

... it's a court response to Harrington

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In responding to my case for retaining "court" for the display area of male Tooth-billed Bowerbirds (*Scenopoeetes dentiostri*) my old friend Graham Harrington (GH) notes that I brought "much scholarly material" to support my argument (Frith 2016; Harrington 2017). Unfortunately he ignores much of that material and addresses only a small proportion of the evidence I presented. He also misrepresents some of what I wrote. I must, respectfully, respond.

- In quoting authors that referred to bowers "in terms that imply a structure, or use such terms as "build" or "construct"" I did not state or imply that they were "making arguments regarding the definition of a bower". As GH notes, they were "describing what their study species were preparing in the way of display artifacts"; which was my point.
- To suggest that there is no reason to consider dictionary definitions of the word bower when the issue is specifically the inappropriate application of that word is as odd as the statement that the context is different.
- GH writes that "bower" was "based on a loosely conceived term of convenience" despite my showing this was not the case. Unlike names of convenience for our native birds (e.g. wrens, chats, robins, magpies etc.) John Gould used bower with specific intent. It is irrelevant that in applying "bower" to avenue structures, in making them first known to science, Gould did so before those (and associated behaviours) of other bowerbird species were known.
- The statement that the Tooth-bill's court has "exactly" the same function as that of the

Golden Bowerbird (*Amblyornis newtonianus*) is not justified. They do share a basic function, in different ways, but bowers provide substantial additional information to females as summarised in my original paper (Frith 2016). Present knowledge cannot support this statement, even if applied to the markedly different bowers within the maypole building species.

- GH suggests that it could be that the Tooth-bill's court is ""constructed" with leaves rather than with grass or twigs". It is clear, however, that while bower building species construct with grass, twigs, and other vegetation, they decorate with, among other things, leaves — just as the Tooth-bill decorates its court with leaves — as is so widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Frith & Frith 2004: 266, and references therein).
- That GH concludes "the term bower is not a scientifically defined term" is surprising, as it is defined in a number of scientific publications and in the text he responds to (Frith 2016; see references therein).
- A paragraph by GH details how some bowers and Tooth-bill courts are found in the same spot season after season. He claims this to be "Another essential similarity of the Tooth-billed Bowerbird's behaviour to other Bowerbird [sic] species" [but it is apparently not typical of the Regent Bowerbird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*) and probably other *Sericulus* species (Lenz 1999; Frith & Frith 2009)]. It fails to take into account that traditional (i.e. used over consecutive years) display leks, courts (some decorated), or perches are typical of male birds of paradise, contingas, manakins and other polygynous

birds with the same basic function as bowers; and thus mounts a parochial case. How, then, can the Tooth-bill's traditional use of sites be pertinent to the nomenclature of bowerbird display sites? [I agree with GH's generational "memory" explanation (see Frith & Frith 2004: 128).]

- The statement "My assertion is that it is the term "bower" which is anomalous because the human bower is completely different *in structure and function*" (my emphasis) contradicts widely available evidence. The avenue bowers Gould saw were to him reminiscent of English garden bowers *in structure and function* (i.e. a bow shape of two parallel inwardly curving 'walls' of vegetation used as a place for courting by couples).
- My observation that it is "disruptive to an established and logically applied nomenclature for [world] avian courts and bowers" to change court to bower for Tooth-bill display sites is not addressed. Why change a long and widely accepted usage that has proven to serve well?
- Of the 21 megapode species (Megapodiidae) all but four accumulate large mounds of vegetation to then burrow into to lay their eggs. The eggs are incubated within the mound, by fermentation. The four species that do not use mounds lay their eggs in excavated burrows, where they hatch by thermal or solar heat (Jones *et al.* 1995). Should we, then, call the burrows of these four species mounds because, to paraphrase GH, "if it smells like a mound and functions like a mound then...." it's a mound! A consideration of the dictionary definition of "mound" would not be out of context.

Use of the well established word *court* to describe the cleared display area of the equally well established name of Tooth-billed Bowerbird is in no way inconsistent as the former reflects a cleared area and the latter a taxonomic grouping. The species is as much a bowerbird as are the monogamous *Ailuroedus* catbirds, and its court is indeed a court just as are those clearings similarly produced for the courting of females by the promiscuous males of a suite of taxonomically diverse bird species world wide.

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