

Nomenclature of the Laysan Honeycreeper *Himatione [sanguinea] fraithii*

by Peter Pyle

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The Apapane *Himatione sanguinea* is the most abundant extant species of Hawaiian finch (Fringillidae, Drepanidinae) (Pratt 2005, Pyle & Pyle 2009). It occurs throughout high islands of the south-east Hawaiian Islands, where it shows little to no inter-island variation. On Laysan Island, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, a resident *Himatione* was first encountered on 3 April 1828 by the naturalist C. Isenbeck (von Kittlitz 1834) and named much later from specimens collected by H. Palmer and G. Munro in June 1891 (Rothschild 1892). While Palmer and Munro were on Laysan they were assisted by George D. Freeth, manager of a guano-mining operation there and an amateur naturalist. In acknowledgement, Rothschild named the new bird *Himatione fraithii*, based evidently on a miscommunication from Palmer or Munro or an erroneous assumption concerning the spelling of Freeth's name, which is not mentioned in the description. This taxon, widely known as the Laysan Honeyeater and, later, the Laysan Honeycreeper, became extinct in 1923 (Ely & Clapp 1975, A. Wetmore in Olson 1996).

Walter Rothschild was a well-known British zoologist with an avid interest in the birdlife of islands (Rothschild 1983, Olson 2008). He had sent Palmer and other collectors to procure specimens from the Hawaiian Islands in 1890–93 for his private museum in Tring, England. Based upon this collection he published *Avifauna of Laysan and the neighbouring islands, with a complete history to date of the birds of the Hawaiian possession* in three parts, Part I in August 1893, Part II in November 1893 and Part III in December 1900 (Rothschild 1893–1900; see Olson 2003). By publication of Part I, Rothschild recognised that he had previously misspelled Freeth's name and emended the specific name of the Laysan Honeyeater to *freethi* (pp. v, x and 3), but by publication of Part III he had returned, in part, to *fraithi* (pp. xvii, xix, 131, 305) and also used a fourth spelling, *freethii*, on Plate 82 showing morphology of bird beaks.

Although each of the four above names, *fraithii*, *freethi*, *fraithi* and *freethii*, have been used multiple times for the Laysan Honeyeater (see synonymies in Pyle & Pyle 2009), since the original description only Hartert (1919) and Bryan & Greenway (1944) have used *fraithii*. All other authors since 1944, including the AOU (1998) have used *freethii* or *freethi*. The taxon was considered a full species until Hartert (1919) demoted it to a subspecies of Apapane, an opinion followed by most taxonomists through the 1900s (including AOU 1998). Based on osteological evidence, Olson & James (1982) proposed it as a full species, and this was followed by Pratt & Pratt (2001), James (2004) and Pratt (2005) based on this and other evidence.

Amadon (1950) and Pratt (2005) justified the use of *freethii* by regarding *fraithii* as a *lapsus calami* that Rothschild had 'corrected,' in the same publication according to Pratt, as permitted by the rules of nomenclature (ICZN 1999, Art. 32.5.1.1). This is incorrect, however, as the original description was published in July 1892 in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* (Rothschild 1892) and the emendation was not made until August 1893 in Part I of Rothschild's (1893–1900) monograph. Furthermore, Rothschild seemed to have realised that changing his original spelling was inappropriate, as he reverted to *fraithi* in Part III of his monograph (1900). Because change of the original spelling is unjustified, and

the use of either *fraithii* or *fraithi* would be admissible, the original spelling should not be emended (ICZN 1999, Arts. 31.1.2 and 33.4), and *fraithii* should be retained as the correct name for the Laysan Honeyeater.

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