

IOUEA: A CREATIVE COUP

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In “IOUEA: A Cretaceous Coup” in the November 1993 Word Ways, Susan Thorpe reported her discovery of IOUEA, the name of a fossil sponge genus in *The Encyclopedia of Paleontology* (1979), written by Rhodes Fairbridge and David Jablonski. (This five-letter all-vowel word also appears in *Nomenclator Zoologicus*.) I wrote recently to Dr. Michelle Kelly Shanks, a world authority on sponges, in Auckland, New Zealand after I read in a paper of hers of a living species of the genus IOUEA. I was also interested in how de Laubenfels came to name the genus back in 1955. She replied in part:

“I think MW de Laubenfels is a real trick! He designed the name in 1955 (*Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*) for a fossil called *Phalangium Schrammen*, 1910. I now realize what he has done—he has taken the vowels aeiou and made them into a word. What a joke—I never thought of that! He was always doing this sort of thing! He must have also been a wordsmith like yourself as he was noted for the odd names that he gave sponges. De Laubenfels (1954) on Micronesian sponges is full of them. There is a sponge genus *Zyzzya*, and what about *Hoplochalina agogo*! This last he admitted to be an arbitrary combination of letters, in the paper.

“De Laubenfels was an awesome biologist and paleontologist who was a lord and tyrant in the field. I had the privilege of speaking to one of his field assistants when I was working at the National History Museum in London (this assistant-turned-professor was about 90!) and he said that he used to sit in canoes in Micronesia with his top hat and suit on looking into the water. He would point to a sponge and a native would immediately be ordered to dive in and retrieve it. The wonderful thing for me as a biologist is that I have collected the same species as he described from Micronesia and they are identical to his descriptions from many years ago. Sponges are notoriously difficult to separate species-wise and bang they are!

“Yes, *Iouea moreti* Lévi & Lévi (1988) is the only known living species of the genus and is confined to the seamounts of the northern end of the Norfolk ridge (New Caledonia). In 1999 I collected what I thought was another species, but have yet to describe this sponge. We have an *Iouea*-like sponge in New Zealand. I will be able to let you know if it is a unique NZ species by February.

“The sad news for you is that IOUEA was recently given a new name by a Polish worker. I quote from the *Systema Porifera*:

The type species of this new genus *Neoschrammeniella* [*Iouea moreti*] has been attributed by Levi & Levi (1988) to the fossil genus *Iouea* de Laubenfels, 1955 (= *Phalangium Schrammen*, 1910, preoccupied), which is a junior synonym of *Schrammeniella Breitstorfer*, 1947 (see Lagneau-Herenger, 1962, 1968). They follow Sollas’s (1988) approach by proposing a new name *Neoschrammeniella* for the Recent (i.e. living species) form attributed to the fossil genus *Iouea*, because of significant differences in the composition of the desmas and the uncertainty of microsclere geometries in the fossil genus.

So how’s that for a stultifying taxonomic jargonistic explanation!!”