

## Recommendations for a consistent use of vernacular names for *Proteus anguinus* in English and Slovenian scientific texts

### Priporočila za enotno rabo angleških in slovenskih imen za vrsto *Proteus anguinus* v znanstvenih besedilih

Peter TRONTELJ<sup>1</sup>, Gregor ALJANČIČ<sup>2</sup>,  
Rok KOSTANJŠEK<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biology, Biotechnical Faculty,  
University of Ljubljana, Jamnikarjeva 101,  
SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; E-mails:  
peter.trontelj@bf.uni-lj.si,  
rok.kostanjsek@bf.uni-lj.si

<sup>2</sup>Tular Cave Laboratory, Society for Cave Biology,  
Oldhamska cesta 8a, SI-4000 Kranj, Slovenia;  
E-mail: gregor.aljancic@guest.arnes.si

Ever since its description two and a half centuries ago, the proteid urodela *Proteus anguinus* Laurenti, 1768 (Fig. 1) has been known to the wider, scholarly audience by several different common names, German as well as English. The number of local Slovenian names, originating from times before the scientific description, is still much larger (Zois 1807, Freyer 1850, Aljančič 1989, Parzefall et al. 1999). There are probably several reasons for this terminological richness including the linguistic and cultural diversity in the Dinaric Karst area of the western Balkan Peninsula, as well as a long history of research and high public attention (Aljančič et al. 1993). On the other hand, the animal is still not common enough and generally known for a single, globalized English name to become generally accepted and to prevail in popular use. We regard the diversity of vernacular names for *Proteus anguinus* as valuable elements of cultural heritage that we do not wish to diminish in any way. Since all these names, e. g. človeška ribica, močeril, bela kačica or protej in Slovenian, and Grottenolm or Olm in German are unique, there is no danger of ambiguity. Likewise, we acknowledge that 'človeška ribica' is the most widely used Slovenian name by which people relate to this important flagship species in spoken language as well as popular, scholarly and legal texts.

What is to be supported in everyday use may not be so desirable in scientific or legal texts. Our motivation to write down these nomenclatural recommendations is multifold. From an editorial perspective, it is a matter of consistency and style to refer to the same phenomenon under the same name as much as possible. Searches in electronic databases, cross-referencing and indexing become much easier when fewer words are involved. As representatives of the three Slovenian laboratories working scientifically on *Proteus anguinus*, we are often asked to render our opinion; we need to give recommendations to students writing their theses and wish to be consistent in our own use. Finally, certain names or forms of names are to be preferred over others. For example, the monomial form has the advantage of allowing for a more flexible addition of extensions when new subordinate taxa are being described (Sket & Arntzen 1994). The English names 'blind cave salamander' and 'European cave salamander' are ambiguous as several other blind urodela species are known from North American caves, and other European urodeles (genus *Speleomantes*) are referred to as cave salamanders. Surely, all of these issues could be resolved simply by using the scientific name all the time. However, for reasons that may not be purely scientific, authors sometimes prefer to use names that are more attractive or just shorter and simpler than the scientifically most justified *Proteus anguinus*.

When shaping our proposal of vernacular names we followed several criteria. They are listed loosely by importance.

(1) Ambiguous or potentially ambiguous names should be avoided. This criterion eliminates names like 'blind cave salamander' and 'European cave salamander'.

(2) Misleading names should be avoided. This does not apply as much to the obviously nonsensical 'človeška ribica' as it does to the literal English translation 'human fish' and a number of older names such as bela kačica in Slovenian and the German folk name Fischotter formerly used in the region of Kočevje, Slovenia (Aljančič 1989).

(3) Widely used and accepted names should be preferred. By this criterion, 'blind cave salamander' and 'človeška ribica' come into conflict with the first and the second criterion, respectively. But we believe that unambiguity and truthfulness should be given priority.

(4) Simple names, in particular monomial ones, are better than complex names. This rule eliminates

the technically unambiguous but cumbersome 'European blind cave salamander'.

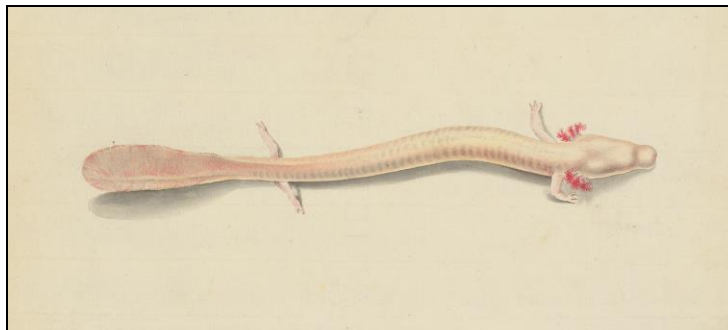
These considerations narrow down the choice of suggested replacements for *Proteus anguinus* in scientific texts to a couple of names in each language. '**Olm**', from the Thuringian vernacular for Molch, or newt (Neri & Ziegler 2012), and first used by the German naturalist Lorenz Oken (1817), is a well-established name that avoids the ambiguity issues with various versions of 'cave salamander'. Above all, it is wonderfully simple, unique and memorable. The Slovenian '**močeril**' comes close both in etymology and by being fostered by a 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist, the Slovenian Henrik Freyer (Freyer 1842, 1850, Aljančič 1989). Besides these two names that meet all the above criteria, we recommend the use of the vernacularized generic name, '**proteus**', in both English and Slovenian. This is the oldest name, by which the species became internationally renowned. It exists in several variants, such as the archaic Slovenian 'proteuz' and the scarcely used 'protej', as well as the common French form 'le Protée', the Italian 'il Proteo'. However, 'proteus' is the most universal one and therefore to be preferably used in scientific communication.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank (in alphabetical order) Lilijana Bizjak Mali, Špela Gorički, Katja Pobiljšaj, Mitja Prelovšek, Boris Sket, David Stankovič, Valerija Zakšek and Anamarija Žagar for their constructive comments, suggestions and views on the terminology of *P. anguinus*.

#### References

- Aljančič M. (1989): »Človekova« ribica in druga imena naše jamske dvoživke. *Proteus* 57(9-10): 365-366.
- Aljančič M., Bulog B., Kranjc A., Josipovič D., Sket B., Skoberne P. (1993): *Proteus*: the mysterious ruler of Karst darkness. Vitrum, Ljubljana, 75 pp.
- Freyer H. (1842): Fauna der in Krain bekannten Säugetiere, Vögel, Reptilien und Fische. Eger'schen Gubernial-Buchdruckerei, Laybach, 45 pp.
- Freyer H. (1850): Močarilec. In: Slovensko berilo za prvi gimnazijalni razred. Jožef Blaznik, Ljubljana, pp. 95-98.
- Neri S., Ziegler S. (2012): »Horde Nöss« – Etymologische Studien zu den Thüringer Dialekten. Hempen Verlag, Bremen, 255 pp.
- Oken L. (1817): Olm (*Proteus anguinus*). *ISIS* 5(81): 641-645.
- Parzefall J., Durand J.P., Sket B. (1999): *Proteus anguinus* Laurenti, 1768—Grottenolm. In: Grossenbacher K., Thiesmeier B. (Eds.), Handbuch der Reptilien und Amphibien Europas. Band 4/I: Schwanzlurche I. Aula-Verlag, Wiesbaden, pp. 57-76.
- Sket B., Arntzen J.W. (1994): A black, non-troglophobic amphibian from the karst of Slovenia: *Proteus anguinus parkelj* n. ssp. (Urodela: Proteidae). *Bijdragen tot de dierkunde* 64: 33-53.
- Zois S. (1807): Nachrichten von der im Dorfe Vir bey Sittich vorkommenden Fischart. *Laibacher Wochenblatt* 29, 18. 6. 1807.



**Figure 1.** First picture of proteus based upon a live animal, known at that time to the locals as 'bela riba' [white fish] or 'zhloveshka riba' [human fish] (Vincenc Dorfmeister/ Sigismund Zois, around 1805, archive of SAZU).

**Slika 1.** Prva slika proteusa po živi živali iz časa, ko so jo domačini poznali po imenu 'bela riba' ali 'zhloveshka riba' (Vincenc Dorfmeister/ Sigismund Zois, okrog 1805, arhiv SAZU).