

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Electronic publication

At last year's Nomenclature Section of the XVII International Botanical Congress a major step forward was taken in recognising the importance of electronic publication for the communication of scientific information. More than 200 botanists attending the Section in Vienna joined in a wide-ranging and vigorous debate about this increasingly important issue for taxonomy.

The first Special Committee for Electronic Publication (SCEP) was established at the Tokyo Congress in 1993. This committee concluded that approval of electronic publication would be premature at that time (Zander & Wilson, 1998). The SCEP was re-established at the XVI IBC in St. Louis to report to the Vienna Congress. The proposals put forward by this committee (Zander, 2004) received a strong negative mail vote and so were not discussed in Vienna. Instead, a large group of attendees worked over several days to draft new proposals that were put from the floor.

Although it was recognised that it is still premature to permit entirely electronic publication of botanical novelties, what may be seen as the first steps towards full acceptance of electronic publication as one of the means of effective publication were approved for inclusion in the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature*. The Section approved a minor modification to Article 29 of the Code, as well as explicit Recommendations outlining best practice for publication in "electronic" journals (i.e., those with parallel print and electronic versions).

The Special Committee is to be re-established, to monitor further developments and to report to the next Congress in Melbourne in 2011. We feel it is important that the issues involved are widely discussed in the community well before then, and we encourage botanists to air their views in the pages of *Taxon*.

Some of the continuing issues with electronic publication that we feel need wide-ranging discussion include:

Archiving: Currently, although the WWW is archived regularly, there is no guarantee that this will prove to be a permanent archive. Archiving, whether of electronic or printed works, cannot be mandated in the Code, but it is still of great concern to botanists, as is the question of unalterable and clearly paginated electronic versions of works. Various initiatives are looking at these issues, and it will be important to monitor developments in this field. Until stable and permanent electronic publications are attainable, it will remain necessary to produce a number of printed copies of any publication. The Code has never been explicit on the number of printed copies

required for effective publication, and the present wording can be interpreted to mean just two copies in different libraries. To improve the situation a Recommendation advising a much larger print run (at least 10 copies in different libraries, including at least one of the major name indexing centres) and wider distribution was approved by the Section.

Accessibility: The increasing reliance by peer-reviewed journals on electronic editions, and the ease of distribution of electronic copies, means that print media have an uncertain future. The decreasing purchasing and storage capacities of libraries world-wide are also adversely affecting distribution of printed journals. Thus issues of access to new names transcend the medium of publication. We envisage an interim stage when effective publication of nomenclatural novelties will require deposit of printed copies in several libraries, preferably including one linked to a major name-indexing centre, but the main dissemination of such works will be electronic.

Date of publication: A proposal from the floor to make the date of availability of the first version of a nomenclatural work, whether electronic or printed, the date of effective publication was heavily defeated. It was regarded as impractical because of the extra work involved in finding both versions and determining, often *a posteriori*, which appeared first. Issues of dating will continue to be important to publication in electronic journals and we feel the taxonomic community will need to liaise with journals and publishers to resolve these issues.

What type of electronic medium? By including suggestions for best practice for publication in electronic journals via the World Wide Web, we feel the botanical community has expressed a preference for this medium, rather than distributable media such as CD-ROMs (as are acceptable under Article 8.6 of the 4th edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride & al., 1999; see also www.iczn.org/iczn/)), as our preferred option for electronic publication. It will be interesting to follow developments in electronic media, software and archiving over the next few years and their influence on the direction of electronic publication of botanical works.

We strongly encourage our fellow botanists to discuss these critically important issues here in the pages of *Taxon* and elsewhere. The new Special Committee will have a lot of issues to consider, and it will need as wide a range of input as possible to be able to put acceptable

proposals to the next Nomenclature Session at the Melbourne Congress in 2011.

*Sandra Knapp*¹, *Karen Wilson*² & *Mark Watson*³

¹ *Department of Botany, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, U.K. s.knapp@nhm.ac.uk (author for correspondence).*

² *National Herbarium of New South Wales, Royal Botanic Gardens, Mrs Macquaries Road, Sydney NSW 2000, Australia.*

³ *Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 20a Inverleith Row, Edinburgh, EH3 5LR, U.K.*

Literature cited

Ride, W. D. L., Cogger, H. G., Dupuis, C., Kraus, O., Minelli, A., Thompson, F. C. & Tubbs, P. K. 1999. *The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*, ed. 4. The International Trust for Zoological Nomenclature, London.

Zander, R. H. 2004. (180–181) Report of the Special Committee on Electronic Publishing with two proposals to amend the Code. *Taxon* 53: 592–594.

Zander, R. H. & Wilson, K. L. 1998. (10–13) Four proposals to amend the Code, and report of the Special Committee on Electronic Publishing and Databasing. *Taxon* 47: 175–177.