Case 3412

Reticulitermes Holmgren, 1913 (Insecta, Isoptera): proposed precedence over Maresa Giebel, 1856

Michael S. Engel

Division of Entomology, Natural History Museum, and Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, 1501 Crestline Drive–Suite 140, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66049–2811, U.S.A.
(e-mail: msengel@ku.edu)

Kumar Krishna

Division of Invertebrate Zoology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024–5192, U.S.A.
(e-mail: krishn@amnh.org)

Abstract. The purpose of this application, under Article 23.9.3 of the Code, is to conserve the usage of the genus-group name Reticulitermes Holmgren, 1913 (type species Termes flavipes Kollar, 1837) for an economically important and universally known group of subterranean termites responsible for much economic damage in the Northern Hemisphere. Two genus-group names have priority over Reticulitermes, both having been established for a common species of fossil termite in Baltic amber. Hemerobites Germar, 1813 (type species Hemerobites antiquus Germar, 1813) has not been used after 1899 and can be considered a nomen oblitum under Article 23.9.1 of the Code. Maresa Giebel, 1856 (type species Maresa plebeja Giebel, 1856) has been used once since 1899, in a large compendium on fossil insects. and, therefore, cannot be automatically considered a nomen oblitum. It is proposed that the genus-group name Reticulitermes be given precedence over Maresa.

Keywords. Nomenclature; taxonomy; Isoptera; Reticulitermes; Maresa; Hemerobites; Reticulitermes flavipes; Maresa plebeja; termites; fossil; Baltic amber; Eocene.

1. Germar (1813, p. 16) established the nominal genus Hemerobites in a paper on Baltic amber insects (middle Eocene (Lutetian)). A single species was included, Hemerobites antiquus Germar, 1813. Hemerobites antiquus was recognized to be a termite and transferred to Termes Linnaeus, 1758 by Hagen (1854, p. 222) and eventually to Reticulitermes Holmgren, 1913 by Rosen (1913, p. 331). The last usage of Hemerobites as a valid genus-group name was by Schlechtendal (1888, p. 489).

2. In a general work on the fossils of Germany Giebel (1856, p. 298) established the genus Maresa for what he believed to be a new fossil species of termite in Baltic amber. The type species of Maresa is Maresa plebeja Giebel, 1856 by monotypy. Maresa was synonymized with Termes Linnaeus, 1758 by Hagen (1858, p. 181) and was subsequently used only as a valid genus-group name by Handlirsch (1907, p. 700), who synonymized Maresa plebeja Giebel, 1856 with Termes fossile Ouchakoff, 1838.
3. In his monumental monograph on the systematics of termites Holmgren (1913, pp. 60–61) established the nominal genus *Reticulitermes* as a subgenus of *Leucotermes* Silvestri, 1901 for *Termes flavipes* Kollar, 1837 (p. 411) and related species. *Termes flavipes* was fixed as type species by original designation. Although the name *T. flavipes* was previously used in an 1833 report of a society meeting, no description or figures, nor indication of a description or figures, was provided and the name was a nomen nudum at that time (Anonymous, 1833, col. 459).

4. Both generic names *Hemerobites* and *Maresa* have priority over *Reticulitermes* by 100 and 57 years, respectively. As noted, *Hemerobites* has not been used since 1888 while the junior synonym has been used in more than 50 articles by more than 10 authors during the last 50 years. Accordingly, *Hemerobites* can be automatically considered a nomen oblitum under Article 23.9.1. *Maresa plebeja* was recognized as a synonym of *Hemerobites antiquus* by Hagen (1858, p. 180) and was not used by authors after Giebel (1856) except when temporarily resurrected as a valid generic name by Handlirsch (1907, p. 700) for *T. fossile*. The name was not used again by any subsequent authors. While *Reticulitermes* has been universally used during the last century for *T. flavipes* and its relatives, including the fossil *T. antiquus*, *Maresa* has priority and cannot be automatically considered a nomen oblitum under Article 23.9.1 of the Code owing to Handlirsch’s usage of the name.

5. To revert to *Maresa* in place of its junior synonym *Reticulitermes* would bring about a change in name for a group of widely-encountered and economically important pest species. As noted, no author subsequent to Handlirsch (1907) has employed *Maresa* as a valid genus-group name, and *Reticulitermes* has been universally used as the valid name in hundreds of works published by dozens of authors subsequent to Handlirsch. Such works include systematic treatments (e.g. Snyder, 1949; Emerson, 1971; Roonwal, 1983; Nel & Paicheler, 1993; Sands, 1998; Takematsu, 1999; Luchetti et al., 2004; Austin et al., 2006; Heintschel et al., 2006; Maïti, 2006; Nobre et al., 2006) as well as biological and behavioral studies (e.g. Chhotani & Bose, 1979; Prestwich, 1983, 1984, 1985; Matsuura, 2001; Nelson et al., 2001; Laine & Wright, 2003; Arquette & Forschler, 2006), work on protozoan symbionts (e.g. Brugerolle & Bordereau, 2006), and biological control investigations (e.g. Cornelius & Östbrink, 2001; Peterson & Ems, 2003; Swoboda et al., 2004; Nakayama et al., 2004; Bernklau et al., 2005; Arquette et al., 2006). It is proposed that the genus-group name *Reticulitermes* be given precedence over *Maresa*.

6. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

(1) to use its plenary power to rule that the generic name *Reticulitermes* Holmgren, 1913 is to be given precedence over *Maresa* Giebel, 1856 whenever their type species are placed in the same genus-group taxon;

(2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the following names:

(a) *Reticulitermes* Holmgren, 1913 (gender: masculine), type species by original designation *Termes flavipes* Kollar, 1837, with the endorsement that it is to be given priority over the name *Maresa* Giebel, 1856 whenever their type species are placed in the same genus-group taxon;

(b) *Maresa* Giebel, 1856 (gender: feminine), type species by monotypy *Maresa plebeja* Giebel, 1856, with the endorsement that it is not to be given priority over the name *Reticulitermes* Holmgren, 1913 whenever their type species are placed in the same genus-group taxon;
(3) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the following names:
(a) flavipes Kollar, 1837, as published in the binomen Termes flavipes (specific name of the type species of Reticulitermes Holmgren, 1913);
(b) plebeja Giebel. 1856, as published in the binomen Maresa plebeja (specific name of the type species of Maresa Giebel, 1856).

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References


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Comments on this case are invited for publication (subject to editing) in the *Bulletin*; they should be sent to the Executive Secretary, I.C.Z.N., c/o Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, U.K. (e-mail: iczn@nhm.ac.uk).