

Forming Standard English Names: Some Guidelines for Reptile and Amphibians

RULES

Capitalization.

Standard English names of species should be capitalized to distinguish them from descriptions and generalized usage. For example, “I collected a Green Frog (*Lithobates clamitans*)” versus “I saw a green frog.” When group names (i.e. standard English names for genera and higher categories or as a word or words that applies to one or more species) are used alone (i.e., not as part of the English name of a species) they should not be capitalized. For example, “The Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake is a well-known species of rattlesnake.” Or, “I hear that racerunners are difficult to catch.”

Formation of descriptive or modifying word.

1. When a descriptor refers to a feature of an animal, the suffix -ed will be added. The modifying word will be treated as an adjective as opposed to a noun in apposition.

Examples: Black-headed Snake, Red-eared Slider, Long-tailed Salamander.

2. Hyphenation. The standard grammatical rule for joining two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun will be followed. The rule states that a hyphen is more appropriately used to join the words in lieu of combining the words.

Examples: Black-masked Racer, not Blackmasked Racer; Black-headed Snake, not Blackheaded Snake; Long-tailed Salamander, not Longtailed Salamander.

Exception: When one of the words describes a location, geographic region, or direction, a hyphen is not used.

Examples: Blue Ridge Two-lined Salamander, Southern Red-backed Salamander, Florida Red-bellied Turtle.

Formation and Use of Group Names.

1. Compound names should be spelled as a single word, unhyphenated, if:

A. The second component is from among the words frog, toad, snake, turtle, tortoise, lizard, salamander, newt, siren.

Examples: Ratsnake, Coralsnake, Treefrog

B. The second component refers to a part of the body.

Examples: Cottonmouth, Copperhead, Whiptail, Softshell, Spadefoot

C. The name describes an activity of the animal. Examples: Racerunner, Pondslider, Bloodsucker

D. The second component is a misnomer.

Examples: Waterdog, Hellbender, Mudpuppy, Coachwhip

Exceptions: Names that would ordinarily be spelled as single unhyphenated words under the above rules should be spelled as separate words with both capitalized when:

A. Spelling as a single word would result in an awkward double or triple letter series.

Example: Wall Lizard, not Walllizard

B. A single word would be excessively long (over three syllables), or awkward, or imply an incorrect pronunciation.

Examples: Tiger Salamander, not Tigersalamander (any combination with salamander can be ruled as too long); Earless Lizard, not Earlesslizard

2. Compound names that are not spelled as a single word should have each word capitalized.

Examples: Box Turtle, Rosy Boa, Cricket Frog

3. A group name may be applied to two or more distantly related groups.
4. Group names of more than one word should neither be encouraged nor discouraged.

Formation of English Species and Subspecies Names

1. Long-established names in widespread use should be retained, regardless of any inaccuracy of description, behavior, habitat, location or phylogenetic relationship suggested by the name, unless there is a compelling and special reason.
2. The English name of every species shall be different from the name of every other species in North America.
3. The English name of a species need not repeat or reflect its scientific name.
4. English names will be given to genera, species, and subspecies.
5. The English name of a subspecies shall not be identical to the English name of the species.

Example, *Terrapene carolina* and *T. c. carolina* were both called the Eastern Box Turtle. Now the English name for *T. c. carolina* is Woodland Box Turtle to avoid conflating the two taxa.

6. The English name given to a subspecies is not required to have any part of it be the same as the English name of the species to which it belongs.
7. Each word of a name shall be a word in the English language unless in unusual circumstances the committee finds it appropriate to use a word from a foreign language or directly adopted from scientific nomenclature.
8. Accepted English names proposed in this list should not be replaced by a local vernacular (but see 7).
9. Patronyms should neither be encouraged nor discouraged.
10. A patronym should be used in the possessive case.
11. Names should be changed if they are offensive to a substantial group of people, but need not be altered merely to reflect a change in the name of a country, region, or island.
12. Reference to geographical places and names may vary in form (e.g., Chihuahua vs. Chihuahuan) as deemed appropriate with respect to previous usage and clarity.
13. A name that refers to a small island or group of small islands should include the word “island” or “islands” if to do so brings clarity or avoids being misleading. In all other cases inclusion of “island” or “islands” in a name should depend primarily on prior usage. Two or more English names may be used within a single genus. For example, under *Pituophis* there are pinesnakes, bullsnakes, and gophersnakes.
14. Words should be spelled consistently throughout the list, for example Mohave versus Mojave.
15. Words with accent marks in the language of their origin should be spelled with those marks only if reasonably necessary to indicate correct pronunciation in English.
16. Excessively long names should be avoided. Names should be as short as possible.

17. The full name of one species or subspecies should not be included in the longer name of a different species or subspecies. For example, if *Anaxyrus debilis* were called the Green Toad and *A. retiformis* were called the Sonoran Green Toad.