

NEW BIRD DESCRIPTIONS WITHOUT PROPER VOUCHER SPECIMENS:
REFLECTIONS AFTER THE BUGUN LIOCICHLA CASE¹

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A new species of *Liocichla* (Aves: Timaliidae) was recently described (Athreya 2006) without the submission of a proper voucher specimen. The author did not collect one on grounds that the species may be rare. The publication evoked dismay among museum ornithologists who feel that the species should not have been formally described and published without a proper voucher specimen, and that the bird may not be as rare as believed. There is also a feeling outside of museum circles that the requirement of voucher specimens may be obsolete and that museum scientists are insensitive to conservation concerns. This essay analyses this controversy and attempts to present the science behind this sensitive issue, to facilitate future decision making. Topics covered include: similar cases in the past and the criticisms they have evoked; why voucher specimens are indispensable for ornithological research and conservation; why there may be no viable alternatives; how scientific collecting makes little or no impact in most bird populations; whether bird journals should accept new descriptions without proper voucher specimens; and how modern museum ornithologists are partners rather than adversaries in the cause of bird conservation.

Key words: New descriptions, voucher specimens, Museum collections, ICZN, Bugun Liocichla