

Case 3823 – *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 (Ascidiacea, Stolidobranchia): proposed precedence over *Caesira* Fleming, 1822, *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 and *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840

Karen Sanamyan*

Kamchatka Branch of Pacific Geographical Institute, Far-Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Partizanskaya 6, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, 683000, Russia.
(ascidiacea@sanamyan.com)

Boris A. Sheiko

Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Universitetskaya emb. 1, Saint-Petersburg, 199034, Russia.
(bsheiko@mail.ru)

*Corresponding author

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Abstract. The purpose of this application, under Article 23.9.3 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, is to conserve the usage of the generic name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 for a widespread genus of ascidians known from Arctic, Antarctic, temperate and tropical seas of both hemispheres. The name is threatened by the senior subjective synonyms *Caesira* Fleming, 1822, *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 and *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840. The name *Molgula* is a well-defined and universally accepted taxon comprising about 140 species. Serious consequences of its replacement by older, little-used names were clear for ascidian taxonomists since the beginning of 19th century. Several clumsy or incorrect attempts were made to save it, resulting in *Molgula* still remaining invalid. However, it has been universally used for about 100 years because of the mistaken belief among ascidian taxonomists that this generic name was conserved and has precedence over its senior synonyms.

Keywords. Nomenclature; taxonomy; Ascidiacea; Stolidobranchia; MOLGULIDAE; *Molgula*; *Syphonotethis*; *Cystingia*; ascidians; cosmopolitan.

1. The generic name *Caesira*, originally spelled “*Cesira*”, was proposed by Fleming (1822: 511) for *Cynthia dione* Savigny, 1816 (p. 153) (misspelled by Fleming as “*C. Diona*”). Fleming (1822) also listed *Ascidia quadridentata*: Forsskål, 1776 (not *Ascidia quadridentata* Linnaeus, 1767) as a synonym of *Cynthia dione*. *Cynthia dione* is therefore the type species of the genus *Caesira* by monotypy. Currently, *Cynthia dione* is classified

in the genus *Molgula* (Hartmeyer, 1914; Kott, 1998; Monniot, 2002).

2. *Cystingia* was established as a subgenus of *Ascidia* Linnaeus, 1767 by MacLeay (1825: 540) to include *Cystingia griffithsii* MacLeay, 1825 (p. 541), type species by monotypy. This subgenus and species have been forgotten for a long time. Huntsman (1922b) treated it as valid (at the rank of genus). All subsequent authors synonymized it with the genus *Molgula* and used binomen *Molgula griffithsii* as a valid name, despite the fact that *Cystingia* has priority (e.g. Van Name, 1945; Lützen, 1959; Nishikawa, 1991).

3. The generic name *Syphonotethis* was established by Gervais (1840: 407) for *Ascidia tumulus* Quoy & Gaimard, 1834 (p. 607), type species by monotypy. Pizon (1898) examined syntypes of *Ascidia tumulus* and assigned that nominal species to *Ctenicella* Lacaze-Duthiers, 1877 (currently considered a junior subjective synonym of *Molgula*). Currently, *Ascidia tumulus* is classified in the genus *Molgula* (see Hartmeyer, 1914; Kott, 1998).

4. Forbes (in Forbes & Hanley, 1848: 36) proposed the generic name *Molgula* for *Molgula oculata* Forbes, 1848 (in Forbes & Hanley, 1848: 36) and one other available nominal species. Hartmeyer (1914: 5) fixed *Molgula oculata* Forbes, 1848 as the type species of *Molgula* by subsequent designation.

5. In 1908, Hartmeyer discovered the forgotten name *Caesira* Fleming, 1822 and used it as a senior subjective synonym of *Molgula*, since the type species of *Caesira*, *Cynthia dione*, was perfectly referable to *Molgula*. A few years later, Hartmeyer (1915) suggested a list of names (including *Molgula*) that he considered “nomina conservanda”, and claimed that in a future work he would use the names he suggested. His list, as a part of the larger list compiled by specialists on other taxonomic groups (Apstein, 1915), was submitted to the Commission by Apstein (see ICZN, 1922 [Opinion 74]). The Commission ruled that it “has no power to adopt en bloc Apstein’s list of proposed Nomina Conservanda” (ICZN, 1922); however, some parts of it were accepted later. In 1926, the generic name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 was placed on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology (ICZN, 1926 [Opinion 94]), but precedence over its senior synonyms was not given, because no proposal suggesting that had been submitted to the Commission.

6. Hemming (1957) submitted a proposal to the Commission to confirm the entry relating to the generic name *Molgula* made on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology by the Ruling given in Opinion 94 (ICZN, 1926). In his proposal, he wrote: “the name *Molgula* Forbes, as the name of an important genus which is the type genus of a family and as a name which has been on the Official List for nearly thirty years, certainly ought not to be displaced in favour of some obscure name of older date. If there existed any such name which there was any ground for regarding as a possible senior synonym of *Molgula* Forbes, I should certainly take the view that that name ought to be suppressed under the Plenary Powers in favour of the name *Molgula*”. However, he then wrongly concluded that “In the present case, however, there is no such name” and “the name *Caesira* Fleming, though [...] a useless and undesirable *nomen dubium*, cannot be regarded as being any longer even a potential threat to the stability [...] of the name *Molgula* Forbes”. As a result, the position of the name *Molgula* on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology was confirmed and slightly amended, but again no precedence over any older synonym was given (ICZN, 1957 [Direction 80]).

7. Contrary to the opinion of Hemming (1957), *Caesira* cannot be considered a *nomen dubium*, as the original description of its type species, *Cynthia dione* (see Savigny, 1816)

is quite detailed, and its assignment to *Molgula* is obvious. This species was redescribed in detail by Monniot (2002) as *Molgula dione* (Savigny, 1816). Similarly, the original description of *Cystingia griffithsii* MacLeay, 1825 is detailed enough to obviate any doubt that it is a species of *Molgula*. Currently, this species, referenced as *Molgula griffithsii* (MacLeay, 1825), is treated as valid (e.g., Van Name, 1945; Millar, 1966; Monniot, 1969; Nishikawa, 1991). The generic name *Syphonotethis* also is not a *nomen dubium*, because type material of *Ascidia tumulus* exists, and it was shown to belong to *Molgula* (see Pizon, 1898; Hartmeyer, 1914; Kott, 1998). The priority of *Caesira*, *Cystingia* and *Syphonotethis* over *Molgula* was known (e.g., Van Name, 1945; Monniot, 1969; Kott, 1998), but *Molgula* is in prevailing usage because all these authors, as well as all other ascidian experts, believe that all older names were automatically suppressed simply by the action of placing *Molgula* on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology. For example, Monniot (1969) mistakenly concluded that senior synonym *Caesira* “fut invalidé par la Direction 80 du Comité de nomenclature”. Similarly, Kott (1998), in her large catalogue of Australian ascidians, included *Caesira*, *Cystingia* and *Syphonotethis* in the synonymy of *Molgula* with the (erroneous) statement “senior synonym suppressed in favour of *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 as nomen conservandum” and with a reference to the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology (Hemming & Noakes, 1958). As described above (paras. 5, 6), *Molgula* was placed on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology, but no precedence over any older synonym was given (ICZN, 1957 [Direction 80]), nor have any proposals suggesting that been submitted to Commission.

8. The name *Molgula* is widely used and currently denotes a well-known, well-defined and universally accepted taxon (in the Appendix, we give a list of 160 publications by 65 authors which use it as a valid name). *Molgula* currently comprises about 140 species known from all oceans and seas; many species are common and constitute a significant component of benthic communities. Most of these species (about 120) were first described in *Molgula*. Replacement of *Molgula* by an older name would be highly undesirable. *Caesira*, *Cystingia* and *Syphonotethis* do not qualify for reversal of precedence under Art. 23.9.1 (ICZN, 1999), because they were used after 1899 as valid several times: *Syphonotethis* was used in one paper (Huntsman, 1922a), *Cystingia* in two papers by the same author (Huntsman, 1922a, 1922b) and *Caesira* in several papers by several authors during a short period of time between 1908 and 1914 (Hartmeyer, 1908; Redikorzev, 1910; Van Name, 1912) and by one author in 1922 (Huntsman, 1922a, 1922b). In the interests of stability, we propose that the name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 be given precedence over *Caesira* Fleming, 1822, *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 and *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840 whenever these names are considered to be synonyms.

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

- (1) to use its plenary power to give the generic name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 (gender: feminine), type species *Molgula oculata* Forbes, 1848 by subsequent designation by Hartmeyer (1914: 5), precedence over the generic names *Caesira* Fleming, 1822, *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 and *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840 whenever it is considered to be synonymous with any of the three;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the following names:
 - (a) *Caesira* Fleming, 1822 (gender: feminine), type species *Cynthia dione* Savigny, 1816 by monotypy, with the endorsement that it is not to be given precedence over the name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 whenever the

- two are considered to be synonyms;
- (b) *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 (gender: feminine), type species *Cystingia griffithsii* MacLeay, 1825 by monotypy, with the endorsement that it is not to be given precedence over the name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 whenever the two are considered to be synonyms;
- (c) *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840 (gender: masculine), type species *Ascidia tumulus* Quoy & Gaimard, 1834 by monotypy, with the endorsement that it is not to be given precedence over the name *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 whenever the two are considered to be synonyms; and
- (3) to supplement the existing text on *Molgula* Forbes, 1848 in the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology by adding the endorsement that it is to be given precedence over the names *Caesira* Fleming, 1822, *Cystingia* MacLeay, 1825 and *Syphonotethis* Gervais, 1840 whenever it and any of the three are considered to be synonyms.

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