopoeic (2003, p.57).

Swainson (1885) simply states that the Heron, or Hern, is "so-called from its harsh cry"; His predecessor, Rolland, lists the F. dialectal and other European names which mainly resemble the Shetland variation *Hegrie* or F. dial. *Hegron*, all derived from Germanic, and apparently motivated by the harsh call, akin to *Grua, Agrio, Agrue, Agraio, Gruau*, all F. dial. terms given for 'Crane', a similar bird with a remarkably loud harsh call.

However, Rolland (1879 p.373) also remarks that "different species of herons wear a sort of crest on their head which is called a *masse*, (It. *mazza*) *de heron*. This crest has consequently been called an 'aigrette' (from aigron=heron) or 'garcette' (from garza=heron in different dialects)."[73] Is it possible to find a single idea at the root of these two motivations?

Cabard and Chauvet (2003, p.62) mention as an aside that in 1354 the word *egreste* (an earlier form of *egrette* or *aigrette*) was recorded for 'a white heron, plumed on the head'. They surmise that the element *aigre* may derive from L. *acer*, 'sharp'. Perhaps in this we may have a sense which unites both the ringing, piercing call of the Heron and the sharp, pointed bill or plumes about the head.

On balance, the motivation is onomatopoeic and a secondary, strongly-attested motivation is a form feature.

A1 F3

Hobby

OED describes this word as

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[72] Cabard and Chauvet here cite J. Andre's *Dict. etym. de la langue castellane.*

[73] My translation.

> a borrowing from French, [with] etymons F. *hobé, hobei*… [a. OF *hobé, hobet*, med. L. *hobētus*, diminutive of *hobe* the same bird; other diminutives were OF *hobel, hobert, hoberet,* mod. F. *hobereau*. According to Darmesteter, perh. derived from OF *hober* to move, stir, or bestir oneself: cf. Du. *hobben* under hobble v.]

Lockwood (1993) concurs with this etymology, (last revised 1989), saying the name is "evidently the only term specifically used of this bird", arising in Prompt. Parv. (c.1440), and in Turner (1544) as L. *hobbia*, denoting this falcon. Lockwood surmises from the OED etymology that the name possibly arose in connection with hawking, referring to the well-known agility of the hobby in pursuit of its prey, even although the 'movement' words do not particularly denote agility.

Macleod (1954) concurs with OED and with Lockwood, deriving *Hoberau* (sic) from Old French *hober* to move, with reference to the bird's activity when hunting, again, a very general and tentative connection.

Swainson (1885) connects F. *Hobereau* and F. dial. *Alban*, *Aubier*, *Aubreau*, *Obereau*, It. *Albanella*, Bret. *Hoberell*, with the notion of L. *albus*, from the whiteness of its plumage compared to other darker hawks. These notions he takes from Rolland (1879, p.27) directly. He omits to remark that there may be a link with F. *aube*, 'dawn'. This notion of 'brightness' inherent in daybreak may fit with my later conclusion.

Desfayes (2008, pp.35-36) discerns an acoustic root *h-b* which refers to birds and instruments usually producing far carrying sounds. He also says this name originally denotes the *Buzzard.*

We may dismiss Desfayes' suggestion as there is no evidence that a name-change occurred in this case. The Hobby is not remarkable for its far-carrying voice, nor is there any support for his view throughout the literature. Lockwood's statement that the name has always been attributed to this bird is correct, and Turner's very early description of the bird of this name is accurate in every detail, down to the black malar stripes on its whitish cheeks. Desfayes own sound-evidence for words with the *h-b* base is also weak, including F. *hauberlette* 'flute', F. *haubois* 'oboe' and F. *habote* 'to clap', all sound-words with little or no connection to the Hobby (genus *Subbuteo*) or even the Buzzard (genus *Buteo*).

In my view Desfayes brings us no nearer the true motivation for *Hobby*, and we must look in a different direction.

Lockwood and the OED derive the name from F. *hobereau*, but the 'hobbling', 'bestirring oneself to move' and even 'hopping' derivatives are surely not the name-source for this

beautiful and incredibly agile falcon. The etymon *hob-* is not a natural French sound and the name has almost certainly been imported or borrowed from another language, perhaps becoming more or less opaque in some regions where it may have later become attached to the Hobby or even the Buzzard, as Desfayes suggests, since its variations may have been pressed into service as echoic names for its mewing call.

Jackson (1968) lists *Robin* as a term for the tiercel or male Hobby, perhaps a familiar and affectionate falconer's nickname, derived from *Roberd* or *Robert*. Lockwood derives *Robert* not from notions connected to 'red', from L. *ruber*,[74] but from a West Germanic term *Hrōþibert* meaning "of bright fame". This would have been thought a fitting name for this highly-prized falcon, and may have become attached to both sexes in falconry, as lark-hunting specialists. It may be the early root of the name.[75]

In addition, the Hobby is known in Welsh as *Hebog yr Hedydd*, and *Hebog Bitw*, the word *Hebog* being cognate with E. *hawk* which is derived from OE *hafoc*. We may compare G. *Habicht*, and all of these related words are connected to the sense of 'seizing' which characterises many birds of prey, including this skilful raptor.

It may be that the similar-sounding *Hrōþibert, Robert, Robin, Hobby*,[76] *Hebog, Habich* and *hafoc* are all connected with the idea of this bright[77] and agile falcon, hawking and seizing pipits, larks and dragonflies over meadows with scattered trees. [78]

K2

[74] The Hobby does have russet thigh-feathers and around the vent which are a diagnostic feature when visible.

[75] We see a similar process in *Merlin*, q.v., another small but spirited falcon whose name is also used for a kind of horse!

[76] See *Godwit* for the process whereby Dan. *rodvitte* becomes *godwit.*

[77] Swainson and Rolland append F. dial. *Aubier, Aubreau, Obereau* and *Hobereau* as roots or variants of the name Hobby, in which notions of the 'brightness' of dawn or daybreak (F. *aube*) are inherent.

[78] Hanks et al (2016) in the *Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* explicitly draws a connection between the personal names Robin and Hobby.

Jay

OED states this name is a borrowing from French, its etymon being F. *jay*, *geai* which in turn are derived from OF *jay*, modern French *geai*. In ONF the form is *gai*, *gay* equivalent to F. dial. (Provençal) *gai* (*jai*), Spanish *gayo*, medieval Latin *gaius*, *gaia* (Papias).[79]

OED continues that it is a word of uncertain origin: some refer it to OHG *gâhi* 'quick' hence, 'lively'.

Lockwood (1993) gives OE *higera*, cognate with G. *Häher*.[80] He tells us *Jay* is first attested 1310, and is of Norman origin, from OF **jai, gai,* F. *geai,* Late L. (5th century) *gāius*,[81] which replaced Classical *grāculus*.[82] He adds that proper names were not used as nicknames for birds until the Middle Ages, so any link to *Gaius* is spurious.[83]

Lockwood states clearly that all these varieties are onomatopoeic and imitative of this garrulous species. Of all the birds we might come across in the woods around habitations, the Jay is the most elusive and the one which is most likely to be heard than seen, as it outlandishly screams warning of your presence before invisibly slipping away to a distance. It is also well-known as a quiet talker and gifted imitator of birds, animals, car alarms, dog whistles, creaking gates, rusty wheels turning and all sorts of odd sounds. I once listened to a Jay in an Ealing churchyard, sunning himself in a tree just above my head and unaware of my presence, who reproduced fairly faithfully a lengthy conversation he had overheard between two parishioners, probably on the same spot.

Desfayes (2008) gives it as a name motivated by the bird's varicoloured plumage, from a chromatic root *g-l, g-yod, j-yod*, 'variegated'. The Jay is indeed a very beautiful and

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[79] OED adds that "it cannot be identified with French *gai* adjective 'gay', which has *g*, not *j*, in Central French."

[80] The Modern G. name for the Jay is *Eichelhaher*, associating it with the oak.

[81] Lockwood notes Late L. *gāia* 'magpie', whose Classical L. name was *pica.*

[82] *Graculus* was often used for the Jackdaw, also known as the Chough.

[83] In any case nicknames for pet Jays were usually familiar and male and included *Richard* and *Mercolphus*, (from Markolf, an insolent rustic buffoon in a popular play who questioned the wise King Solomon) especially in Germany where this was recorded as the bird's name. Ray recorded *Malakokranos* (soft-headed) for the crested *Jay* in his Trilingual Dictionary of 1675, but elsewhere he appears to attribute this name to the *Shrike*, which was used in hunting so may also have been handled.

colourful bird, looking black and white in flight but, at rest, displaying a cinnamon-pink overall colour, with bright blue patterned patches on the wings.

As further examples Desfayes appends F. dial. *gayolé*, *gayoulé*, 'variegated'; It. (N.); *gaola, ghea* 'Nutcracker';[84] Sp. (Aragon) *gay, jay*; OF *gai* 'variegated'; E. *gay* 'transvestite';[85] It. (Bormio) *gea* 'Jay'; E. *jay-thrush* 'Mistle Thrush' (again this is not a chromatic or variegated name, it is an acoustic name related to the familiar harsh call of this Thrush); E. dial. *jay-teal* Goldeneye (the *jay-teal* is correctly the E. *Garganey*, also known as E. dial. *Summer Teal* or *Crick Teal,* another acoustic name from its harsh call, out of place on Desfayes' list of chromatic or variegated terms); F. dial. *geai de Rousse*, Spotted Crake (yet another acoustic term relating to the harsh call of the Crake and nothing to do with variegated plumage).

It. *Ghiandaia*, a name which, like L. *Glandarius,* refers to the Jay's predilection for acorns, may also be at the root of some of these terms. Elements *ghia, jaya* or *daya* could have given rise to its names in various dialects across Europe.

There is no requirement to choose between well-evidenced name motivations, and combinations of motivations are very common in the dataset. It would be odd if the Jay's voice or its patterning were *not* at the root of its European names, and as Desfayes and Lockwood have clearly shown, the name *Jay* reflects both its harsh vocalisations and its gaudy plumage.

A1 C1

Kite

OED suggests this is a name "of unknown origin from Old English *cýta* (< **kūtjon*-);" it adds "no related word appears in the cognate languages."

Lockwood cites ME *kyte*, and OE *cȳta*, which glossed *Buteo*, 'buzzard'. He suggests the name is imitative of the long, drawn-out whistling call of both Kite and Buzzard, and

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[84] The Nutcracker is also a harsh-calling bird of the treetops which is associated with nuts and large seeds; strictly speaking it is not 'variegated', but dark brown with white spots. Although this is a remarkable patterning, it is more pied than particoloured. In the light of this, its *gaola* and *ghea* 'jay' names are more likely to refer to another characteristic, likely its raucous voice (as in the other examples Desfayes lists), possibly also in its affinity to large nuts, acorns and seeds (cf It. *Ghiandaia*, L. *Garrulus glandarius, Pica glandaria*).

[85] Here Desfayes demonstrates limitations to his understanding of English.

originally denoted the latter species. He concludes the names arose in "this country", since there is no cognate in other Germanic languages, where the Kite was known as a *Glede*. He quotes Merrett 1667 who uses the name *fork-tailed Kite*, Ray 1678 who uses *Kite or Glead*, and Pennant 1768 who gives *Kite*.[86] Lockwood adds that the toy's name is suggested by the soaring flight of the bird.

Desfayes (2008) suggests without explanation that "*kite* is a collective name for hawks which are known for the astonishing speed [sic] when pouncing on their prey. The word is from a root *(s)kit-* 'to dart'. Like the Buzzard, the Kite is a glider and a scavenger; it does not 'hawk' for prey.

Breeze (2023) concludes 'kite' is a southern or midland English dialect borrowing from a Celtic (British) term from which Welsh *(bar)-cud, (bar)-cutan* 'kite' is derived.[87]

To conclude there is no consensus for a motivation in this case, with only Lockwood's onomatopoeic or acoustic suggestion being apt. It appears odd that no 'gliding' motivation has been put forward in this instance, although in its dialectal names this is foremost, E. dial. *glead, gled,* 'glide' being typical of the Kite and of the Buzzard (Jackson 1968, p.35 and p.51).

A3

Lapwing

The OED says this is a compound of

> < *hleápan* to leap + **winc-* to totter, waver (so OHG *winkan*, MHG *winken*, also to wink; compare OE *wincian* to wink). The bird was named from the manner of its flight. The current form is in part due to popular etymology, which connected the word with *lap* v. and *wing* n.

Lockwood also considers obsolete E. terms *Lapwinch*, and *Lapwink*, the W. Frisian *leep*, N. Frisian *liap*, 'lapwing'; Heligoland Frisian *leap* 'hoopoe'. The current E. word "winch"

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[86] In Evans (1903) Turner's 1544 term for *Milvus ictinus* was E. *Glede*, *Puttok*, or *Kyte*. He gave the G. *Weye*, p.xvi and p.116. This must be the Red Kite; for the Black Kite, *Milvus ater*, not found in the British Isles, is given no English name.

[87] Elements *bod-*, *cyt-*, *kitt-, cud-*, *cutan-*, *put-* (which all seem to feature in the names particularly of birds of prey and especially of the Kite and Buzzard in E. dial. and in Welsh) would seem to have some relation, though it appears this has not sufficiently been explored in the literature.

retains an up and down sense of movement, and Lockwood deduces the bird is named after its crest, which to an extent it can raise and lower at will.

Desfayes suggests the bird is so named from its wobbly flight, from root *lap-* of kinetic origin. The OED points out the kinetic connection to *lap* and *wing* is via later folk etymology, although it agrees the motivation is a kinetic one from the manner of the bird's flight. Lockwood also dismisses connections (to *lap* and *wing*) as "folk-etymological distortions".

Kirke Swann (1913, p.139) quotes OE *hleapewince* from Skeat meaning "one who turns about in running or in flight", an interpretation found previously in Swainson (1885 p.183), "one who turns about in running"; Kirke Swann's fuller quote from Skeat is accepted by Myers (2022).

It appears to have been overlooked that this bird runs about, tottering and staggering in a deceptive ground display designed to deceive predators near its nest into thinking it is injured with a broken wing before flying off, having led them astray. This may be the original sense of this ancient two-part name. Its flight is certainly acrobatic and idiosyncratically 'floppy' or 'lapping', even 'winking' black and white, and if this is folk etymology, as the OED suggests, it is certainly a remarkable and accurate description. There is no good reason to rule out Lockwood's theory either, and we may accept that in the antecedents of both *lap* and *wing* we may admit kinetic, behavioural and morphological motivations: its ordinary mode of flight, its acrobatic display flight, its deceptive staggering around on the ground as if with a broken wing, and the crest which to some extent it can raise and lower.

B1 B2 K2

Lark

The OED recognised this name as "a variant or alteration of …the etymon *laverock* n. Compare the Germanic forms cited at *laverock* n., some of which show similar contraction. The contracted form is attested earliest as a personal name and as a place-name."

Lockwood says this is a Germanic name, cf OE *lawerce*, ME *larke*, G. *lerche*. 'little song, little songster,' demonstrating an acoustic motivation. Desfayes concurs, suggesting a root *l-r-* to sound, while Macleod confesses the ultimate derivation is unknown.

Skeat, from the Icel. *laevirki*, 'lark' discerns *lae-* 'deceit' and *virki* 'work', but neither Skeat himself nor Myers (2022, p 196) who quotes him recognises that in this 'guile-

worker'[88] there may be a reference to the Lark's well-known 'broken-wing' display, where, as is seen with the Plovers and some other birds, the Lark will feign injury in order to draw predators away from its nest or young.

In the light of the broad consensus, albeit based on slender evidence, we may conclude there is an acoustic motivation here perhaps allied to the remarkable rising and falling action of the songster, though this is not made explicit by the etymologists except in the L. *alauda* counterpart name where the sense of 'praise' or 'hymn' is discerned.[89] Combined with this is the behavioural 'lie-working' display in defence of its young.

A4 K2

Magpie

OED finds *pie* to be a term "of multiple origins", partly a borrowing from French, partly a borrowing from Latin, with etymons F. *pie*, and L. *pica*.

> < (i) Anglo-Norman and Old French *pie* (*c*1170; Middle French, French *pie*), and its etymon (ii) classical Latin *pīca*…
>
> …after Old French *pi* woodpecker (Middle French, French *pic*) < classical Latin *pīcus* woodpecker (see *piciform* adj.); compare also Middle French, French *pivert* great green woodpecker (see *green-peak* n.).
>
> …compare French *pie* (adjective, of animals) particoloured (1549 in Middle French), French *pie* (noun) piebald horse (1636); compare also Anglo-Norman *pie* (noun) particoloured cloth (2nd half of 14th cent.). Compare earlier *pied* adj.

Lockwood (1993) gives a borrowing from F. *pie*, c. 1250, ultimately derived from L. *pica,* 'magpie'.

Desfayes (2008) states both *mag* and *pie* mean 'variegated'. *Pie* means 'particoloured', especially black and white.

Macleod (1954) traces L. *pica* given by Brisson (1760), as L. *pica* 'magpie' (Pliny, X, 59), perhaps imitative of one of its calls.

Montagu gives *Picae*, Linnaeus: 'pies', the second of the Linnaean Orders. *Pie*: the oystercatcher. *Pianet*: the magpie, the oystercatcher.

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[88] This is Myers' apt translation.

[89] L. *laudere*, 'to praise'.

Turner (1544) in Evans' (2014) index gives Gk. *Kitta,* L. *pica,* in English a 'py, piot', in G. Elster, Atzel. In his text, Turner quotes Aristotle who writes 'the *Pica* often changes its notes, for almost every day it utters different cries…it makes a nest in trees, of hair and wool, and when acorns grow scarce, it gathers them and keeps them in store'. These notes well describe the Jay, a well-known oak denizen, an inveterate acorn-cacheur, with an extremely varied vocabulary, famed for its imitative abilities. However, the Magpie nest is a remarkable spherical fortress made of sticks, and this species is not so varied in its vocabulary. It is not known for any partiality to acorns and is not noted for storing these in particular, although it is a habitual cacheur of food generally.

Turner goes on to quote Pliny, who says of a certain kind of *Pica,* that it is less famous than the parrots because it does not come from distant lands. However it is even more loquacious, and

> …not only do they learn but they delight to talk… Their form is not commonplace, though not showy to the eye…however, people deny that others are able to learn, save those belonging to the group which lives on acorns…
>
> Of late, and as yet infrequently, towards the city from the Appenines there have begun to be observed some sorts of Picae which being remarkable for the length of their tails have been called 'variae'. They have this special mark, that they grow bald in every year when rape is sown. (Evans 2014 p.143-145)

In every respect the former *Pica* is a Jay, and the last-mentioned are Magpies, a conclusion Turner arrives at himself. Turner mentions an incident (Evans 2014, p.145) when he observed a 'bird like a Pie, called a Jay, in German Mercolphus,' by the banks of the Po, and a passing monk answered him, when he asked its local name, that it was a *Pica granata*, or Seed Pie. Turner began to suspect this bird was of the group of Pies, and he became confirmed in his view that this was Pliny's Pie, when he considered that this bird 'imitated human tones much more correctly than the other Pie, which is the commoner' and that 'it lives on acorns more than any other bird.'

The new kind of Pie which Pliny writes about, which have long tails, go bald at the end of summer, and are infrequently approaching the city from the Appenine hills, are Magpies; he quotes their local name, *variae*, an early word for 'variegated', or 'particoloured', in F. bariolé, here most likely 'pied'.

So the Pie of Aristotle and Pliny was the Jay, and a different kind of Pie, the Magpie with a long tail, was noted to be spreading to the city from the hills. It may be that the Jay was

commoner in Europe, whereas the Magpie was more familiar to Turner, perhaps being commoner in Britain.

In any case the evidence appears to point to *pie* as having a 'pied' motivation, from the black and white patterning of the bird; and *Mag* to be a nickname with feminine and acoustic connotations from the names Magot or Margaret. If *Pica* "magpie, jay" is derived from *Picus* "woodpecker", then the original pied bird may have been the woodpecker, after whose patterning the corvid was named. Ultimately, however, the *Picus* itself may have been named from its sharp hammering bill, or perhaps from its far-carrying "pic!" call.

C1

Merlin

OED links this name with its Dutch equivalent and traces origins in various French and other European forms:

> …Middle Dutch *smeerle, smerle, smērel*…
>
> Post-classical Latin *mereella* (c1180), *merulus* (a1188), *merilo* (1209), *esmerillunus* (1213), *emerlio* (1275), all in British sources, are probably < Anglo-Norman forms; post-classical Latin *smirillus* (13th cent.), *smerilio* (13th cent.), *ismerilus* (14th cent.), *simrilius* (in an undated text in Du Cange), in Italian and French sources, are probably < Romance languages; Spanish *esmerejón* (13th cent. as *esmerilón*), Italian *smeriglione* (14th cent.), Portuguese *esmerilhão* (15th cent.) are perhaps < Old French *esmerillon*; Old Occitan *esmirle* (13th cent.), Catalan *esmirle* (1263), Italian *smerlo* (13th cent.) are perhaps directly < Germanic languages. The complex pattern of borrowings < Germanic languages reflects trade in raptors between northern Europe, where such birds were native, and more southerly regions…
>
> A few isolated examples of forms without initial s- are attested in continental sources, e.g. post-classical Latin *mirle* (a1250 in Albertus Magnus), Catalan *mirle* (1379), *mirla* (1393), early modern Dutch *merlijn*, German †*Merle*, †*Myrle* (both 18th cent. in the same source), and perhaps result from confusion with cognates of merle n. …
>
> An isolated Middle English form *emerlion* (< Anglo-Norman *emerlion*) is attested in some later manuscripts of Chaucer's Parl. Fowls…

Lockwood (1993) traces the complex word history, agreeing with the OED, and concludes that nothing is known about its affinities, except that the suffix *-l* in some forms denotes a diminutive, this being the smallest hawk.[90]

[90] Strictly speaking, the Merlin is a falcon, but can be said to be a 'hawk' or 'hawker' because its mode of hunting is to seize its prey. See discussion under entries *Hawk, Harrier, Hobby.*

Desfayes (2008, p.43) gives *Merlin* as a collective name for small hawks, from their swift pouncing on their prey. He links F. regional terms such as *mirayer* = F. *lancer* 'to throw', and names given to the Sparrowhawk such as F. dial. *lancera*, Basque *mirotz*, F. *mirolet*, *mérillon, émerillon*, and Sp. *Miruello.* He adds that *Merlin* and *émerillon* are names restricted to the Merlin *Falco columbarius* since the days of falconry.

Macleod (1954) traces the name to OF *émerillon* but gives no meaning.

Kirke Swann (1913) adds that Sibbald attributes *Merlin* as the name for the larger female bird, where *Jack* or *Jack-Merlin* was the smaller male; he offers no meaning of the term.

Jobling gives L. *aesalon*, from Gk. *aisalon*, a kind of hawk. This was thought to be the Merlin of Aristotle (c.350BCE) and Pliny (c.77CE), and was the specific epithet in its scientific name *Falco aesalon* (Temminck) according to Montagu (1831, p.309).

Cabard and Chauvet (2003) do not accept Desfayes' 'pouncing' being the name's motivation, as it is not unique to the Merlin and Sparrowhawk. They suggest *Columbarius* most likely signifies the dove-grey colouration of the male and not any predilection for doves as prey; these would be too large, this being a Meadow Pipit specialist.

Under the headword 'Sparrowhawk', Rolland (1967) gives the Merlin article (*Aesalon lithofalco* Kaup.) for *mouchet* names relating to the male Sparrowhawk - this leads to a fly-grey ('gris-de-mouche') description of the (male's) plumage; he admits to not understanding all the OF *émeril*, *esmerillon, smerlin* names he lists (1967, p.30). He cites etymologists who relate the name with L. *Merula*, F. merle 'blackbird', but sees no connection with that species. He does cite the French proverb saying 'vif comme un émouchet, joyeux comme un émerillon' – 'as lively as a musket, as joyous as a merlin' and adds that one says of a person with lively eyes that she has eyes which are '*émérillonnées*'.

The Merlin is well known for its lively spirit despite its small size (Ray, 1674). This 'spirited' nature is perhaps the best clue we have in the literature as to the motivation for the name *Merlin,* although it is possible that the spirit derives from the bird.

F. *emerillon* equates to 'swivel'; this may imply also a kinetic motivation allied to its acrobatic, swerving flight, a notion we detect also in the origins of names for birds displaying aerial mastery, the Swallow and Swift, and possibly also the Hobby.

F2 K2

Missel, Mistle [Thrush]

OED gives

> A word inherited from Germanic. Cognate with West Frisian *mistel* mistletoe, early modern Dutch *mistel* mistletoe, birdlime; Dutch *mistel* mistletoe; Old Saxon *mistil* mistletoe, birdlime (Middle Low German *mistel* mistletoe).
>
> Further etymology uncertain: perhaps < the Germanic base of *mix n.*, from the fact that the plant is propagated in the excrement of birds; or perhaps cognate with the Germanic base of *mash n.*, with reference to the stickiness of the berries; in both cases the second element is the Germanic base of the diminutive suffix *-el.*

***Missel* names**

In 1768 Pennant "accepted" *Missel-Thrush* as the standard form of this name. It had been used in this form by all authoritative ornithologists from Willughby and Ray (1678), Latham (1781), Bewick (1797), Montagu (1802), and by subsequent authors at least until Swainson (1885).

Lockwood (1993) cites *Missel bird* from 1626, which was taken up by Willughby and Ray (1678) as *Missel-bird, Thrush* or *Shrite*. Lockwood also finds *miselthrush* from c.1670. Jackson (1968) records *mizzle blackbird* for the Ring Ouzel.

Lockwood dismisses this form of the name – possibly the original form of the name – as an "abbreviation" or "oversight", and fails to examine its roots. Desfayes (2008) omits the name entirely in all its forms, and Macleod (1954) does likewise.

However, under the headword *ouzel*, Desfayes (2008) gives evidence which must be taken into account and seems apt for this *Missel* name. He gives cognates for E. dial. *ouzel*, Sc. *osill* as G. *amsel, amessl, omischl, umelsche,* and finds it expressed across Europe in Flem. *massel, maschel* 'patterned like knitwork', G. dial. *graumaschel* 'Nutcracker', G. dial. *guldomaschel*, 'Oriole', F. dial. *méchelo* 'Black Redstart', G. *amessl, amsel* 'Blackbird', E. dial. *ouzel*, *zulu*, 'Blackbird', F. dial. *mesle* 'Blackbird'.

He traces the base *m-s* 'black, smeared, spotted' and appends evidence which shows it appearing in words which denote the *Nutcracker*, a dark brown bird spotted with white; the *Blackbird*, the male of which is black and the female of which is dark brown with a marbled chestnut breast; the *Black Redstart*, like a little blackbird, the male of which is black and the female dark brown; the parti-coloured *Golden Oriole,* a species formerly

known locally as the Golden Thrush, whose female is streaked green and brown; and a knitwork patterning, perhaps meaning a criss-cross or tartan pattern, dotted with regular spaces.[91]

It seems fairly evident that this 'spotted' and 'patterned' set of words based on the root *m-s* refer to the diagnostic streaked or striated underparts of the thrushes and particularly to the boldly spotted breast of the largest of its kind, the Missel Thrush.

There is excellent evidence for Desfayes' remarks on the subject of the base *m-s* and its connection to birds known as *amsel* or *ouzel* with shared characteristics and we can clearly see how it might also apply to this grey-brown Thrush with a black-spotted cream-coloured breast.[92]

Other forms of the name have taken on other associations, and when Aldrovandi (1603) and later Willughby and Ray connected this Thrush to the Gk. *kixla* 'thrush' known as Gk. *ixoboros* or L. *viscivorus* 'mistletoe-eater' of Aristotle - thereby influencing Linnaeus to make this its scientific name - the meaning of the word and its roots were almost lost.

Mistel **names**

Mistel Drossel 'Mistel Thrush'is first used by Bechstein in 1802 and Meyer in 1810.

G. *mistel* is linked to excrement or droppings, and it has been observed that the Mistle Thrush (among other species) drops sticky strings of consumed mistletoe berries at certain places near where it feeds. It was until recently thought that the seed of this fruit had to pass through the body of this bird in order to germinate, but this is not the case.[93] Some of these will land on the right kind of branch and germinate, but most will be lost. This species is one of a number in inefficient vectors of this fruit, a group of baccivorous birds such as Waxwings and Fieldfares; it forms only a small part of its diet for a few months of

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[91] This last reminds me of the E. dial. *tartan back* names for the Brambling, which connected these brightly-patterned parti-coloured finches to their Sc. Gaelic and Irish names *breacan*, 'variegated, patterned', names shared with the more familiar Chaffinch.

[92] Other comparable spotted- or pattern-names are E. dial. *marble thrush*, *mizzly Dick,* 'Missel Thrush'; *meslim bird* 'Fieldfare' (Jackson 1968, pp.58 and 40 respectively).

[93] James Rennie was one of the first ornithologists to point this out (Montagu 1831, p.325): under the headword *Missel Thrush* he notes "Its food, like the other species, is insects and berries, particularly that of the misseltoe, which it has been erroneously supposed necessary to pass through the body of this bird to make it vegetate. That the seed of this berry will propagate after passing the organs of digestion is no more wonderful than that corn should grow when voided whole by a horse."

the year in very few parts of the country. Research shows that most British and Irish Mistle Thrushes will never come across mistletoe at any time, and that Mistle Thrushes in the land of Linnaeus[94] – who named it *viscivorus* in 1758 - are even less likely to do so (Briggs 2021). This is because of this plant's limited distribution in parts of Europe.

Is there any connection with mistletoe at all? How did this idea evolve?

The great French ornithologist Brisson named the bird L. *Turdus major*, the 'Great Thrush'. Buffon gave its vernacular name *la Grande Draine*, the "Great Thrush" with Temminck choosing *Merle Draine*, the 'Thrush Blackbird." In these appellations there is no hint of the bird being associated with the *kixla* 'thrush' of Aristotle known as the *ixoboros* or *viscivorus*, 'the mistletoe-eater'.

Aldrovandi writing from Bologna in 1603 did, however, link the Great Thrush to mistletoe, calling it "*Turdus qui viscum vorat, major ceteris, voce rauca, in nemoribus viscum quaerit…*"[95] Ray in his Synopsis (1713) refers to the *Turdus viscivorus major*, implying other smaller thrushes may also be mistletoe eaters. The Song Thrush is indeed designated in Willughby and Ray (1678) *Turdus viscivorus minor*, though not from its mistletoe-eating behaviour, but from its likeness to its larger relative.[96] Linnaeus refers to this name in his *Syst. Nat.* 10th ed. (1758) as well as in Faun. Suec. (1746, ed. 1761, p.79).

Ray (1678) writes of

> that Latine proverb 'Turdus malum sibi ipse cacat', spoken of those that are the cause of their own destruction, took its original from that ancient conceit that the parasitical plant, called Misselto, of the Berries whereof in old time Birdlime was wont to be made, sprang from the seed voided by the Thrush.

He quotes Pliny who says that "Misselto…sow it how you will, springs not unless cast forth in the Excrement of Birds, especially the Ring-Dove,[97] and Thrush". So the Missel

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[94] Sweden.

[95] "The Thrush which eats mistletoe, bigger than the others, with a raucous voice, seeks mistletoe in the woods…". My translation.

[96] Ray makes this clear on p.188.

[97] The Ring Dove is now commonly known as the Woodpigeon.

Thrush is not the only *viscivorus* in ornithological nomenclature, and not the only disseminator of the voided berries noticed in the literature.

In fact, as remarked upon by Briggs (2021), Mistle Thrush may be a misnomer altogether, at least in the British Isles. He observes that:

- the species of mistletoe found in the British Isles (and Europe) is *Viscum album,* our only native plant with white berries;
- it is a long-lived perennial evergreen, parasitic only on deciduous hosts (in the British Isles);
- it rarely grows on oak trees, but more often on apple, lime, hawthorn and poplar, and less in woodland than in gardens, orchards and parks; its berries ripen in midwinter, around February in England;
- mistletoe derives from two OE words, *mistel* 'dung' and *tan* 'twig', pointing to its dependence on being spread and germinated by birds, either specialists or generalists; but mainly 'inefficient' dispersers, as they are the ones who eat the berries whole and excrete them in long sticky strings, which hang from branches and twigs.
- the Missel Thrush, as originally named, is not a mistletoe specialist, but a generalist, eating many fruits and berries besides its insect and mollusc food; and is not efficient like the wintering Blackcaps who wipe the sticky individual seeds from their bill onto a branch, but inefficient, since it randomly excretes whole sticky strings of seeds, only a few of which will stick to a branch and therefore germinate;
- mistletoe is only found in abundance in the SW Midlands of England, and in SE Wales, while the Missel Thrush is distributed all over the British Isles; Briggs concludes that almost all British and Irish Missel Thrushes will never encounter mistletoe the year round, and for this reason he surmises their name of *Mistle Thrush* may be misleading;
- since *Viscum album* is widespread in continental Europe, the Linnaean name *viscivorus* may be less inappropriate, as continental Mistle Thrushes will encounter mistletoe far more regularly than their British counterparts; however in Sweden, where Linnaeus worked, Missel Thrushes would have been even less likely to encounter any mistletoe.

Briggs (2021) adds that the dependence of *Viscum album* on generalist and inefficient avian vectors is a limiting factor in its spread, a fact recognised by Darwin; that another complicating factor is that some birds may not recognise white berries as food, and that those who do consume the berries may be put off trying them again by their natural viscosity, which makes the seeds sticky and difficult to manipulate in the bill; viscin from the berries is so glutinous it was once used in birdlime. Briggs adds that unsurprisingly there are no dedicated vectors (birds which transfer the seeds from one location to another) for *Viscum album* in the British Isles.

The link between the Missel Thrush and the mistletoe may be spurious: it is not a primary or dedicated vector for the plant, not a specialist for mistletoe, and an inefficient disperser and germinator of the seeds, in the same generalist bracket as the Fieldfare and Waxwing, unlike the overwintering Blackcap, an efficient disperser of the seeds.

***Mistletoe* names**

Newton (1896) insisted upon the correctness of this version of the name. Kirke Swann (1913, p.157-158) says Merrett used this form, but Mullens (1908) accurately quotes Merrett's Turdus Viscovorus [sic] as *Misletoe Thrush* (Merrett 1667, p.177).

In conclusion the analysis of Desfayes of the root [*m-s*] of the word *ouzel* and related words like *amsel* and *missel* demonstrates that this bird is named after its diagnostically thrush-like boldly spotted breast and underparts. As a consequence we must conclude that the name's connection to mistletoe (and the ornithonym's spurious evolved spelling, *Mistle*) has arisen by folk etymology. Although there is a tenuous connection to the natural history of baccivorous birds like the Missel Thrush, the Ring Dove or Woodpigeon, the wintering Blackcap, Waxwings, and Fieldfares, to name but a few, the berries of that plant play a small and insignificant part, if any, in the lives of British Missel Thrushes and accordingly have in all probability played no part in the motivation of the English name, albeit the related lore and mythology may have ensured its longevity and widespread popularity.

C2

Nightjar

The OED gives this as a compound of E. *night* n. + *jar* n.:

> The second element in the name reflects the bird's distinctive call; compare other (chiefly regional) names for the bird, as churn-owl *n.*, churr owl *n.*, eve-churr *n.*

> eve-jar *n.*, jar-owl *n.*, nightchurr *n.* Many similar imitative formations for the name of this bird are found in other languages.

Lockwood agrees this is named (from 1630) after its unique 'jarring' song, comparing its local names *churn owl, wheel bird.*

Desfayes states that the peculiar churring voice of the nightjar earned it its name (2008, p.44).

Macleod agrees that *jar* refers to the bird's rattle-like call.

Desfayes and Macleod describe the bird's nocturnal wheel-spinning, continuous churring sound best. It is not particularly jarring, but rather an eerie, whirring, long drawn-out mechanical note. *Churn* names, perhaps even milk-related legends (cf its local *goatsucker and* L. *caprimulgus* names) may be corruptions of onomatopoeic *churr* and *churrin(g)* descriptions in different locales.

A3 A4 A5

Oriole

OED says this is a borrowing from Latin, whose etymon is L. *Oriolus*.

> < scientific Latin *Oriolus*, genus name (Linnaeus, *Systema Naturæ* (ed. 12, 1766) vol. I. 160), after earlier use as the specific name of the golden oriole, *Coracias oriolus* (Linnaeus, *Systema Naturæ* (ed. 10, 1758) vol. I. 107) < post-classical Latin *oriolus* 'golden oriole' (*a*1446 in a British source; *c*1150, *a*1250 in British sources as *aureolus*) < classical Latin *aureolus* 'golden' (see *aureola* n.).
>
> Compare Anglo-Norman *oriol*, Old French *oriol*, *orïoel* (12th cent.; compare Middle French, French *loriot*), Old Occitan *auriol* (*a*1173; *c*1150 as *aureol*), *auriola* (*a*1150; Occitan *auriòl*), Spanish *oriol* (1251), Catalan *Oriol* (1460), Italian *oriolo* (17th cent.).
>
> It is unclear whether the plural form *oryoli* in the passage below is intended as post-classical Latin or another language. It does not appear to correspond to any passage in Pliny. Compare:
>
> *c*1260 Oryoli aves sunt a sono vocis vulgariter sic vocati ut dicit Plinius. *Albertus Magnus, De Animalibus (1921) xxiii. xxiv. 1505*

Lockwood relates that the name was settled upon by Pennant 1776 from Linnaeus' (1758) L. *oriolus*, a term used by Albertus in c.1250 derived, as Albertus averred, from its call which was given in OF as '*oriol*' (see OED quotation above). The name is therefore onomatopoeic.

Lockwood adds current names such as G. *Pirol*, and others also listed by the OED. He acknowledges that the only species found in Europe, the Golden Oriole, is indeed brilliant yellow, and this led to its 'golden' epithet being described as L. *aureolus*, in some forms of the name.

Desfayes states that the name is a calque of the L. *oriolus*, from a Romance name; and is derived from a root *or-*, 'yellow'.

Macleod suggests *Oriole* is from ML. *oriolus*, 'golden', from classical L. *aureolus*, from *aurus*, 'gold'.

Rolland gives many local French names which he derives from *aureolus*, its plumage being of a 'beau jaune d'or', 'a beautiful golden-yellow'. He later appends songs and sayings which incorporate and interpret the distinctive call of the bird, especially around its love for ripe cherries and figs.

As the OED and Lockwood suggest, citing Albertus, the name originally has an acoustic, echoic motivation. The native English name is *woodwall* (cf *woodwale*, *witwol* (Turner, 1544)), all onomatopoeic – the fluty and far-carrying "weelaweoo" or "oriolo" call of the invisible males in the treetops being unique and diagnostic. Many of its dialectal names across Europe attempt to reproduce this call, at one time a familiar and joyful reflection of woodland life.

A later secondary chromatic reflection on 'golden' from 'aureolus' and 'aureus' seems to have become part of the mix through folk etymology. However, females are mostly green, and other orioles in the New World are not yellow, but orange. As with *Roller* and *Petrel*, these secondary accretions to the folk etymology - fixed in print by scholars - may have maintained the name and given it a resilience and longevity, even if they were no part of its echoic or onomatopoeic origins.

A1

Ouzel

OED says this is "a word inherited from Germanic", cognate with MLG *amsel*, *amstel*, OHG *amsla* (MHG *amsel*, G. *Amsel*); further etymology unknown.

Interestingly the OED finds only that *ouzel* is cognate with MLG *amsel, amstel*, whose etymology is unknown.[98] It does not connect either term with any particular species. There is no evidence for any connection to L. *merula* or with F. *merle*, 'blackbird', the species historically most closely associated with the name in English.

As late as 1866, Montagu's editor Newman lists *Black Ouzel, Mountain Ouzel, Penrith Ouzel, Ring Ouzel, Rock Ouzel, Rosecoloured Ouzel, Tor Ouzel* and *Water Ouzel* as species bearing this name. He reduced this to four separate species by gathering *Mountain, Rock* and *Tor Ouzel* under the headword *Ring Ouzel*, leaving the *Blackbird, Rose-coloured Starling* or *Pastor,* and *Dipper* as the other three bearing the name.

Lockwood traces *ouzel, ousel*, from OE *osle*, G. *Amsel,* 'a blackbird'.

Desfayes avers this is a name for the Blackbird, variously *ousell, osill, zulu* in different parts of Britain. G. forms include *amsel, amessl*, but these forms do not occur in Low German, in Dutch or the Scandinavian languages. It derives from a root *m-s* meaning 'black, smeared, spotted.'

Desfayes adds as evidence G. *guldomaschel*, 'golden oriole' , a yellow and black 'two-coloured' bird, G. *graumaschel*, 'Nutcracker', a dark brown bird, spotted with white, Flem. *massel, maschel* 'patterned like knitwork'. This calls to mind 'brinded', 'brindled' or by extension a 'variegated, particoloured' sense akin to 'sheld', or 'pied'.

We may accept the OED's evidence that *ouzel* is cognate with MLG *amsel*, *amstel*, and also Desfayes' view that it derives from a root which denotes black, spotted or smeared patterning or colouring. Females and juvenile blackbirds are chestnut brown and speckled or spotted around the breast. Dippers, otherwise dark brown, are 'spotted' with a white throat and bib. Ring Ouzels, also blackish and dark brown, are 'marked' with a white crescent gorget. The Rose-coloured Starling or Pastor has a two-coloured patterning, akin to that of the Hooded Crow, which may be called 'pied' in one sense, even in the absence of white.

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[98] It appears to me to have been entirely overlooked that F. *oiseau,* m, 'a bird', or 'fowl', may have had a feminine equivalent, **oiselle*, f. 'a bird', perhaps a smaller, younger or more feminine version (from the F. diminutive and feminine suffix); both deriving from F. *oie*, a goose. It would seem fairly likely – or at least worth considering - that *ouzel* or *ousel* is the surviving form of *oiselle*, meaning a small or female bird, where *oiseau* designated larger or male fowl.

It is a remarkable possibility, based on this etymology of the OED and the ingenuity of Desfayes, that this root *m-s*, 'spotted or smeared', allied with MLG *amsel* and *amstel*, may actually point us in the direction of *misel, missel, mistel,* and *mistle* elements we are considering closely under *Missel* or *Mistle [Thrush]* (q.v.).

We may settle upon a chromatic aspect (patterning) motivation for this name.

C2

Owl

OED gives this as "a word inherited from Germanic",

> cognate with Middle Dutch *ule*, *hule* (Dutch *uil*), Old Saxon *ūuuila* (Middle Low German *ule*), < a Germanic base of imitative origin, derived from the typical hooting call of many species
> (compare *howl* n.).

Lockwood (1993) gives OE *ule*, as evidence of the echoic motivation of this name.

Desfayes omits the term.

Macleod (1954) gives L. *ulula*, 'screech owl' (Pliny, X, 16), imitative of the bird's call.

Notwithstanding *ulula* is a 'hooting' or 'howling' term, not redolent of the cry of the 'screech owl' or Barn Owl, we may conclude that this name is acoustic or onomatopoeic and based on the eerie call of the Tawny Owl, as an example.

A1

Partridge

OED identifies this name as "a borrowing from French" whose etymon is F. *perdriz*.

> < Anglo-Norman and Old French *perdriz*, *pertriz* (*c*1170);…< classical Latin *perdīc-*, *perdīx* 'partridge' < ancient Greek *πέρδικ-*, *πέρδιξ* 'partridge' (usually the rock partridge or the chukar partridge), probably < *πέρδεσθαι* to break wind (see *fart* v.; perhaps after the noise made by the bird as it flies away: this etymology goes back to antiquity) + *-ικ-*, suffix forming nouns.

Lockwood (1993) traces the word history, but gives no meaning, whereas Desfayes (2008) gives *perd-* a 'chromatic' root, meaning striped or spotted, especially with reddish colouring.

There is no agreement around the acoustic interpretation of the OED that the name is suggestive of a small 'detonation' as it explodes into flight (cf *Petrel*); Lockwood makes no suggestion and Desfayes' word-evidence is unconvincing and apparently irrelevant.

Arnott (2007, p.175) states *perdix* is not recorded as a bird name in ancient Greek, but appears in proverbs: as a skulking bird, and as a bird which emerges reluctantly. One story describes an occasion when 'a party of Samians landed in south Italy, who were so terrified by a covey of partridges suddenly flying up and loudly squealing that they immediately ran back to their ships and sailed away!'

This evidence, allied to that of the OED, suggests that any explosive sense inherent in the name may be a combination of the sudden burst into flight and the startling nature of the noise made by these skulking and reluctant birds.

A1 B1

Petrel

OED says the origin of this name is "uncertain and disputed."

> Dampier's suggested derivation < the name of St *Peter* (1703)…is probably a folk etymology, and similar folk-etymological alteration probably lies behind the analogous names of this and related birds in other European languages, at least some of which were probably intended as calques on the English word: compare e.g. German *Petersvogel* (19th cent. or earlier), *Petersläufer* (end of the 18th cent. or earlier), Norwegian *Søren-Peder*, *St. Peders-fugl* (both 1764 and earlier), French †*pierrot* (1751), Spanish (rare) *ave de San Pedro*, Italian regional (rare) (Elba) *uccello di San Pietro*, (Venice) *osel de San Pietro*.
>
> It has also been suggested that the name is, in spite of the chronology, a Romance loan in English, and is ultimately related to the Indo-European base of *pet* n. (the bird having been so named perhaps on account of the noises it makes during copulation, or perhaps on account of a strong-smelling substance which it emits in order to defend itself), but the case for a Romance origin is not strong…
>
> It is unclear whether the following example represents an earlier attestation of the word; if so, its stem vowel is unexplained:
>
> 1582 A poydrel which is a lytle black byrd cam to the ship, which M. Fayrwether sayd was a token of wynd. R. Madox, *Diary* 19 June in E. S. Donno, *Elizabethan in 1582* (1976) 146
>
> Compare French *pétrel* (1723; 1705 as †*petrel* in a translation of Dampier; 1782 or earlier as †*pétérel*; < English and Dutch *petrel* (19th cent. or earlier), Spanish *petrel* (1839 or earlier), Italian *petrello* (*a*1837 or earlier), all ultimately < English, partly via French.

Lockwood (1993) gives the 1602 spelling of *pitteral, pittrel*, from unattested **pitterel*, from the jingle 'pitter-patter' from its habit of dangling its feet in the waves as it flies over the surface of the sea, but the expression is found by the OED to be much later in origin than the word under consideration.

Macleod (1954) gives F. *petrel*, diminutive of Pêtre, Peter, the apostle who walked on the water at the Sea of Galilee, as the bird skims the water with its feet dangling down. In this he is merely reciting the folk etymology identified in the OED without examining the term.

Desfayes (2008) in my view rightly dismisses both theories, saying the name, derived from the root *p-t* to chatter, make a noise, is given to many other noisy birds.

The OED makes an allusion to the name perhaps denoting a foul smell without explaining this would be from F. *péter* 'to fart', (which Desfayes translates as 'to detonate'), also omitting to conclude that this might instead be an acoustic clue, imitative of the birds' calls in their rocky crevices at night.

These suggestions are all fairly inconclusive, and the term remains somewhat opaque; although its *-erel* suffix, a French diminutive, suggests that the first element of the name may be acoustic, a pattern discovered by Lockwood (cf *pickerel, dotterel, titterel, whimbrel*) but not applied by him in this instance, as he is distracted by his jingle. Few observers would have discovered these tiny seabirds in their roosting or nesting grounds, where they make noises like little 'detonations', to use Desfayes' expression, allied with a strong odour.

Looking a little further into the root element F. *pét-* at its implied fore-runner F. *pest-* we find that not only is a 'pestilence' or 'plague' literally indicated, but also metaphorically a 'curse', as evidenced in F. *pester* 'to curse' (Collins le Robert 2020). This may well be at the heart of the otherwise puzzling reputation the bird has had for many generations among seamen as an ill-omen, a harbinger of misfortune, perhaps connected with changes in the wind and weather.

However, the St Peter folk-etymology relating to their apparently walking on water is so powerful, apt, and remarkable that over time in many cultures it is now very widely assumed to be the motivation for the name. The behaviour is so well-suited to be a naming characteristic, that it would be remiss not to record the possibility that there is a sense of this either in the coining of the name, or, more likely, in its maintenance and resilience over centuries.

We may look to Oriole ('golden') and Roller ('tumbler') for similar developmental accretions to names which are recorded as originally acoustic.

We may tentatively conclude that this is a name rooted in an acoustic motivation with overtones of ill-luck and a musky smell.

A1 A3 B1 F2

Plover

The OED recognises this name as a borrowing from French with the etymon F. *plover*, *plovier*.

> < Anglo-Norman *plover* (13th cent.), *plovier*, *pluvier* and Old French *plovier* (12th cent.)… < post-classical Latin *plovarius* (1250 in a British source)… further etymology uncertain and disputed:
>
> either < classical Latin *pluvia* rain (see *pluvial* adj.) + *-ārius* -ary *suffix1*, or an imitative formation (on account of the bird's call), apparently subsequently associated by folk etymology with *pluvia* rain…
>
> Compare also German *Regenpfeifer*, lit. 'rain-piper' (18th cent.)…
>
> A number of discordant explanations have been offered in support of an etymology from *pluvia* rain… This difficulty is resolved if the word is taken to have been originally imitative in origin.

Lockwood (1993) says this name is based in the plover's clear, far-reaching call, heard as 'plo', and by the Norse as 'lo', appearing as an element in local names, like *sandlo*. There is no connection with L. *plovere*, Classical L. *pluere*, to rain.

Macleod (1954) states it is from F. *pluvier*, deriving from L. *pluvia*, 'rain'. Cf L. *pluvialis,* 'rain-' coined by Brisson (1760). Belon (1555) thought this was because these birds were more easily caught in the rain, Charleton because they inhabited rainy habitats, and Littré (1863) because they arrived in the rainy season. Newton's (1896) source pointed to their raindrop-like markings on their plumage. An OED source suggested they foretell rainy weather by their restlessness, while their G. name *Regenpfeifer*, 'rain-piper', implies the bird sings in the rain. Macleod generalises perhaps a little ruefully that 'perhaps the real origin of the name is that plovers like rain in a general sort of way'.

I concur with the OED, as does Lockwood, that this is an acoustic name, aligned with if not derived from G. *pfeifer,* a 'piper' or 'whistler', after the diagnostic call of the Golden Plover.

A1

Robin

OED gives this as "a proper name" deriving from the male forename Robert, which is attested in Britain from c. 13th century,

> appearing in Middle English texts in a variety of forms (as e.g. *Robin*, *Roben*, *Robyn*, *Robyne*). It is attested earlier in France (compare Old French, Middle French, French *Robin*), and several of the allusive and proverbial uses of the personal name… have parallels in French: compare Old French, Middle French, French *robin* groom, stable boy (14th cent.), insignificant person (early 15th cent.), fool (17th cent.).
>
> Allusion to Robin Hood *n.* (and associated popular dances, drama, songs, etc.) and to Robin Goodfellow *n.* is likely in a number of cases…
>
> compare *robin redbreast* n. … and earlier *robinet* n. …

Lockwood (1993) gives this as a diminutive of Robert, both of which originate with the Normans; it is recorded as a bird name in English from 1549, but not in French, being an alliterative epithet qualifying earlier names *redbreast* and *ruddock*. Like *Martin*, it later became independently used as a noun, a name in its own right.

Desfayes (2008) suggests it is a word denoting 'red', from the root *ruv-, rob-,* not a name or nickname.

Macleod (1954) gives Robin redbreast a nickname, as in *Magpie, Martin, Jenny Wren.*

Robin is also a term used for the male Hobby, perhaps in the sense of a familiar 'lad',[99] possibly also from the 'red' sense of the word given the diagnostic russet thighs and underparts of this small falcon.

I conclude this name derives from a familiar nickname ultimately meaning 'of bright fame' (see p.69) which in its current form has overtones of the reddish orange colour of the bird's face and breast feathers. Linnaean terms *rubecula* and *rubetra* (from L. *ruber*, 'red') (Macleod 1954, p.28) referring to the Robin and the Whinchat, also reflect this chromatic sense, which may ultimately derive from L. *rubus*, a bramble or blackberry.

C2

Roller

OED gives this as a borrowing from German, and the etymon as G. *Roller* which it dates to the mid-16th century. It also notes that

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[99] This familiar sense is found also in Celtic languages in the form *bod*, in Welsh names for Harriers, Kites, Buzzards and Merlin (Parry 1963) and may be linked with *put-* which is also found in E. dial. bird of prey names like *puttock*, 'Buzzard', 'Kite'. In Gaelic is has a sense of 'fellow' carrying within it a sense of juvenile masculinity, familiarity, roguishness and virility. It has been translated from Irish as 'lout' in the case of the slender songster the Blackcap, surely a heavy-handed overstatement!

> the original source appears to be Gesner *Historiæ animalium* iii. *Aves* (1604) 702, who says the bird was so called at Strasbourg (in Latin *Argentoratum*) *per onomatopœia* 'by onomatopoeia'. Later writers have variously explained the name as referring to a habit of rolling about in the air, or of rolling over sticks and stones in seeking food.

Lockwood (1993) identifies this name as a local German onomatopoeic name given by Gesner. He describes this species as a vagrant to the British Isles, and says the bird has never acquired a genuine English name, first appearing in English in 1663 as 'a curious bird called a *Rollar Argentoratensis*'[100] then in Ray 1678 *'Roller'* whence it became part of our ornithological nomenclature. He states the name comes from Gesner 1555, who reports that this species was called *Roller* at Strasbourg (Argentoratum) and that the name is onomatopoeic in origin. He adds that it is cognate with G. dialect *rollen*, a verb imitative of sounds made in rapid succession and particularly applicable to the cries of this noisy bird.

Lockwood is accurate in every aspect of the word-history and of the bird's natural history.

Desfayes (2008) differs in his interpretation, saying the name *Roller* was attributed to the species *Coracias* in error. He is aware the name is from Strasbourg "as stated by Gessner", but makes no mention of Gesner's information that it is onomatopoeic. Desfayes adds that the *Roller* (*Coracias)* is 'accidental' in that area, inhabiting Europe mainly to the south and east. *Roller*, says Desfayes (2008, p.55), is a name for woodpeckers, from G. *rollen* 'to drum', "and it is precisely for their drumming that woodpeckers have been so named."

Desfayes' insistence of the literal 'drumming' sense of *rollen* insufficiently takes into account the harsh grating or rolling cries of *Coracias*, which Lockwood well describes. It is not necessary to transfer the name to woodpeckers, as Desfayes suggests, as they are not noted for aerial displays high in the air which Gesner describes as a characteristic of his *Roller*. Further, Gesner describes the 'rolling' as a vocalisation, which the drumming (on dead wood) of woodpeckers is not.

Macleod (1954) concurs that according to Gesner this was the name used around Strasbourg in imitation of the bird's call, but thinks it is more likely to be derived from G.

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[100] OED gives this quotation from P. Skippon (a.1691): "We kill'd a curious bird, called a *Rollar Argentoratensis*, of the bigness of a dove, and of a blue colour". *Account Journey Low-Countries* in *Churchill's Collection of Voyages* (1732). Skippon's travels were 1663-66 and perhaps this is why Lockwood dates it as he does.

rollen, 'to roll', with reference to the male's habit of 'rolling' or turning over in its nuptial flight. He gives no grounds for this preference.

Kirke Swann (1913) says the name is from F. *Rollier*. 'The name *[Roller],* which is found in Willughby, appears to originate with Gesner (1555) who says it was so called near Strasburg from its habit of rolling or turning over in its flight.' Gesner does not, in fact, mention this characteristic as far as I am aware.

Kirke Swann appears to have taken this description of the bird's flight from Newton (1896) who says the Roller is "a very beautiful bird, so called from its way of occasionally rolling or turning over in flight." Newton, in a footnote, adds that his source for the name and this motivation are from Gesner in 1555. He makes no mention of the onomatopoeic origin of the name, which is very curious, and may be the origin of an error which influenced subsequent authors to the present day.

Rolland (1879) appends local dialectal F. names describing a *blue pie, blue crow,* and *blue jay,* which mark its colour but also probably its harsh vocalisations. He lists this bird as *Coracias garrula*, Linn.; F. *le Rollier* – and having no etymology for the name, says "je ne connais pas l'origine de ce mot".[101] He gives the German and English name *Roller*, "anglais et allemand", from which the French term derives. Rolland appends local names describing it as a *green jay,* a *blue jay,* a *blue pie, 'gralla bleue', blue crow,* all of which appear to reference its corvid (or more specifically 'garruline') qualities, probably its raucous voice, alongside the brilliant chromatic impression it makes. He also confesses he is unaware of the meaning of two further names: *Gassa marina*,[102] from Nice, and *Pica marina*, from Naples; both of which must surely refer to the 'ultramarine' overall colouration of the bird as noticed by Willughby and Ray (1678, p.131): "…of a lovely blue or ultramarine colour (as the Painters call it)…"

Myers (2022, p.284) states that 'most authorities' believe these birds get their name from the conspicuous and acrobatic display flight, in which "they dive rapidly in a roller-coaster manner with wings and body rocking back and forth", but this bold assertion is far from demonstrated. Neither the OED, Lockwood nor Desfayes takes this view. She adds that

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[101] "I do not know the origin of this word". My translation.

[102] 'Sea-blue jay', 'sea-blue pie'.

Gesner was first to use the name in 1555 and gives the quotation where he avers the name is onomatopoeic:

> Avis haec cuius figuram ponimus, circa Argentoratum Roller vocatur per onomatopoeiam, ut audio, in aere perquam alte volat.[103]

Originally an onomatopoeic German dialect name from its harsh grating or 'rolling'[104] calls resembling those of the crow, or magpie or jay, it was applied in French (as *Rollier*) without explanation, alongside local blue-jay names, the bird being almost unknown in France. The bird name was assumed by a small number of English authors to refer to a 'rolling' display flight, although the bird occurs very rarely in the British Isles and this display could hardly have been widely witnessed, if at all.

Suolahti (1909) gives other German names for this remarkable bird, all of which are vividly onomatopoeic and describe its harsh, grating calls and cries, reminiscent of the crows, jay and magpie: *Racke, Racker, Blaukrähe, Rache, Blaue Raacke,* and *Krick-elster*, are typical examples, with which we may compare G. *häher* 'jay', and G. *krähe* 'crow'.

Latham 1781 gives its Linnaean name as *Coracias garrula*, and its English name as *Garrulous Roller*, evidently an acoustically-motivated name, linked with the idea of *Garrulus*, a jay. His opening line describes it as the 'size of a jay', further reinforcing the physical resemblance as well as the vocal similarities of these two species.[105] He gives Frisch's German names as *Blaue racke* (a name recalling its azure colouring and harsh voice) as well as *Birck-heher*, another jay-name, from G. *Birke* 'birch', and G. *heher* 'jay'. Brisson and Buffon contented themselves with translating Gesner's *Roller* into French as *Rollier*, and the E. *Roller* was the form it took in the British Isles, although in Germany, France and Britain it is very rarely seen or heard. Since Gesner never mentioned its display flight, and since the French and English namers who followed him had probably never seen or heard the bird in the wild, it is unlikely the bird was named after its 'rolling' flight.

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[103] "This bird, whose picture we have placed here, around Strasbourg is called the Roller by onomatopoeia, as I hear, it flies very high in the air." My translation.

[104] In the sense of 'rolling one's *r*', as Lockwood describes.

[105] The Jay, *Garrulus glandarius,* is an elusive woodland species throughout Europe, but well-known for its harsh screaming calls and particoloured plumage, which is generally described as cinnamon-pink, with black and white wings and tail, a prominent white rump - evident when it flies - and brilliant blue patches on the wings.

All its names point to its blue patches and its harsh calls, all of which call to mind the commoner jay, a bird which is around the same size. Nevertheless, it is now authoritatively recorded that the bird has a tumbling, 'rolling' display flight, and as a result it is widely believed that the name Roller refers to this behaviour.

> In the breeding season, the male performs an acrobatic mating dance, where he dives rapidly towards the ground with half-rolls, like a lapwing (Sterry, 1997, p158).
>
> A displaying male flies over his nesting area with jerky wingbeats, gaining height and calling all the time with a harsh *rak rak* note, then drops suddenly with a twisting, tumbling action, a wonder to behold (Hayman and Hume, 2004, p176).

It is remotely possible that Gesner borrowed the original *Roller* name from one who had seen the flight display, and was somehow mistaken about its onomatopoeic meaning; but it seems more likely that this secondary meaning has developed by folk etymology, simply because a bird known as a *Roller* which 'rolls' in flight *must* be named after this remarkable behavioural feature, in the mind of interpreters, despite the evidence to the contrary that there may be no connection.

I conclude, therefore, that the name is onomatopoeic, referring to the grating vocalisations of the bird. Its folk-etymology (accounting for the name's longevity in English, and perhaps also in French) refers to its twisting, falling, acrobatic display flight high in the air.

A1

Scaup

The OED (last revised 1910) says the name is "short for scaup-duck", and that this term is

> a variation of *scalp*, from around 1521, a bank providing a bed for shellfish, especially oysters and mussels, often described as *mussel-scalp,* or *oyster-scalp*.

Lockwood (1993) concurs; he gives Ray (1678) *Scaup Duck,* and records Pennant (1768) making this the 'accepted' name. Lockwood adds that the epithet *scaup* is a northern form of *skalp*, meaning 'mussel-bed', mussels being "the favourite item on this bird's menu". Ray (1678), quoted by Myers (2022, p.293), says "it is called Scaup-duck from its feeding upon Scaup, ie broken Shelfish." Swainson (1885) affirms this, giving local names including *mussel-duck* and *spoonbill-duck* which bear this out. Desfayes (2008) concurs, as

does Kirke Swann (1913), who adds Montagu (1802) gives *scalp* as from O. D. *schelpe*, OF *escalope*, signifying a shell.

Saunders (1899, p.450) departs from this path by suggesting the name is onomatopoeic, adding that:

> the note is remarkably hoarse and discordant, resembling the word skaup, and its utterance is accompanied by a peculiar toss of the bird's head… the food in winter consists chiefly of molluscs, small crustaceans and sea-plants, obtained by diving over beds of oysters and mussels (known as skalp) or from reefs on which tangle grows.

He does not specifically connect either of these circumstances with the name.

Myers (2022) adds that this is a Scots term, with variants *scaap, scape,* and *scalp,* and she discounts the theory that the word describes its call.

Notwithstanding my initial thought that the bird name might be associated with E. *scoop*, a term describing its spoon-like bill and its mode of feeding among broken shells, and acknowledging Saunders' remark that its harsh call may sound like the word *skaup*, the evidence strongly suggests that the bed of broken mollusc shells among which this diving duck habitually feeds has given rise to its name. So while all three possibilities are at least plausible, the evidence points to the bird's feeding habits and habitat being the principal motivation.

B1 E1

Scoter

The OED states this is a term whose origin is unknown, adding:

> Perhaps compare *scout* and also the following:
>
> 1901 Numbers of scoters ('*Scoots*' the boys call them), the scaup, dive over the cockle scaur.
>
> …It has been suggested that the name is originally a printing error for **sooter*…a name supposed to have arisen on account of the bird's colour; German *Rußente*, lit. 'soot duck', a name for the unrelated scaup (*Aythya marila*), is also sometimes mentioned in this context. However, there is no evidence for such a name in English.

Lockwood (1993) says this is originally a Yorkshire term for the (Common) Scoter, giving Ray (1674) "The Scoter *Anas Niger",* and in 1678 "The black Diver or Scoter". He says

Pennant (1768) gives this as the 'accepted' term, but Lockwood states this name is spurious, and a scribal or printer's error for **sooter*, named after the male's black plumage. He gives G. *Russente*, 'soot-duck' as corroboration for his theory.[106]

The OED notes the lack of evidence for these speculations. Examples abound where Lockwood is wont to find 'misprints' where there are none, such as in his dismissal of Turner's "clotburd" and "steinchek" (Lockwood 1993, p.24) which are perfectly good variants of dialectal Wheatear names. *Clod bird* and *clot-bird* are listed in Jackson (1968, p.38, p.75) as local names for both Wheatear and Corn Bunting. She has this from Kirke Swann (1913) who attributes Clod-bird, Clod bird and Clot-bird (as Wheatear) to Merrett (1667) and Clod-bird (as Corn Bunting) to Hett (1902). *Burd* for 'bird' and *stein* for 'stone' represent standard northern and Scots pronunciations; *clod* and *clot* are locally interchangeable.

Desfayes (2008) derides Lockwood's suggestion, contending that *scoter* is "a collective name for some seabirds" a word linked to *scoot* 'to dart', *skitter* 'to skim', *skite*, 'to move quickly', ON *skjota* 'to dart', all references to the "rapid flight of these sea-ducks, guillemots, and razorbills as they scoot over the surface of water or surf, in characteristic fashion." Desfayes describes *scoter* as being from "a kinetic base *(s)k-t, (s)k-d,* indicating a rapid movement", which gives rise to words he lists like *skid, scud, ski, shoot, kite, scuttle*, as well as the seabird name *skuttock* and presumably also local seabird names such as *scout, skout, scoot* (the latter listed by Lockwood as an onomatopoeic name for a young guillemot).

Newton (1896) gives it as a name of doubtful origin, perhaps from *scout*, a local name for the Guillemot and Razorbill, or perhaps from *coot*, in support of which he describes the confusion in France between these two black waterbirds, both of which serve as the *macreuse*, the Scoter in the north of that country, and the Coot in the south. He adds that the wildfowlers of North America call scoters 'coots'.

Macleod (1954 p.62) also suggests it is "possibly a variation of *coot*",[107] reaffirming Newton's *macreuse* suggestion and the N. American use of *coot* for scoter.

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[106] Under L. *Fulica*, 'coot', Macleod (1954, p.29) gives links to L. *fuligo*, soot and L. *marila* to charcoal embers.

[107] Reedman's (2016) publishers describe, on the cover of his book, how *Scoter* is "the last unexplained common name of a British bird species," a ludicrous claim. In the book Reedman unveils his opinion that *scoter* might be derived from *sea-coot*, a view already put forward by Macleod (1954) who copied Newton

However, E. *Coot* is a standalone onomatopoeic name for a pond-bird's call and has no connection with the term *Scoter,* which as Newton suggests and as Desfayes clearly demonstrates is a *scout*-type name given to mainly black seabirds skimming and skiting over the waves in low flight and skidding landings. Nevertheless, the implication of 'blackness' inherent in many of the related terms implies there may be a secondary motivation, perhaps an element of folk etymology as yet unrealised and unresolved. In his study into the origins of country names (1998) Desfayes relates the root *sk-t* (underlying Scots and Scythians) to be related to 'darkness' and 'the North', appending ancient Gk words like *skota* 'twilight' and *skitazo* 'to get dark'. This evidence may be taken into account when considering names like E. *scoter*, E. dial. *coot*,[108] or E. dial. *scout*.

K1

Shrike

OED says this is "apparently a variant or alteration of another lexical item", that etymon being E. *scrīc*,

> apparently representing Old English *scríc*, *scréc* (glossing Latin 'turdus'), which was perhaps used generally for birds having shrill cries; *shrike* and *shrike-cock* are dialect names for the missel-thrush.

It suggests we "compare *shreitch, shrite,*" further terms describing shrieking birds.

Lockwood (1993) reports it was first noted in Turner (1544), "a shrike, a nyn-murder"; the only source Turner had for the English name of this bird, by his own admission, was Sir Francis Lovell. Lockwood suggests this is onomatopoeic, or at least an echoic or imitative name for a bird which shrieks, but he affirms that the bird is not noted for shrieking call-notes, nor does any other name for the bird in any language recall such a note. He follows Newton (1896) in supposing this to be a misattributed name for the Mistle Thrush, with its startling alarm note, and names which describe this. He adds that Ray (1678) used "*Butcher-Birds* or *Shrikes*", and Pennant chose *Butcher-bird* in 1768, but later used *Shrike.*

(1896). Reedman makes no other attempt in 292 pages to work out the meaning of any other common bird name. If we look to *Fieldfare*, for example, he is content to paraphrase Lockwood's bizarre 'grey piglet' theory, without demur.

[108] The E. dialect term *coot* is sometimes used in the sense of 'scout' or 'Scoter', being linked by folk etymology but also by a sense of 'blackness' or 'darkness' inherent in the root of similar names.

Desfayes (2008) concurs, stating the Mistle Thrush has many *shrike*-like local names because of its harsh "creaking" call. *Shrike,* he adds, is cognate to *shreak* (sic) derived from a base *kr-k, skr-k, shr-k* meaning to produce creaking sounds, such as G. *krickente,* E. *crick, cricket teal* 'Garganey', G. *krickelster,* 'Roller', G. *krichel* 'Kestrel', Ir. *scric*, 'Mistle Thrush', etc., all of which describe birds with screeching, creaking or otherwise harsh call-notes.

Macleod (1954, p.62) gives *Shrike* as derived from Icel. *Skrikja,* "with ref. to its harsh call".

In fact the Shrikes (of the genus *Lanius*) do have a very harsh screeching call-note, and there is some evidence that they were used as birds of prey in hunting small birds, so being very familiar to their handlers who may have coined the name.

This is certainly an acoustic name, after the bird's harsh call-note, with the proviso that it may be originally a dialect name for another better-known shrieker, the Mistle Thrush or perhaps the Jay;[109] the dialectal names for these two birds often combine or overlap.

A3

Smew

OED describes this name as "of uncertain origin", and its "origin and relation to *smee*" also as "uncertain".

Lockwood (1993) says this Norfolk word, like *Smee*, 'imitates the whistling sound heard from this species'.

Charleton (1668) referred to '*Boscas Mergus*, the Diving Widgeon … the Smew' giving this as a Norfolk name. He connects this 'whistling' name with the whistling Wigeon. Supporting his view is the fact that D. *smient* and G. *Pfeifente* (*-ent* 'duck') also refer to the Wigeon, a clue as to the true identity of the owner of this name.

Ray (1678) gives *Smew* in his index but elsewhere *White Nun,* a German name - '*ein gross weiss Nunn*' - derived from Baldner (1666) but ultimately from the 15th century.

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[109] Screeching names for the Jay include W. *Ysgrech y coed* (Parry, 1963, p.20); Sc. Gael. *sgraicheag*, 'Jay', (Holden 2016); *devil scritch, scold* (Som.) (Jackson, 1968, p.51). In Ireland the word *Jay* signifies the Missel Thrush, as does E. dial. *Jaypie* (Wilts.) (Jackson, 1968, p.58). The same source gives other Missel Thrush names as *screech thrush* (Glos.), *screech* (Sussex), *shreitch* (Sussex), *shrite* (Sussex), and *screech-drossel* (Glos.)

Pennant gives *Smew* as the accepted name for *Mergus albellus* in 1768.

Desfayes (2008) states the Smew, from a root '*(s)mi-, '*to miow' [sic], has a short, hissing whistle call' ; he appends words from the European lexis in support of this.[110]

Macleod (1954) suggests *Smew* may be a corruption of *semawe*, 'sea-mew', similar to Reedman's opinion that *scoter* may be a corruption of 'sea-coot', and almost as wide of the mark. It is also redolent of Desfayes' equation of *Smew* to *mew* and *miaow*, the cat-like sound made by the Common Gull. Kirke Swann (1913) gives *sea-mew* as a name for Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, and Herring Gull in Scotland, yet the Black-headed Gull is not one of the 'mewing' gulls associated with this call. He does say it is a Yorkshire term only for the Common Gull, which fits better with the ornithology.

In fact, *smee* and *smew* are onomatopoeic whistling names, and all of these conjectures are worthless.

Swainson (1885) gives *Smee* and *Smee Duck* as Norfolk names, as does Lockwood (1993), but only comments on the black and white 'hood' which gives rise to the *White Nun* name.

Willughby and Ray (1678) said 'Mr Dent of Cambridge sent us a female marked Smew'. It may be that this refers to a female Wigeon, which in Norfolk *is* called a Smew, or that he thought he was sending a female wigeon (E. dial. *smee, smew*) but instead sent a redhead *Mergus albellus*, a White Nun.

Myers quotes Ray. Moss (2018, p.60) makes a brief mention of this name among others which are onomatopoeic, where the link between name and sound has become corrupted over time, blurring the original connection. Reedman (2016, p.43) makes no original comment, paraphrasing the OED and Lockwood.

There is a convergence around the name *Smew* being an onomatopoeic "whistling" name, but my search of the literature and of the online ornithological sound recording resource at xeno-canto reveals no such call being made by the species that bears the name. The noises made by this bird range from the hoarse chuckling coughs of the magpie to the deep gurgles and clicks of the capercaillie. It is clear that the name *Smew* is a local name referring only to the whistling Wigeon, as first stated by Charleton (1666), and that it was

[110] Contrary to Desfayes' suggestion, *Mew* is surely unrelated to the Black-headed Gull, a screamer, being as it is an ancient name for the Common Gull, a mewer. It rarely if ever refers to larger gulls, such as the Herring Gull, although its calls are not so far removed from those of the Common Gull.

in error attributed to the White Nun, *Mergus albellus,* first by Ray in his index and later by other writers. The bird does not breed in the British Isles (breeding in Russia and Northern Scandinavia) and is a winter visitor locally in England, being only occasionally encountered elsewhere, so it is unsurprising that its voice is relatively unknown. Smew are also "silent in winter" (Cady and Hume 1988, p.120); "generally silent birds" (Hayman and Hume 2004, p.61), and 'mainly silent' (Sterry 1997, p.52). Svensson *et al.* (2001, p.66) expound more fully on the Smew's vocalisations: "Mostly silent; display call of m. [male] low and rarely heard, a deep, accelerating, frog-like croaking, ending with a hiccup, *gr-r-r-rrr-chic*. F. [female] has a hoarse *krrr*.'

However, the direct statements by Desfayes and Lockwood, indirectly echoed by Macleod, that this species is a hisser, a whistler or a mewer are without foundation and show how easily etymologists can be led astray in the absence of a robust knowledge of ornithology. The tendency to assume an acoustic motivation without evidence is one of the most widespread and deeply ingrained errors in this field.

Smew, as a name for the whistling Wigeon, has an acoustic onomatopoeic motivation, as Charleton knew, and as the evidence of its Dutch and German names attests.

A1

Sparrow

OED states this is a word inherited from Germanic.

> Old English *spearwa*…Middle High German *sparwe*, *sparbe*, *sperwe*, older Dan. *sparwe, sporwe, spørwe* (Danish *spurv*, Norwegian dialect *sporv, sparv,* Swedish *sparf* ; also obsolete Danish *spurg, sporig,* North Frisian *sparreg*)… German dialect *spar*; compare Middle High German *sperlinc*, German *sperling*)…

Lockwood (1993) says this is a traditional name for various passerines and similar-looking birds, also in *Sparrowhawk.*

Desfayes (2008) states it is from the root *(s)par* to scatter, "widespread in most Indo-European languages," eg Rom. *spart* and F. *épars*, 'scattered', appending several related examples. "House sparrows live in flocks easily scattered at the approach of humans. Also names of hawks that disperse the flocks of small birds."

Swainson (1885) gives "[OE] spearwa from Icel. *sporr*, lit. a flutterer."

Macleod (1954) gives A-S [OE] *spearwa*, lit. 'flutterer; from the Aryan [Germanic] root *spar* 'flutter'.

Kirke Swann (1913) says it is from "[OE] *spearwa* 'sparrow' (Turner, 1544)"; both Macleod and Kirke Swann have quoted Swainson almost verbatim.

Newton (1896, p.895) gives [OE] *Spearwa*; Icel. *Sporr*; OHG *Sparo, Sparwe*, suggesting (like the equivalent L. *Passer*) it originally meant "almost any small bird …now… Hedge-Sparrow, House-Sparrow, Tree-Sparrow and Reed-Sparrow - the last being a bunting."

In Evans (2014) Turner gives:

> of the Passeres: Gk. *strouthos*, L. *passer*, in English 'a sparrow', in German *eyn musche*, or *eyn spatz*. Some call it *eyn luningk*, the Saxons *eyn sperlingk*. The Passer, Aristotle says, both dusts itself and washes, and is of all birds most wanton.

There is slender but repeated evidence that this variable and ancient name refers to a 'fluttering' kinetic motivation, and no other suggestions present themselves. It is remarkable how closely aligned are some variations of names for Sparrow and Starling, notably D. *spreeuw* 'Starling' and MHG *sperwe*, 'Sparrow'. Additional evidence that there may be a common root or common ancestor to both terms lies in the ancient Greek term *psar, psaros,* 'Starling', and also in *psaris*, 'a kind of *strouthos*, small bird' (Arnott, 2007, pp.199-201), the general nature of which supports Newton's view that the name refers generally to small birds. Kitson (1997, p.486) makes the remarkable point that "the 'sparrows', *passeres*, of Matthew X 29 and Luke XII 6 are called *staras* in the Lindisfarne Gospels".

K2

Starling

OED says this word is formed within English, by compounding *stare* + *-ling* (a diminutive suffix). It invites us to compare "early uses as a personal name, byname, or surname" quoting *Starlingus*, *Starlinc* (c.1086), *Sterling* (c.1133), *Starling* (1166).

The etymon *Stare* from which the name derives is given as a word inherited from Germanic which is

> cognate with Middle Low German regional *stār*, Old High German *staro* (Middle High German *star*, G. *Star*), Old Icelandic *stari*, Swedish *stare*, Old Danish *stær* (as a nickname; Danish *stær*, †*star*) < the same Indo-European base as classical Latin *sturnus* 'starling'…

Lockwood (1993) gives OE *staerling*, 11th century, meaning a young *staer*, a 'starling' or 'stare'. As *-ling* is a diminutive suffix, *Stare* is the primary form of the word, as seen in its continental cognates.

Lockwood suggested both forms of the name competed in common use, but the current name *Starling* is the only form used in Turner (1544), Albin (1738) and Edwards (1743); Yarrell (1843) confirmed it as the accepted form. Merrett (1667) gave "Stare Sterlynge" and Ray (1678) gave "Stare or Starling". Lockwood adds that Pennant (1768) preferred *Stare,* as did Latham (1787) and Selby (1833). Others later preferred *Starling,* currently the only form in use, *Stare* having become archaic. Lockwood says the name has been formed from an imitative root *star-,* but he fails to elaborate on whether this is from its staccato alarm call or some other vocalisation. This is the first indication in the literature of a possible motivation for the name.

Macleod (1954) states it is a diminutive of A-S [OE] *staer*, root uncertain.

Desfayes (2008) states the Starling is so-named from its garrulous habit from a base *t-r, tr-n, tr-l* 'garrulous' describing many species. He appends many words which support this interpretation including names of gulls, terns, corncrakes, nightjars, corn buntings, sneezing, tunes, roundelays and stories.[111]

Some of these, particularly the ones which reflect the bird's French name *l'étourneau*, with its suggestion of turning and returning (F. *tourner*, to turn), reflect the bird's actual song patterns very closely, meaning a 'roundelay', a repeated story. Building on Lockwood's vague assertion that the name is imitative, we may accept Desfayes evidence here as very strong that the roundelay or F. *ritournelle* "same-old-story" sense of the name and its cognates gives the motivation for the name, reflecting the turning, twisting and returning repetitions and imitations of the continuous mechanical song.[112]

However Newton (1896) describes with great accuracy the wheeling, turning, twisting and returning murmurations, or great flocks of Starlings, sometimes many thousands strong, which have been remarked upon as early as Pliny (c.77CE), closely formed and flying in formation in a shape-shifting mass, blackening the sky, before dropping into reedbeds or trees in order to roost. It is also possible that the name derives from this extraordinary and

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[111] Desfayes links 'tern' words in European languages with this acoustic root, with some justification. The OED gives no grounds for its suggestion that L. *Sterna* 'tern'may be related to L. *Sturnus*, 'Starling', but Desfayes' imitative 'base' may be evidence for a connection.

[112] Desfayes also lists F. dial. *litournau* 'Nightjar' among these 'reeling' names, a perfectly apt name for a bird whose continuous mechanical 'spinning' vocalisation is diagnostic.

remarkable natural phenomenon, a physical and kinetic counterpart to the 'turning and returning' acoustic motivation.

An intriguing and hitherto unexplored possibility lies in the ancient Greek term *psar, psaros* 'Starling', which suggests that *Stare and Starling* may have a common root or common ancestor with *Sparrow.* The term *psaris* 'a kind of *strouthos*, small bird' also leaves this suggestion open.[113]

A1 A2 F2

Swift

OED states this was "formed within English, by conversion…substantive use of swift *adj.*"

The OED suggests the bird is named from its remarkably swift flight, noticeable as it hurtles in screaming parties through towns and streets, or very high in the sky. Kirke Swann (1913) concurs, finding the term first in Willughby and Ray (1678). Turner (Evans 2014, pp.101-103) mentions the Apodes among the Swallows, and mentions these as flying in flocks, much higher than any other kind, never settling in trees.[114]

Macleod (1954) concurs, adding that the Swift has been recorded flying at 100mph.

Lockwood (1993) echoes the OED's interpretation of the name as deriving from the adjective 'swift', calling it a 'self-evident motivation', but he also mentions some dialect names such as *skeer devil*, which he appends as another example of the same motivation, apparently taking *skeer* to mean 'swift.'

Desfayes (2008, p.66) differs, saying the name is not due to the bird's swiftness of flight, but, "like the Swallow", to its peculiar, swerving manner of flight; he appends rather poor evidence from the root *sw-f* and his evidence does not speak to his conclusion, taking us no further.

Swainson (1885) describes the bird's 'impetuous' flight, which gives rise to *Swing devil* and *Skeer devil* names, explaining that *skeer* (according to Halliwell), means 'to move along quickly and slightly touching.' In doing so Swainson combines motivations subtly.

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[113] These ancient Greek terms are discussed in Arnott, 2007, pp.199-201.

[114] In Evans (1903, 2014, pp.101-103) Turner builds on the description of Pliny who also refers to these as *Apodes* and *Cypselli*, as the Swifts have long been known. Pliny notes that they never settle but live life almost entirely on the wing, except at the nest, where "they either hang or lie." Turner further describes these as "very large and black", and carefully differentiates the Swallow, House Martin and Sand Martin.

To my mind *skeer* would more likely be onomatopoeic, describing the drawn-out shriek of this 'screaming' bird, and possibly its 'shearing' flight on scimitar-shaped wings through streets and around chimney-pots. *Skeer-devil* (Jackson, 1968, pp.72-73) is among the dialectal names which combine the shrill screaming sound with its blackish colouration.

We may accept these closely connected impressions in combination, and conclude that this name refers to a fast and swerving mode of flight for which the Swift is well-known.

K2

Titmouse; Tit

OED describes the name *titmouse* as formed within English by compounding the etymon *mose,* n. with a first element *tit* which is ultimately of expressive or imitative origin.

The acoustic or onomatopeic nature of *tit* has been lost in the literature, and it is almost universally assumed that it refers to 'a small creature' – when in fact this sense is carried in the second element *mose,* which was originally the word used as the name of these birds. As one example, Kirke Swann (1913) suggests that *tit* derives from Ic. *tittr,* 'small bird, small creature'.

OED continues that the obsolete element *mose* has undergone "folk-etymological remodelling" after E. *mouse* "probably reinforced by the small size and quick mouselike movements of the bird", which gives us the more recent E. forms *titmouse* and *titmice*.

Perhaps due to the opaque nature of the element *mose*, *tit* on its own has become the more usual form of the bird name, as acknowledged by the OED. Kirke Swann tells us Macgillivray (1840) and Yarrell (1843) 'set the fashion'.

A different form of the name was in use from an early date, as attested in the OED first edition (1912). *Tittymouse* (with a medial vowel) was thought to be "a childish or rustic adaptation", but there is no justification given for this assumption. In fact the evidence of local dialectal names for these birds shows that such forms may have been common at an early date, and E. dial. *tidife* (very likely an onomatopoeic name) is recorded for the Blue Tit in Swainson (1885) and Kirke Swann (1913) who also gives *tidee* and *tydife*. In Jackson (1968) we find the rhythmically-identical *sit-ye-down* (Great Tit) - which refers to

one variation of its ubiquitous spring 'saw-sharpening' "teacher teacher" song - and *pickatee*[115] and *tittymouse* (Blue Tit).[116]

If we accept the acoustic nature of *tit-*, then there is no tautology formed with the diminutive form element *-mose*.[117] In my view this is the most likely motivation for the name.

Lockwood (1993) gives the name history but concludes the name is tautological, both parts denoting 'small creature'. He says the term first appears 1325 as *tite-mose* (likely a three-syllable name), later 1400 as *titmose.* He adds that around 1530 *titmouse* (and its presumed but spurious plural *titmice*) became the current term through folk etymology, the meaning of *mose* having been forgotten; the original *titmose* became obsolete around 1570. Ray (1678) equated the term with the Paridae, the 'titmice'. The foreshortened term *tit* came into use around 1706 in a dictionary entry "tit, or Titmouse", and Yarrell (1843) accepted the abbreviated term. However *titmouse* has remained in use in ornithological works, including in the 'official' BOU[118] lists of 1883 and 1952.

Desfayes (2008) says *Tit* denotes something small, and is given to any small bird from a root *t-t* which is related to Indo-European root *p-t* 'small'. *Mouse*, he adds, is a name given to many animals or insects "quick to dissimulate", from OF *musser* 'to hide'. Desfayes gives words related to *mouse* and *mouche*, 'insect', a word which usually denotes 'a fly'. He fails to note the word history, rejects the likely acoustic base of *tit*, and seems unaware of the original element *mose*, or the folk etymological base of *mouse.*

Notwithstanding Lockwood and Desfayes' assertion that both parts of the name mean the same thing, the evidence of the OED allied with the panoply of local dialectal names for

[115] To my ear this is very like a Coal Tit call. But *pickatee* may be a variation of *tidife*, *pick-cheese* and other local names, such as the US *chickadee.*

[116] It is remarkable how many names the Great Tit has accumulated in local dialects pertaining to its distinctive calls: Jackson (1968) lists *bell-bird, carpenter-bird, great ox-eye, jacksaw, ox-eye, pick-cheese, pridden pral, saw sharpener, sawfiler, sawfinch, sawfitch, sharp-saw, sharpie, sit-ye-down, tinker.* Morris (1851) thought *ox-eye* to be onomatopoeic, although this name may have a chromatic motivation, and *pick-cheese*, as well as describing its call, also describes its habits.

[117] As evidence of this type of compound from other bird names, Lockwood points to the terms *tit lark, titling,* 'meadow pipit' (*tit* and *pip* being interchangeable onomatopoeic renditions of the Meadow Pipit's call). In the latter case *tit* must be an acoustic term, as the suffix *-ling* denotes the diminutive sense, and there would be no need to create a tautology. Lockwood seems to overlook this in his analysis of the present name.

[118] The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) keeps an up to date list of British breeding bird species.

these birds point to this compound name being partly onomatopoeic from the calls of the Great Tit, Blue Tit, and Coal Tit, and partly based on their small size.

A1 F2

Wren

The OED says this is

> Probably a word inherited from Germanic. Old English *wrenna* (also with metathesis *werna*), *wrænna* (*wærna*), obscurely related to Old High German *wrendo*, *wrendilo*, Icelandic *rindill*.

Lockwood (1993) gives ME *wrenne,* ON *rindill*, 'a [little] tail', the bird sporting a "perky, cocked-up tail, unique among our birds and thus calculated to inspire a name."

Desfayes (2008) gives many Sc. and E. dial. cognates and variants from its small size.

Macleod (1954) gives OE *wraenna,* stating it is cognate with *wraene*, 'lascivious', but without rationale.

Myers (2022) notes this is also Whitman's (1898) interpretation. She remarks that the wren is polygynous.

There is much folklore about this tiny bird which has the ironic reputation as 'king' of the birds. The male builds several domed cock-nests, one of which his mate chooses to line and lay eggs in. This prolific home-building, misunderstood as promiscuity, may be at the root of the assumption of 'lasciviousness' in Macleod's observation, or perhaps its energetic virility is implied in the symbolism of its cocked tail.

To conclude, there is no consensus around the origin or meaning of this bird name, which may signify its small size, cocked tail, or reputed 'lasciviousness'. It seems odd that there is no support for any "rounded" or "loud song" motivation, although its chittering alarm call is noted in its local names such as *chitty, cracket,* and *crackadee* (Jackson 1968, p.78).

F2 F3

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

Having analysed the names in the dataset with a view to settling or securing name motivations, I have coded each motivation for every name. In this chapter I set out my results in the form of a table for each category. A bar chart illustrates the numbers and a pie chart the percentages for each category and sub-category.

5.2 All motivations

90 combined motivations from A1-K2 were found in 51 names, many names having more than one motivation.

Names inspired wholly or partly by the sounds birds make were 42% of the total dataset, by far the biggest category, more than double the size of the next largest group.

Names wholly or partly motivated by the observed form of the bird accounted for 16% of the total dataset.

Names wholly or partly motivated by the observed colours of the bird formed 14% of the total dataset.

Names wholly or partly inspired by observed behaviour formed 12% of the total dataset.

Names wholly or partly kinetically motivated, inspired by the bird's usual way of moving or flying, formed 11% of the total dataset.

Names wholly or partly motivated by the environment or habitat of the observed bird formed 5% of the total dataset, the smallest group.

ALL	
ENVIRONS	4
KINETIC	10
FORM	14
COLOUR	13
BEHAVIOUR	11
ACOUSTIC	38
	90

Table 5.1: All Motivations

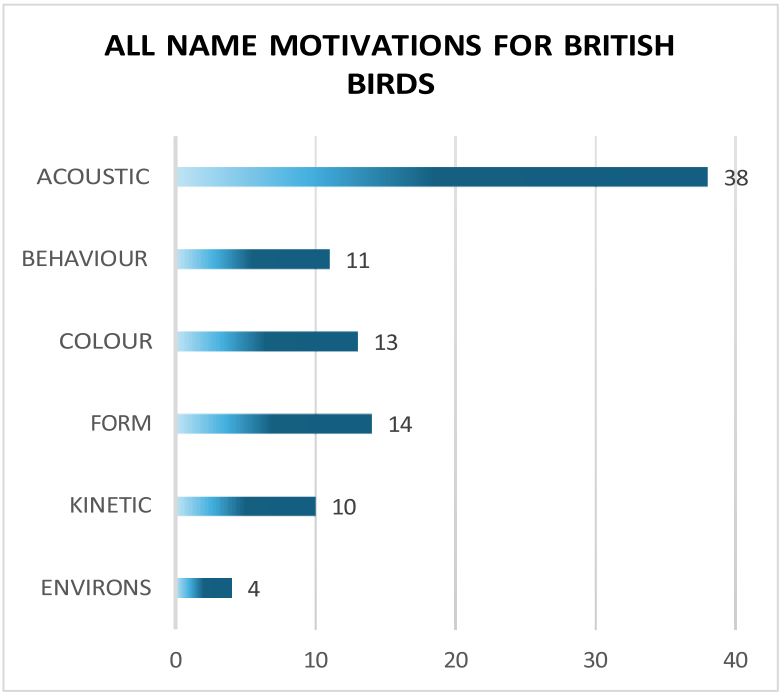


Figure 5.1: All Motivations

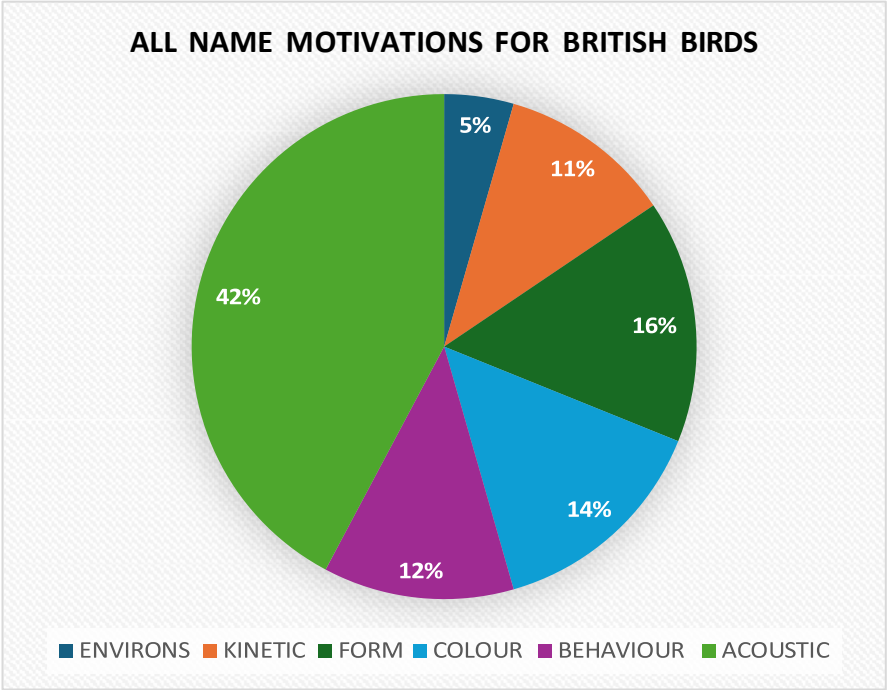


Figure 5.2: All Motivations - percentage

5.3 Acoustic

Within this acoustic category, by far the largest individual category, comprising 42% of all bird name motivations in this dataset, the most frequently recorded were names wholly or partly motivated by onomatopoeia related to the call. This accounted for 60% of all acoustic motivations, followed by names otherwise motivated by the call which formed 29% of the acoustic category. Therefore names wholly or partly motivated by the bird's

call accounted for 89% of all acoustically-motivated names. Much smaller subcategories represented motivations such as onomatopoeia by song (3%), names otherwise motivated by song (5%), and names wholly or partly motivated by the conditions under which the bird was making sound (3%).

ACOUSTIC	
ONOM CALL	23
ONOM SONG	1
CALL	11
SONG	2
CONDITIONS	1
	38

Table 5.2: Acoustic Motivation

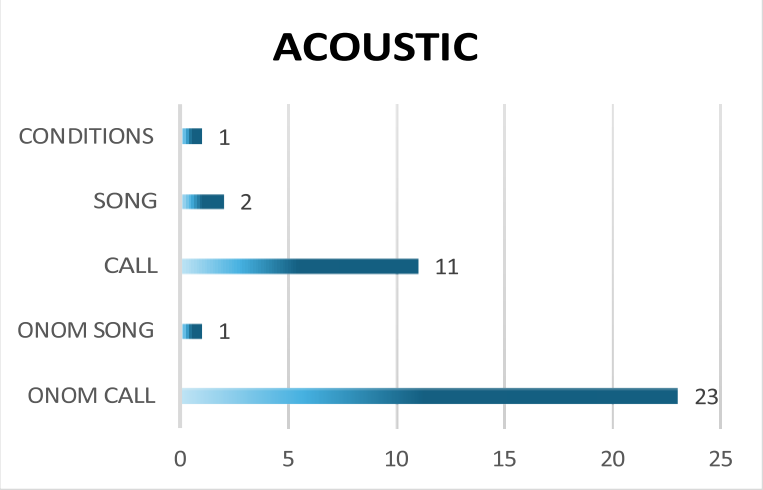
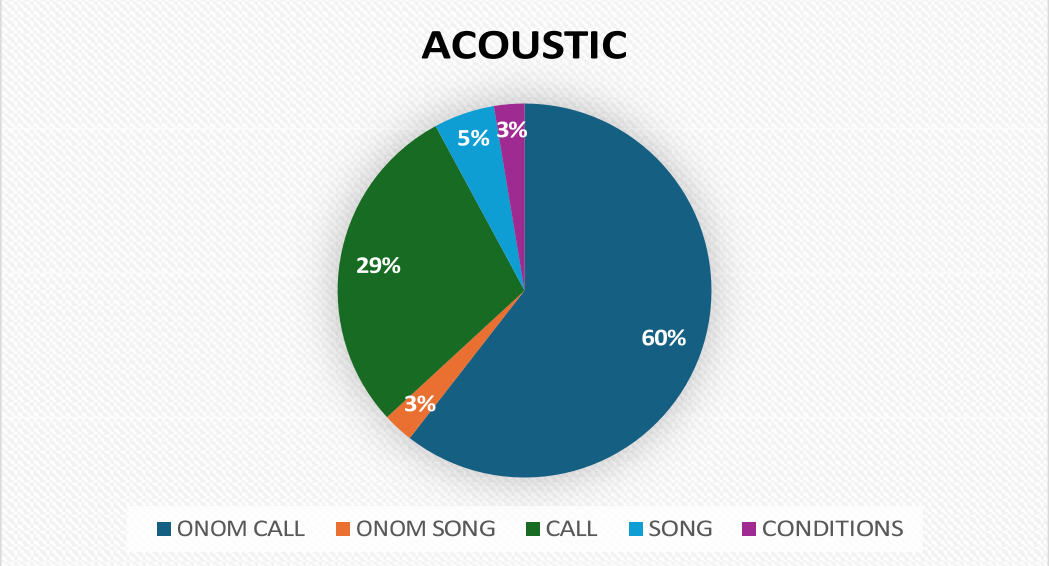


Figure 5.3 Acoustic Motivation

Figure 5.4: Acoustic Motivation - percentage



5.4 Form

Names wholly or partly inspired by the form of the bird – its size, shape or features – accounted for 16% of the total dataset, the second-largest category overall.

Within this category, 50% were motivated by the size of the bird, 36% by one or more features of the bird, and 14% by the overall shape of the bird.

FORM	
SHAPE	2
SIZE	7
FEATURE	5
	14

Table 5.3: Form motivation

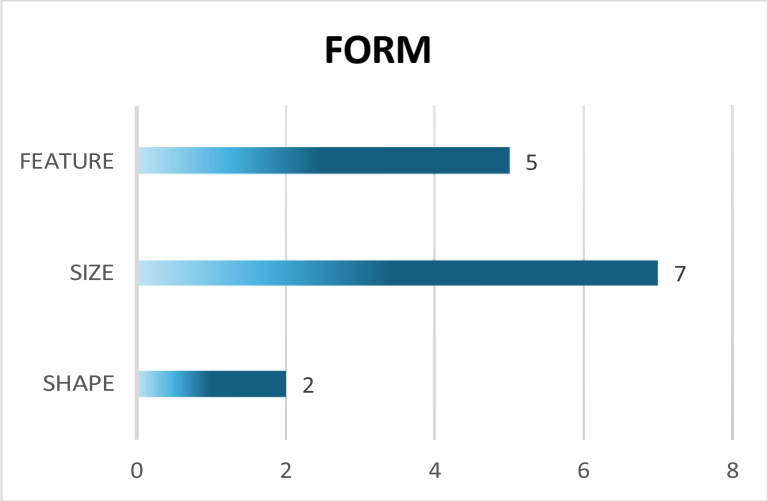


Figure 5.5: Form Motivation

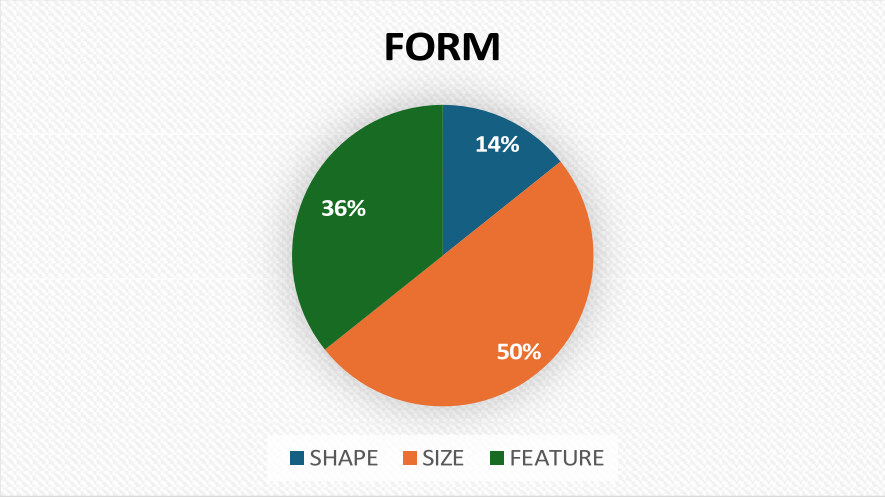


Figure 5.6 Form Motivation - percentage

5.5 Colour

Names wholly or partly motivated by the bird's colour formed the third largest group with 14% of all motivations, only slightly smaller than the previous category. Within this, overall colour was the most frequent name motivation (69%), with a colour aspect forming the other 31%.

COLOUR	
OVERALL	9
ASPECT	4
	13

Table 5.4: Colour Motivation

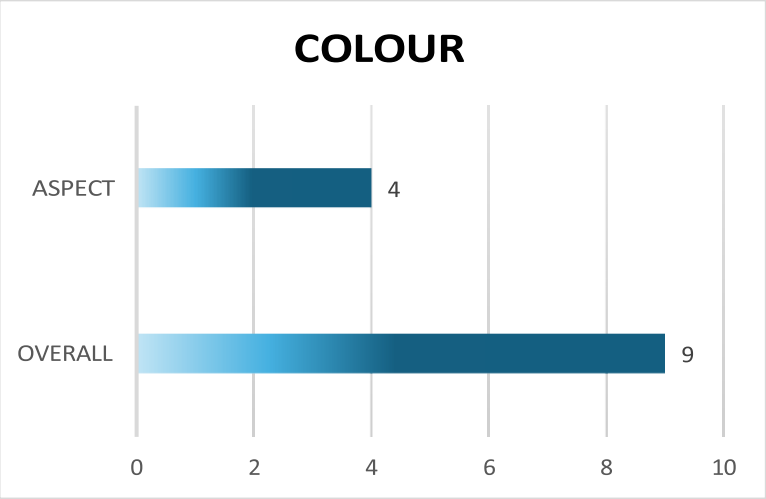
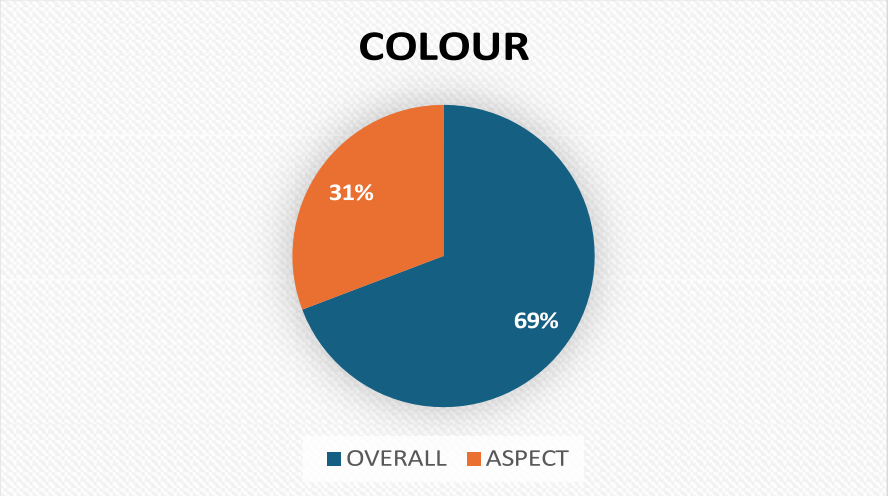


Figure 5.7: Colour Motivation



*

Figure 5.8: Colour Motivation - percentage

5.6 Behaviour

In the naming motivations underlying bird names in this dataset, the behavioural motivation formed 12% of the total, making this the fourth largest category, not far behind the previous category. Within this, names wholly or partly motivated by the bird's apparently deliberate, idiosyncratic or purposeful habits formed 82% of the total, with displays accounting for the other 18%.

BEHAVIOUR	
HABITS	9
DISPLAYS	2
	11

Table 5. 5: Behavioural Motivation

Figure 5. 9: Behavioural Motivation

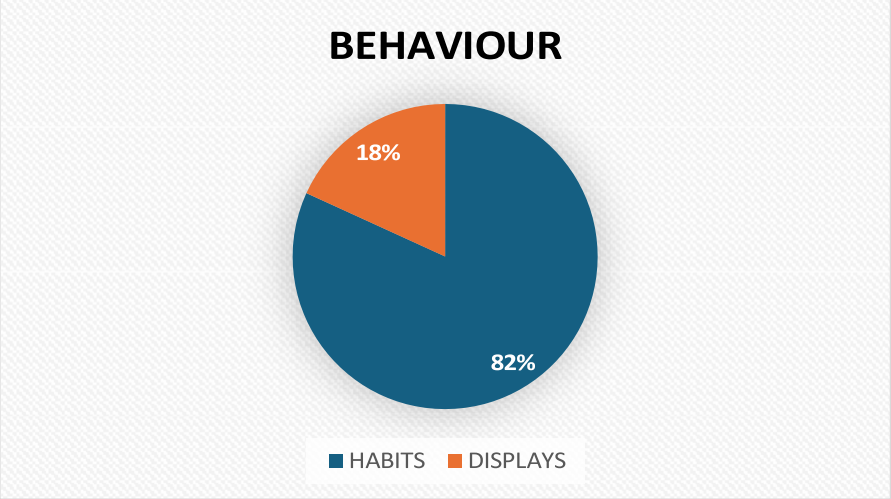


Figure 5.10: Behavioural Motivation - percentage

5.7 Kinetic

Names wholly or partly kinetically motivated, that is by the usual mode of locomotion or movement of the bird, formed 11% of the total dataset, the fifth largest group, only slightly behind the previous category. Of these, 80% were inspired by the flight of the bird, and 20% by movement other than flight.

KINETIC	
MOVEMENT	2
FLIGHT	8
	10

Table 5.6: Kinetic Motivation

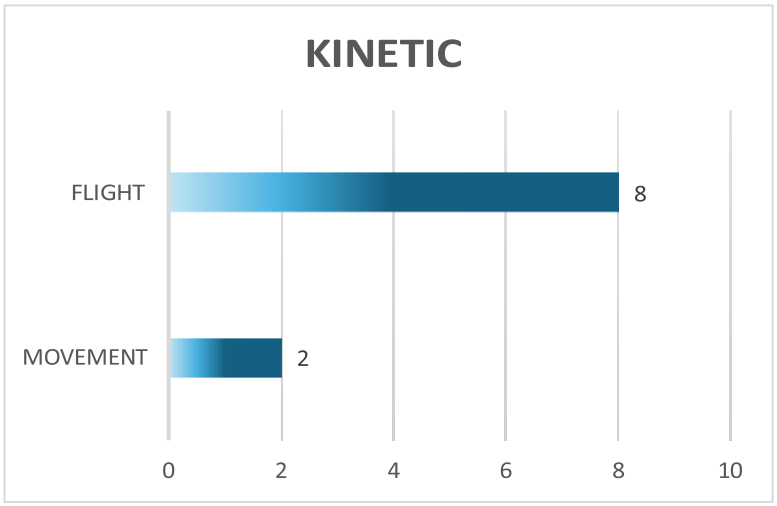


Figure 5.11: Kinetic Motivations

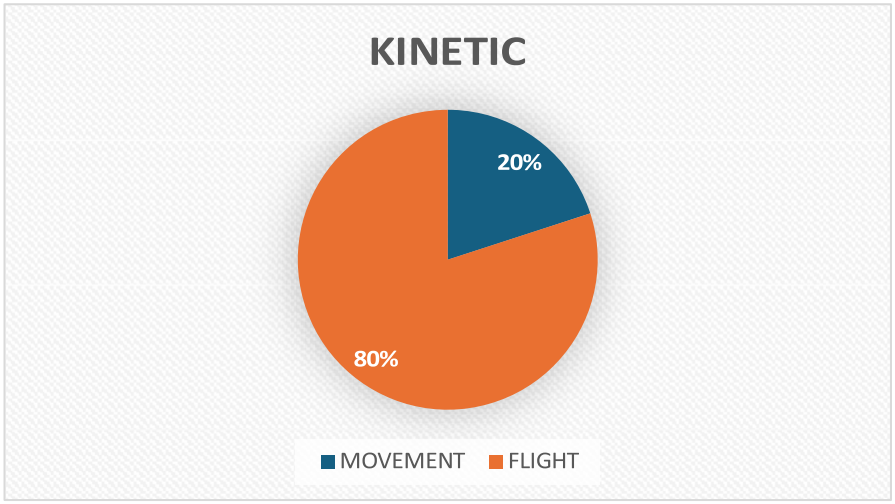


Figure 5.12: Kinetic Motivations - percentage

5.8 Environs

Names wholly or partly inspired by the environment of the bird formed 5% of the dataset, by far the smallest category. Of these, 100% were motivated by the immediate habitat, as opposed to geographical zone, for example.

ENVIRONS	
HABITAT	4

Table 5.7: Environmental Motivation

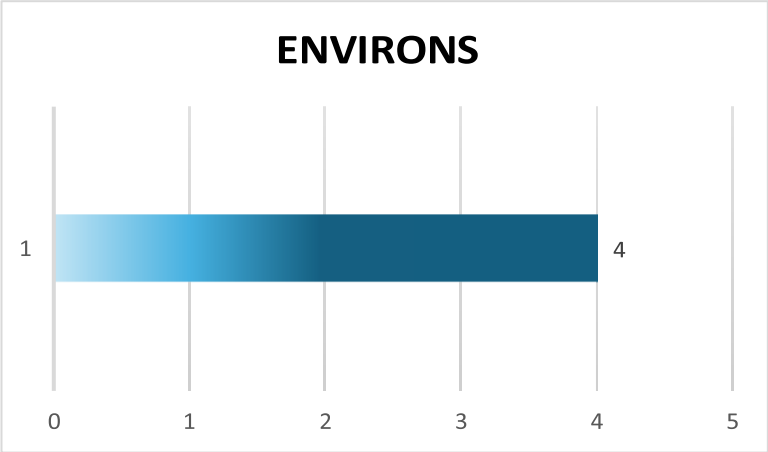


Figure 5.13: Environmental Motivation

5.9 Established and unknown motivations

According to the OED, etymology and motivation were well-established in the case of only 19 out of 51 names (37%) in this dataset.

Etymology and motivation were "unknown" or "uncertain" in 27 cases out of 51 (53%), and only "probable" or "apparent" in a further 3 out of 51 cases (5.9%). Taking these two categories together, 59% of the names in this dataset had motivations which were either unknown or had a degree of uncertainty according to the OED.

OTHER	3
ESTABLISHED	19
PROBABLE	3
UNCERTAIN	27
ESTABLISHED MOTIVATION - ALL NAMES	
	51

Table 5.8 Established Motivations - all names

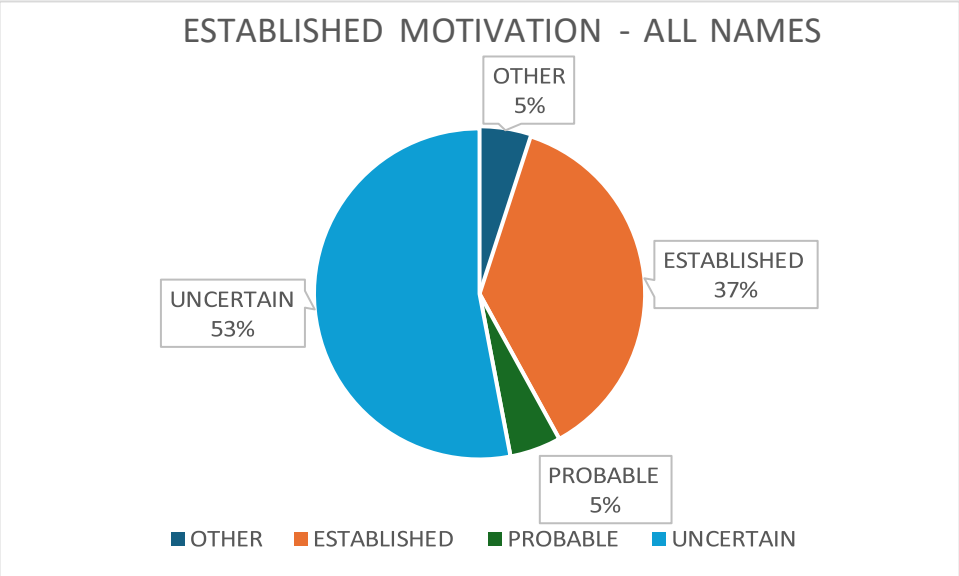


Figure 5.14: Established motivation - percentages

5.10: Borrowings from other languages: mostly obscure motivations

In this dataset, according to the OED:

16 out of 51 names (30%) were borrowed from French; of which 10 (62.5%) were of uncertain etymology or motivation.

12 out of 51 names (24%) were borrowed or inherited from Germanic languages, including Scandinavian, of which 7 (58%) were of uncertain etymology or motivation.

12 out of 51 names (24%) were of unknown or uncertain origins, of which 10 (83%) were of uncertain etymology or motivation.

9 out of 51 names (18%) were of Scots or English origin, of which one (11%) was of uncertain etymology or motivation.

The two names borrowed from Celtic and Italian formed 2%, and both were of uncertain etymology or motivation.

<FRENCH	16
<UNCERTAIN ORIGINS	12
<GERMANIC	12
<ENG SCO	9
<CELTIC	1
<ITALIAN	1
BORROWINGS	51

Table 5.9: Borrowings

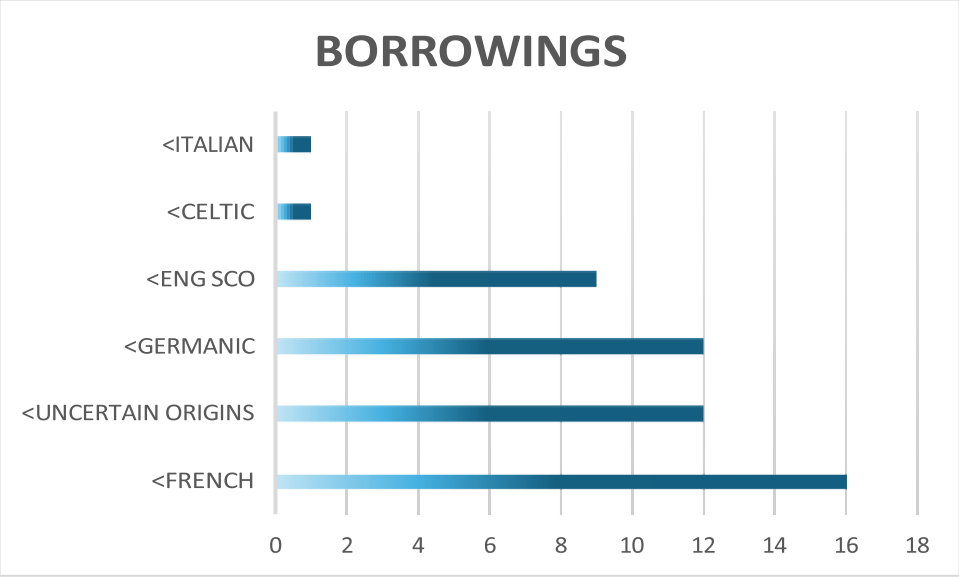


Figure 5.15: Borrowings

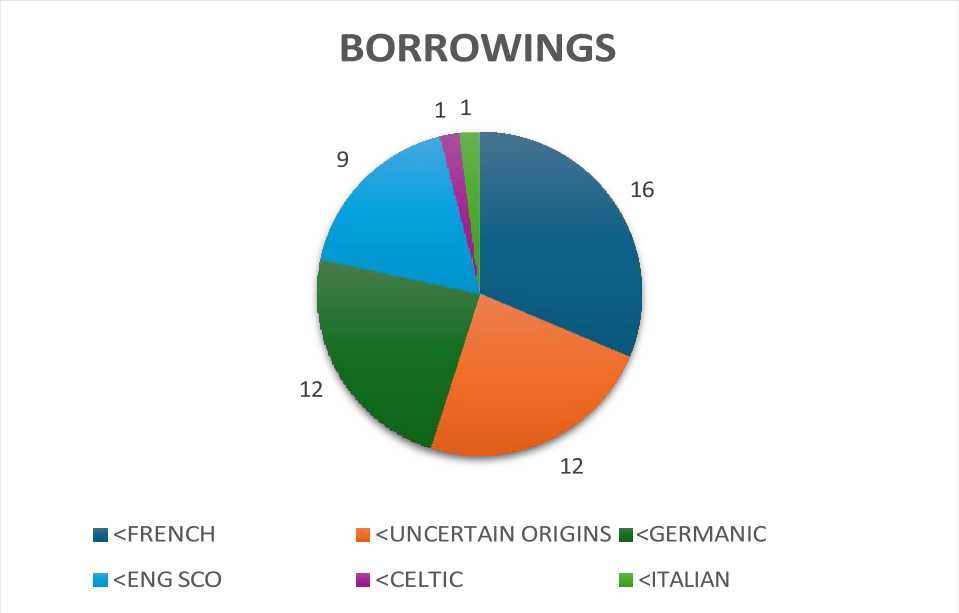


Figure 5.16: Borrowings - percentage

<OBSCURE ORIGINS	83%
<FRENCH	62.50%
<GERMANIC	58%
<ENG SCO	11%
BORROWED NAMES WITH % UNRESOLVED MOTIVATION	

Table 5.10: Borrowings with % unresolved motivation

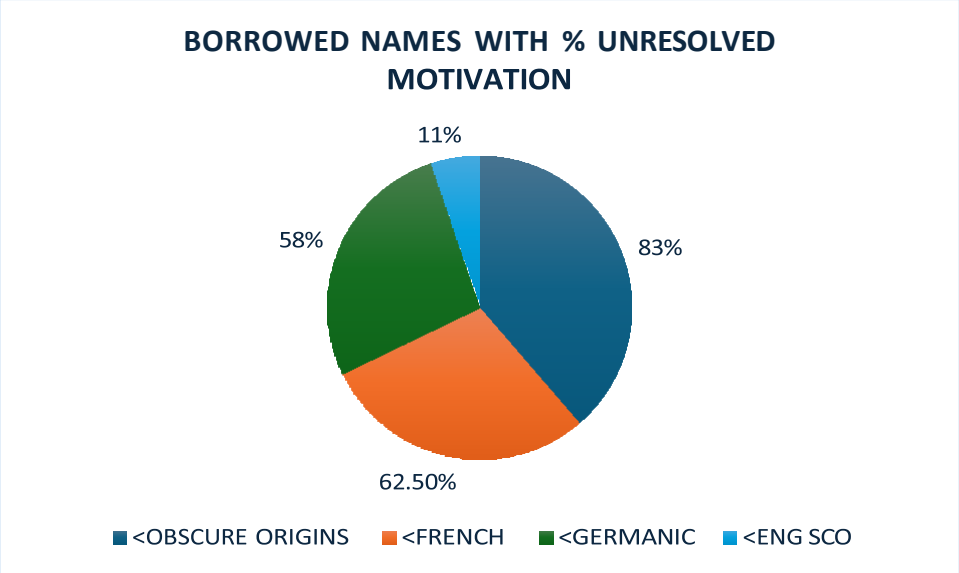


Figure 5.17: Borrowings with % unresolved motivation

Chapter 6: Conclusion & Limitations

6.1 Introduction

Having set out my results, I am in a position now to draw conclusions which answer the research questions set out in Chapter 2.

6.2 Research Questions:

6.2.1 What are the motivations behind the vernacular names of British birds?

It is not straightforward to identify the motivations underlying vernacular bird names. Names evolve from district to district and from generation to generation, becoming confounded with ideas and folklore related to the birds and amended by the rhythm, cadence and music of accent and dialectal variation. Metaphors such as 'invisible hands'[119] through which these names and ideas pass are quite apt for describing aspects of this process.

My analysis of this dataset demonstrates that the primary senses used to observe birds are sight and hearing. These two main categories contain all names in this dataset. Desfayes (2008, p.6) mentions that form- or morphologically-motivated names relate back to a "tactile impression", corresponding to the sense of touch, but this is not necessarily the case. Form names in this thesis are all visually-motivated and do not rely on the sense of touch. Poole and Lacey (2014) point to the importance of avian "aurality", and Lockwood (p.10) implies names based on bird-sound may be the most important group in terms of size. My analysis shows that names which are wholly or partly motivated visually form an overarching super-category comprising 58%, but only if we make the assumption that all names based on behaviour, colour, environment, form and kinetics correspond to the sense of sight, which seems reasonable. This being the case, we may conclude that bird-watching has always been at least as instructive as bird-listening, at least as far as naming birds in this dataset is concerned.

From the analysis of names I was able to construct categories and more finely-tuned sub-categories which coded names based on acoustic, behavioural, chromatic, environmental, morphological and kinetic motivations.

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[119] This apt metaphor derives from the title of Rundblad and Kronenfeld (2003).

6.2.2 What patterns or categories are discernible in these naming motivations?

Names wholly or partly acoustically-motivated formed by far the largest single category. Onomatopoeic or other names wholly or partly inspired by the call of a bird account for 89% of all acoustically-motivated names. While bird song may be arresting, beautiful, and evocative, it is often seasonal and linked to territory and the breeding cycle, and may only be heard for a few months of the year, with a few exceptions. Often it will be delivered by a songbird out of sight in thick foliage, although some birds sing from prominent perches. It may therefore be less than straightforward to identify a singer which cannot be seen, or to equate it with its song which is not so familiar or delivered only in summer. Calls, on the other hand, are contact-notes or alarm-notes in the main, designed to be startling or far-carrying and to draw attention to danger or to summon companions. These are heard all year-round, often expressed at the approach of humans, short, sharp and memorable – quite suited to identifying and even naming the bird heard and seen. Calls which can be approximately rendered into words are particularly memorable and more easily expressed. This may partly explain why onomatopoeic names imitating the call are so predominant in the dataset.

Names wholly or partly motivated by the observed form of the bird made up the second largest category. The size or physical features of the bird drew most attention, with shape motivating only a very few names. The features and size of a bird are often the only clues a fleeting glimpse gives as to its identity.

Names wholly or partly motivated by the overall colour of the bird were twice as frequent as names wholly or partly motivated by a colour aspect. Perhaps from a distance this kind of observation would be expected, few birds being routinely observed up close, except for those shot for the table, or kept for falconry.

Of behaviourally-motivated names, almost all were in relation to remarkable habits, rather than displays, which may be less frequently observed.

Kinetic motivations centred mainly around flight observations, rather than any other mode of movement. Usual movements may not have been observed at all in the bird's everyday habitat, but flight modes would always have been more obvious and in many cases, remarkable and perhaps even diagnostic.

6.2.3 How might this type of analysis throw light on outstanding issues in the literature?

My analysis of each bird name begins with a summary of the etymology and notes from the Oxford English Dictionary. The current second and third editions are consulted, but some of the entries have not been revised for a hundred years or so. Since my dataset was selected partly on the insecurity of their etymology, it may be unsurprising that 53% of the names analysed here are described by the OED as having origins which are "obscure", "uncertain", or "unknown". In a further 5% of cases, the OED qualify their etymological connections with "apparently" or "probably", which are also signs of tentativeness. In all, if we combine these categories, we perceive that 58% of the generic bird names in this dataset have an element of uncertainty or obscurity in their etymology, with only 37% establishing a more secure etymology. This underlines the scope for original research in this field. Other names are traced back to earlier forms without a meaning being offered or suggested, a circular path which gives no motivation and leaves the meaning beyond us.

A large group of names are "borrowings" from other languages, mainly Germanic (23%) or French (c.33%), and in most of these cases the meaning of the term is not given. In the case of names of obscure or unknown origin, which form 25% of the names, almost all of these have no secure motivation (83%).

Purely drawing from the example of the OED, without referring to the wider literature, there has remained a great deal of uncertainty and obscurity around the etymologies and particularly the motivations of vernacular names of British birds, even the 'accepted' names of the commonest and most familiar species. In the wider literature, only Lockwood (1993) and at times Desfayes (2008) have made progress in connecting meaning and motivation to the lexis of Scots and English names of birds, with contributions from Swainson (1885), Myers (2022), and a few others. Recent scholarship particularly in Old English has served to lighten the obscurity around the origins and possible motivations of many individual bird names, particularly in connection with place-name studies. In general, ornithological writers in this field assume the accuracy of folk etymology too easily, and are content to casually repeat the errors of the previous generation without demur. In this study I have found that almost every name in the dataset yields some new or hidden motivation which has lain obscured sometimes for a hundred years, or in some cases, far longer. The disagreements between the principal etymologists have pointed the way to deeper and more rigorous enquiry.

An original and perhaps unexpected finding of this study was that a vernacular name might have one, two, three or more underlying motivations. In fact, names having a combination of motivation were the rule and not the exception. I found that of 51 names in the dataset, 23 names (45%) had two motivations combined, and a further 10 names (20%) had three or more combined underlying motivations. Together almost 65% of names in this dataset had two or more combined motivations.

The A1 A3 combination occurred in 5 names, either on its own or as part of a larger combination. The A1 B1 combination also occurred in 5 names. B1 C1 occurred in 4 names, and B1 B2 in 3 names.

6.3 Limitations of the research and scope for further enquiry

In a thesis of this size strict lines needed to be drawn around a possible dataset, and this meant that the clear criteria for a name's inclusion had to be decided. In the end it was practicable to consider in detail only those 'accepted' names which acted as generic, primary or group names, with a small number of specific names which took a similar form and acted in the same way; and of those, only names whose etymology seemed unsettled with reference to three principal sources were considered for inclusion. Therefore 'book-names' relatively recently invented by ornithologists like *accentor* and *merganser* were excluded, as were simple compounds consisting of noun and epithet like *greenfinch* and *redwing,* but both *finch* and *chaffinch* were included. In general I used Desfayes' (2008) example, and focused on names genuinely attested as being current in British dialect speech before the onset of ornithology. Around 1768, Pennant was standardising synonyms and 'accepting' one name for one species in written English.

Several names which may have fallen into this category were not sufficiently doubtful in their etymology, and were excluded. Others did fall into the dataset but I had not as yet formulated an original and reasonable contribution as to motivation.

One limitation of my system is that although I have been able to mark 'secondary' or 'less secure' motivations with square brackets in the Appendix, I have nevertheless quantified all motivation codes equally. All counts and percentages are approximate, as some names like *Merlin* are possibly derived from more than one language, and many etymologies are not definitive.

There is emerging a group of names (e.g. *Dotterel, Oriole, Petrel, Roller*) which are onomatopoeic in origin, but through folk etymology have been ascribed other motivations. This is an area which may repay further research.

Future research may focus on a wider list of names, such as English dialectal or local synonyms, a set of at least 5000 names if we take Kirke Swann (1913) as a guide, or 500,000 if we follow McAtee (Kalmbach 1968). It may be that the mode of categorisation could be amended with some profit, or that any flaws in the analysis may be rectified or emphasis laid on other areas of the bird's natural history or of the linguistics of the name itself. More detailed analysis of the combinations of motivations might be instructive, perhaps with a larger dataset. Further research into and understanding of the workings of folk etymology will be an essential component of any improvements to be made in this field, a subject which is both compelling and extremely challenging.

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Appendix

Vernacular name motivations of British birds

NB:

[Less secure or secondary naming motivations are in square brackets]

Behaviour>Habits=idiosyncratic habits

Kinetic>movement=ordinary means of locomotion

	ACOUSTIC / SOUND					BEHAVIOUR		COLOUR		ENVIR.	FORM			KINETIC		SUMMARY CODE
	Onomatopoeic < call	Onomatopoeic <	Call	Song	Time / conditions	Habits	Displays	Overall	Aspect	Habitat	Shape	Size	Feature	Movement	Flight	
NAME	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	C1	C2	E1	F1	F2	F3	K1	K2	CODE
auk	A1															A1
avocet			A3													A3
barnacle								C1								C1
brant, brent								C1								C1
bunting								[C1]			F1					[C1] F1
bustard	[A1]		A3													[A1] A3
buzzard	A1															A1
chaffinch	A1					B1		C1		E1						A1 B1 C1 E1

NAME	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	C1	C2	E1	F1	F2	F3	K1	K2	CODE
chat	A1															A1
chough	A1															A1
coot	A1															A1
dotterel	A1					[B1]	[B2]	[C1]	[C2]		[F1]	F2				A1 [B1] [B2] [C1] [C2] [F1] F2
dove	A1															A1
eagle						B1		C1		E1						B1 C1 E1
egret			A3									F2	F3			A3 F2 F3
falcon													F3			F3
fieldfare						[B1]				E1				K1		[B1] E1 K1
finch	A1															A1
godwit	A1							C1								A1 C1
grebe													F3			F3
grouse			A3													A3
guillemot			A3													A3
gull	A1		A3			[B1]										A1 A3 [B1]
harrier															K2	K2
heron	A1												F3			A1 F3
hobby															K2	K2
jay	A1							C1								A1 C1
kite			A3													A3
lapwing						B1	B2								K2	B1 B2 K2
lark				A4											K2	A4 K2
magpie								C1								C1
merlin												F2			K2	F2 K2
missel									C2							C2
nightjar			A3	A4	A5											A3 A4 A5
oriole	A1															A1
ouzel									C2							C2

NAME	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	C1	C2	E1	F1	F2	F3	K1	K2	CODE
owl	A1															A1
partridge	A1					B1										A1 B1
petrel	A1		A3			B1						F2				A1 A3 B1 F2
plover	A1															A1
robin									C2							C2
roller	A1		A3													A1 A3
scaup						B1				E1						B1 E1
scoter														K1	K2	K1 K2
shrike			A3													A3
smew	A1															A1
sparrow															K2	K2
starling	A1	A2										F2				A1 A2 F2
swift															K2	K2
titmouse	A1											F2				A1 F2
wren												F2	F3			F2 F3

Table A1: Vernacular Motivations Dataset