

Regards of
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THE EARLIEST NAME OF THE YELLOW FEVER MOSQUITO

By FREDERICK KNAB

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A single species of mosquito has been definitely connected with the propagation of yellow fever. This mosquito is well known and widely distributed; in fact, it occurs in association with man throughout the tropical and semitropical parts of the globe. Since the discovery that this mosquito is the vector of yellow fever, it has become the subject of a very extensive literature. Unfortunately there has been much disagreement about the scientific name of this species, it having been described independently by many entomologists, so that no less than 23 specific names are cited in synonymy (see the last volume of Howard, Dyar and Knab, *The Mosquitoes of North and Central America and the West Indies*, now in press). The names most frequently applied have been *Culex fasciatus*, *C. calopus*, *C. mosquito*, and *C. taniatus*. In 1901 the genus *Stegomyia* was introduced for this species and almost universally adopted, the species now becoming *Stegomyia fasciata*. A readjustment of generic values caused Dyar and Knab to sink the genus *Stegomyia* as a synonym of *Aedes*.¹ A strict application of the laws of priority made the Fabrician name *fasciata* (1805) untenable, the name having twice previously been applied to other species in the genus *Culex*, in 1764 by O. F. Mueller and in 1804 by Meigen.² This has caused the adoption, by those who adhere to the code of nomenclature,

¹The larvæ of Culicidæ classified as independent organisms. Journ. N. Y. Ent. Soc., vol. 14, pp. 169-230, pls. 4-16 (1906).

²Austen, E. E., Nomenclature of *S. fasciata*. Yellow Fever Bur. Bull., vol. 2, p. 3 (1912).

of the next oldest specific name, *calopus* Meigen (1818). But no stability has been reached, many holding that the wide use of the name *fasciatus* justifies its retention.

While engaged in bibliographic work, the writer made the discovery that there is a name for this mosquito which antedates any of those hitherto cited by systematists, and which, according to the laws of priority, will have to supplant the ones now in use. Under the name *Culex argenteus*, the Abbe Poiret, in 1787, in his "Memoire sur quelques insectes de Barbarie," gave a brief diagnosis of this insect. This, with the accompanying remarks, I quote herewith.

Culex argenteus, *dorsum squamis argenteis exornatum, pedibus fasciatis.*

"Quoique cet insecte ait été détruit dans ma collection, j'ai cru devoir en donner la description. C'est le cousin le plus commun en Barbarie. Il est de la grosseur du nôtre, mais si richement paré, que je lui ai souvent pardonné ses piquûres pour le plaisir de l'admirer. Tout son corps, particulièrement le dos, est couvert d'écailles argentées, placées sur lui comme autant de paillettes orbiculaires & brillantes. Ses pattes sont ornées de bandes alternatives brunes & argentées."¹

There can hardly be a doubt that the insect thus described was the yellow fever mosquito; it was evidently already well established at that period in the coast towns of northern Africa. The ingenuous remark of the Abbe, that he was perfectly willing to tolerate its bite in order to be able to admire its beauty, is most interesting.

The name *Culex argenteus* seems to have altogether escaped modern catalogers. We find it in Gmelin's Thirteenth edition of the Linnean Systema Naturæ, vol. 1, part 5, p. 2888 (1792), and it is indicated in Hagen's Bibliotheca Entomologica. Much as another change is to be regretted, the yellow fever mosquito should now be called scientifically *Aedes argenteus* (Poiret).

¹Journ. de Physique, vol. 30, p. 245 (April, 1787).