

Renaming moths and more

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ENTOMOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF AMERICA
SHARING INSECT SCIENCE GLOBALLY

"The purpose of common names is to make communication easier between scientists and the public audiences they serve. ... **names that are unwelcoming to marginalized communities run directly counter to that goal.**"

- ESA President Michelle S. Smith.

"Words matter ... Consideration of these replacements is a **big step forward in our efforts to remove derogatory terms** whose expiration dates are long overdue."

- US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY 2

Photo credit: R. Lindroth

Example Naming Guidelines for NEW names

From Entomological Society of America, Common Names Rules and Guidelines

(<https://entsoc.org/publications/common-names/use-submission>)

Here are some of their “Do’s”

- **Most names have two parts**, one indicating the family or group, and the other a modifier.
- Distinctive **physical features that well differentiate** the species are useful.
- Other useful descriptive terms may derive from features such **as habitat of the species, host associations, biome, life stage and aspect of seasonal life cycle.**
- Specific words used as modifiers (adjectives, adverbs) in a common name should be easily pronounced and **generally understandable by a broad public audience.**

Rainbow trout

Longnose gar

Creek chub

Prickly sculpin

Example Naming Guidelines for NEW names

From Entomological Society of America, Common Names Rules and Guidelines

(<https://entsoc.org/publications/common-names/use-submission>)

Here are some of their “Don’ts”

- Common names with words that unnecessarily **incite offense, fear or promote negative emotional reactions** (e.g., epidemic, murder, invasive) are strongly discouraged.
- Descriptors of **cultures, populations, ethnicity, race, and industries/occupations** are generally not acceptable.
- The **use of a geographic descriptor in a common names proposal is generally discouraged...**

Murder hornets

Killer whales

Nun moth

Japanese beetle

The ESA created a new process in 2021 for all renaming, not just naming.

- Same general do's and don'ts as prior listing
- Special considerations: for *L. dispar*, this meant names related in any way to stereotypes or themes related to Roma people were also excluded, even if biologically accurate.
- Robust and community-based process to ensure inclusion of key groups and interests
- Online form for any ESA interested party to submit names for re-evaluation



Let's dig into *Lymantria dispar*



Photo credit: J. Lindholm

Lymantria dispar Process and Timeline

- **Late summer 2021 ESA convened an L dispar working group**
 - ~50 total members self selected to join, including Canadian representative from Entomological Society of Canada (ESC-SEC)
- Using the new **Better Common Names Project** working process and structure across Fall and Winter 2021
 - Called for candidate new names (over 160)
 - Researched native range names in local languages (over 60)
 - Working group vote and comment to winnowed to top selections (down to ~30)
 - Public poll to assess popularity and pitfalls (down to 7 names)
 - Final decision based on poll and feedback
- **Name finalized in January 2022 was spongy moth**



A Tale of ~~Two~~ MANY Moths

Lymantria dispar, now named **spongy moth** via **ESA Better Common Names Project**

- Conversations in 2020, pre-work in early 2021
- Working group convened July 2021 – December 2021
- Announcement of new name January 2022

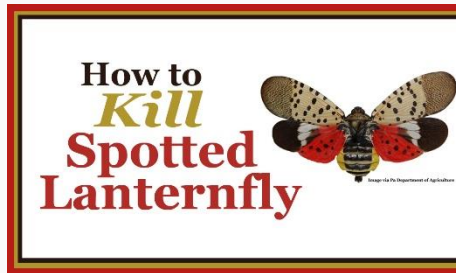
Closely related six species of Lymantrids

- Pre-work in early 2022
- Working group convened June 2022 – October 2022
- Proposal submitted to **Common Names Committee** in mid October 2022
- Review is now underway, stay tuned!



Context of eradication and government control

- The context around invasive species management amplifies this issue
- Names associated with groups of people- whether ethnic, geographic, or other groups- can cause harm
- All geographic names are problematic- by stating some geographies are neutral, the underlying bias becomes apparent



It is in your power to frame these changes as an opportunity

- The conservation community has an opportunity to do better; names can be **more accurate and descriptive of the physical or behavioral characteristics**.
- We can choose to find new names that serve us for outreach, early detection, and education on invasive species.
- **We can choose to make science and conservation more inclusive in this space.**



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Thank you!

Email me at
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to learn more



Photo credit: J. Lindholm

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'Spongy Moth' Proposed as New Common Name for *Lymantria dispar*

Translation of French name based on destructive forest pest's sponge-like egg masses

Annapolis, MD, January 25, 2022—A group of entomologists at the Entomological Society of America (ESA) has proposed the name "spongy moth" as the new common name for *Lymantria dispar*. The name was used in France and refers to the moth's sponge-like egg masses. The name "gypsy moth" as the common name in Names of Insects was removed because the name was removed from the Romani language. The name "spongy moth" is preferred by the ESA Common Name Committee. ESA members can vote on the name through February 8.

Lymantria dispar moth