

MEMORANDUM ON THE NOMENCLATURE OF FOREST TREES

With reference to the Motions in favour of *nomina specifica conservanda*, forwarded to the Sixth International Botanical Congress, by the Imperial Forestry Institute, on behalf of certain bodies interested in Forestry, the following Government Departments and other bodies and individuals have expressed themselves in favour of the Motions:

Britain.—The Forestry Commission; The Forest Products Research Laboratory; The Imperial Forestry Institute; The Imperial Institute; The Society of Foresters of Great Britain; The Empire Forestry Association; The Royal English Forestry Society; The Royal Scottish Forestry Society; The Rothamsted Experimental Station; The John Innes Horticultural Institution; The Royal Horticultural Society; The Timber Trade Federation of the United Kingdom.

The Dominions.—The Inspector General of Forests to the Government of India; The Director of Forests, Canada; The Director, State Forest Service, New Zealand; Mr. E. Phillips Turner, formerly Director of Forestry, New Zealand; The New Zealand Institute of Foresters; The Forest Products Division, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Canberra, Australia; The Forestry Commission, New South Wales; The Australian Forest League, New South Wales Branch; The Royal Society of New South Wales; The Technological Museum, Sydney; The Forestry Division, Department of Agriculture and Forests, Union of South Africa; The Forestry Division, Department of Agriculture and Forests, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

Colonial Forestry and Agricultural Departments (including Protectorates and Mandated Territories).—The Forestry Departments of Trinidad; British Guiana; British Honduras; Nigeria; Gold Coast; Sierra Leone; Kenya; Tanganyika Territory; Uganda; Nyasaland; The Forest Research Institute, Kepong, Selangor, Federated Malay States. The Government Agricultural Department, Trinidad.

Botanists.—The Department of Botany, Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad; Prof. Sir W. Wright Smith, F.R.S.E.; Dr. M. C. Rayner, Bedford College, University of London; Prof. W. Neilson Jones, University of London; Prof. M. L. Fernald, Harvard University; Prof. W. L. Jepson, University of California; Dr. Alfred Rehder, Arnold Arboretum; Mr. C. E. Parkinson, Forest Botanist, Dehra Dun, India; The Director, Botanic Gardens, Singapore; Dr. A. S. Hitchcock, Systematic Agrostologist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, U.S.A.; Mr. C. Vigne, Silviculturist, Kumasi, Gold Coast; Mr. J. D. Kennedy, Silviculturist, Sapoba, Nigeria.

Failure to adapt botanical nomenclature more closely to the needs of workers in botany (e.g. Forest Botanists, Agriculturists, Plant Pathologists, Ecologists, Geneticists, etc.) is making it difficult for the latter to adapt their literature to changes made from time to time under the International Rules, and if persisted in will necessitate the preparation of an independent list of names to be used by Forest Officers and others. The Forestry Commission has already adopted such a list. The Inspector General of Forests to the Government of India states that 'If these motions are not passed I shall have to consider the appointment of a committee to deal with *nomina specifica conservanda* as far as Indian forestry is concerned, irrespective of what names European botanists may give to our trees'.

It is highly desirable that the necessity for such a course should be avoided, and this can be accomplished by adoption of the Motions.

The following are extracts from some of the letters received in support of the proposals.

'In this country, legislation mentions various species by name and any change of name entails an amendment to the legislation and leads to confusion, I therefore most strongly support the principle of *nomina specifica conservanda*.'—*The Acting Conservator of Forests, Tanganyika Territory*.

'Foresters greatly resent the changing of names of well-known forest trees without any reference to the persons mostly concerned. Such confusion now exists that it is impossible to say what the correct name of any tree is.'—*The Inspector*

General of Forests to the Government of India, on behalf of the Forestry Service of India and Burma.

‘The frequent changing of names that have been well-established by long usage, for well-known trees, is a source of much confusion to us and I have often been addressed on the subject by foresters and others who are under the impression that there is something wrong with botanical nomenclature and have expressed the view that something should be done about it.’—*Mr. C. E. Parkinson, Forest Botanist and Deputy Conservator of Forests, Dehra Dun.*

‘I think that from the point of view of both foresters and horticulturists the conservation of a limited number of well-known specific names is most desirable, and that the principle should be admitted to the rules of nomenclature. The safeguards you propose seem to me adequate to prevent any abuse of the principle.’—*The Director, Botanic Gardens, Singapore.*

‘You may count us all in as whole-hearted supporters of the motion, which seems likely to have the approval of every reasonably minded forester throughout the Empire.’—*The Director, Forest Research Institute, Keping, Selangor, Federated Malay States.*

‘The Royal Society has itself proposed the conservation of the names of 10 important timber trees of New South Wales, and a further resolution that specific botanical names which have been used for a period exceeding 50 years should be retained.’—*Royal Society of New South Wales.*

‘The Congress would confer a boon on the Forest Service of New South Wales if it could see its way to adopt your proposed motions, and also place the undermentioned N.S.W. species among the nomina conservanda. These species are mostly important commercial species, and the names suggested to be conserved have been in use for over 50 years.’—*The Acting Commissioner, Forestry Commission of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.*

The New Zealand State Forest Service ‘supports all three Motions and I should be glad if you mentioned it as a supporting body, if you deem that course necessary or advisable.’—*The Director of Forestry, Wellington.*

‘I am quite in accord with you as far as the question affects those trees which are of importance in forestry or are much used in arboriculture. . . . With respect to the botanical names of Douglas fir, Norway spruce, and those others given in the circular, in fact all trees much used in arboriculture or of importance in forests, I am quite in accord with your own views.’—*Mr. E. Phillips Turner (formerly Director of Forestry, New Zealand)*.

‘The adoption of such a list is most whole-heartedly urged by the Forest Service of the Union of South Africa, in so far as the commonly cultivated trees are concerned. I am anxious that this support of the motion should be brought to the notice of Congress, and would ask you to arrange that this is done.’—*The Chief: Division of Forest Management, Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Union of South Africa*.

‘It would be a distinct advantage if, when a botanical specific name for a commercially important plant is under discussion, the better known name could be retained and have priority over what may, strictly speaking, be a more correct botanical term.’—*The Acting Chief Forest Officer, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia*.

‘The adoption of the principle of *nomina specifica conservanda* for a limited list of important trees, is urgently needed.’—*The Conservator of Forests, Zomba, Nyasaland*.

‘On behalf of the Kenya Forest Department, I wish most strongly to urge that the rules of nomenclature should be so amended as to permit of the retention of the specific names of important trees which have become universally recognised, even though names with better legal claim to adoption should come to light.’—*The Conservator of Forests, Nairobi, Kenya Colony*.

‘On behalf of the Forest Department of Uganda I should like to support the Motions. Practical foresters find the alteration of names, which they have come to regard as ‘household words’ in their duties, very disconcerting.’—*The Conservator of Forests, Entebbe, Uganda*.

‘I am in complete agreement with your proposals and am prepared to support your ideas of a solution of the difficulty. The same difficulties are experienced in Nigeria of keeping track

of name changes, which at times appear somewhat arbitrary and often unnecessary.'—*The Conservator of Forests, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

'I am strongly in favour of some form of stabilisation of botanical nomenclature, particularly in respect of trees of merchantable species.'—*The Acting Conservator of Forests, Accra, Gold Coast.*

'The Forest Department of this Colony strongly supports the three motions recommending the adoption of nomina specifica conservanda, to be submitted to the Sixth International Botanical Congress.'—*The Conservator of Forests, Freetown, Sierra Leone.*

'In British Honduras we have always been involved in a considerable amount of confusion with botanical names, and I wish to add my support to the motions urging the adoption of the principle of nomina specifica conservanda.'—*The Conservator of Forests, Belize, British Honduras.*

'I am strongly in favour of the motions to be submitted to the Sixth International Botanical Congress, and wish you success in your efforts to avoid the confusion which exists at present from the frequent changes in the names of trees of commercial interest.'—*The Conservator of Forests, Mazaruni, British Guiana.*

'We are in favour of the principle of nomina specifica conservanda.'—*The Assistant Director of Agriculture, and the Conservator of Forests, Trinidad.*

'The value of the principle of nomina specifica conservanda to forestry, as also to minor crops, weeds and other economic semi-wild species, is unquestionable and its adoption would meet with our support.'—*The Botanical Department, The Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad.*

'We in Canada are strongly in favour of stabilising the nomenclature of well-known trees. Practically all the evidence of priority must have been ferreted out by the botanists by now, and if some obscure references do turn up in the future, there should be some limitation set.'—*The Director of Forestry, Ottawa, Canada.*

'I have been in favour of the conservation of certain binomials and had presented a motion to that effect to the last Congress. . . . It seems advisable to bring this matter again before the next Congress.'—*Dr. A. Rehder, Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, U.S.A.*

'I recommended this [the adoption of nomina specifica conservanda] in a paper presented at the Ithaca Congress. I also supported this proposition at the Cambridge Congress. . . . I am ready to support at the next Congress a proposition to establish a limited list of conserved specific names.'—*Dr. A. S. Hitchcock, Systematic Agrostologist, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington.*

'Cogent objections to a limited nomina specifica conservanda list do not now occur to me. I think first of the case of *Sequoia gigantea*. No legislation by botanical congresses ever has been able or will be able to stop the use of *Sequoia gigantea* by the general scientific world or by the lay public.'—*Prof. W. L. Jepson, University of California.*

'In general I am heartily in accord with every move to make nomenclature stable instead of the perpetual moves of the czars and popes to change the Rules radically every five years.'—*Prof. M. L. Fernald, Grey Herbarium, Harvard University.*

The Imperial Institute Advisory Committee of Timbers 'are well acquainted with the perplexities caused to the timber trade by frequent changes in the botanical nomenclature of timber trees, and are of the opinion that the stabilization of such nomenclature would be of great advantage to all concerned in the exploitation and marketing of timber.'

The Nomenclature Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society has expressed its support of the Motions, as detailed in the printed memorandum.

'I am very much in agreement and trust that you will be able to impress the Conference with the importance of the question.'—*Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh.*

'On behalf of the John Innes Horticultural Institution, I desire to express our support of the Motions *re* nomina specifica conservanda which you are to submit to the Sixth International Botanical Congress.'—*The Director.*

'Although this is not a forestry institute we are greatly concerned in the matter of nomenclature and strongly support the adoption of a limited list of nomina specifica conservanda. The problem affects us particularly in regard to pasture grasses and weeds; agriculturists throughout the world are familiar with certain names which have long been in use, and as many of them are remote from libraries and large scientific institutions it would be quite impossible for them to keep track of changes, assuming these were made. They would find it exceedingly confusing if the common plants that they have to handle were liable to have their names changed without notice, and the disadvantages would, in my view, outweigh any possible gain.' — *The Director, Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, Herts.*

The Motions referred to read :—

Motion I. *That the Sixth International Botanical Congress, Amsterdam, 1935, be asked to take into consideration the adoption of a limited list of nomina specifica conservanda especially concerned with trees and other plants which are extensively cultivated or which are otherwise of economic importance.*

Motion II. *That the following Article be added to the International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature :*

Article 21B. To avoid disadvantageous changes in the nomenclature of species of Phanerogamae by the strict application of the Rules of Nomenclature, and especially of the principle of priority in starting from the dates given in Art. 20, the Rules shall provide lists of specific names which must be retained as exceptions. These names shall concern only a limited number of species, and especially those of trees and other plants which are extensively cultivated, or which are otherwise of economic importance. The names to be conserved shall be by preference those which have been in general use in the fifty years immediately preceding the Fifth International Botanical Congress, Cambridge, 1930. The lists of these names shall form an appendix to the Rules.

Motion III. *That a Special Committee be appointed by and at this Congress, to prepare from such lists as have been submitted to it, lists of nomina specifica conservanda, as provided in Art. 21B.*

In relation to these Motions attention may be called to the following extracts from the International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature:

'The essential points in nomenclature are: (1) to aim at fixity of names; (2) to avoid or to reject the use of forms and names which may cause error or ambiguity or throw science into confusion.' *Article 4.*

'Each [taxonomic] group [of plants] with a given circumscription, position and rank, can bear only one valid name, the earliest that is in accordance with the Rules of Nomenclature.' *Article 16.*

'Names of species are binary combinations consisting of the name of the genus followed by a single specific epithet' *Article 27.*

In the amended Rules adopted at the Fifth International Botanical Congress held at Cambridge, 1930, which were not published until the early part of 1935, there is a footnote to Article 16 which reads: 'In species of groups of lower rank, the valid name is the binary or ternary combination containing the earliest epithet published with the same rank, provided that this combination is in conformity with the Rules of Nomenclature.' ~~This provision as to the earliest epithet is not found in the 'Vienna Rules' (1905).~~

If the principle involved in this footnote is confirmed by the Sixth International Botanical Congress, Amsterdam, 1935, it will legalise a practice which appears to have been the cause of much of the name-changing which has taken place in recent years. It is worth serious consideration whether this should not be vetoed in favour of the principle (implied in the Articles quoted above) that the correct name of a species is the first combination (under the correct genus) of generic name and specific epithet without regard to any earlier epithet which the plant might have borne.

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