Proposals on Registration of Plant Names, a New Concept for the Nomenclature of the Future

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(214)-(219) Proposals on registration of plant names, a new concept for the nomenclature of the future.

The "Committee for Registration of Plant Names" was set up by decision of the General Committee, "to study the feasibility of a registration procedure for new names of taxa governed by the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature; to propose ways and means by which such registration can be made to operate; and to report to the Nomenclature Section of the XIV International Botanical Congress."


Time for committee work has been extremely short: four months exactly, between the date of its set-up and the deadline for submitting a report for publication in "Taxon". By consequence the committee members have had a busy time—but they have nevertheless considered most carefully the issues placed before them.

The present report is based on 60 pages of distributed documents (two circulars and the corresponding replies and comments) and on thorough discussions at a committee meeting at the CAB International Mycological Institute, Kew, on April 14–15, 1986; this was attended by all members except P. Silva who was consulted by telephone. In addition to the committee members, the following have been placed on the mailing list and were asked to comment (which most of them did): F. A. Stafleu and E. G. Voss (President and Secretary of the General Committee); O. Solbrig and T. Younès (President and Executive Secretary of the International Union of Biological Sciences); Rita R. Colwell and W. D. L. Ride (IUBS ad hoc Committee on Biological Nomenclature); M. R. Crosby (Index Muscorum); M. Dadd and H. E. Kennedy (BIOSIS).

Their expertise has widened in a most beneficial way the background of knowledge and experience represented by the committee members. W. D. L. Ride and T. Younès were present at the meeting in Kew and took an active part in the debates there.

The Committee gratefully acknowledges financial support by IUBS which has enabled the meeting at Kew to be summoned and organized at very short notice.

What Is Registration?

Generally speaking, registration of names is the process of entering names into a register whereby they acquire a special quality (whereas indexing might be defined as the listing of names that have a defined set of qualities but do not acquire a different status by being indexed). The register may be in the form of a published list or lists, of a paper file, an electronic file, or any combination of these.

Registration, or procedures comparable to registration, already exist in biological nomenclature in at least two fields: (a) in the naming of cultivars, where a multitude of both national and international, nonstatutory and statutory registration authorities are operating (see the "International code of nomenclature for cultivated plants—1980", Arts. 53 to 56); and (b) in bacterial nomenclature where names newly proposed in any publication after 1 January 1980 must, in order to be validly published, be included in the International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology—which has thereby acquired the function of an official register (names published before that date are valid only if they have been entered in "approved lists" that are another kind of register; see the "International code of nomenclature of bacteria, 1976 revision", Rules 24 and 27).

As in the bacteria, registration of plant names is conceivable in two distinct fields: extant names, and new names yet to be proposed. The mandate of the Committee is limited to exploring the latter option. Registration of extant names may be desirable but would be an immense task. It may be envisaged as a subsequent step, if and when a system for the registration of new names has been set up and is operating successfully. The proposals of the Committee deal only with future names, but would not preclude retroactive registration of existing names (in some or all plant groups, at some or all ranks) in the future.
What Are the Merits of Registration?

One major problem for future users of the Code, in our rapidly moving world, will be to determine what is, and what is not, an effective publication. The Nomenclature Section of the XIII International Botanical Congress has extensively discussed this matter (see Englera 2: 66–72. 1982) but has reached no conclusion except for authorizing the General Committee to set up a Special Committee to investigate the issues and to report to the next Congress. Such a committee has been set up but could not find suitable answers yet and is not, apparently, putting forward any proposal. However, Prop. 229 by Hnatiuk and West (see below) and Props. 226–228B by three members of this Committee (Brummitt, Hawksworth and McNeill; see below) attempt to deal with this problem.

Similar uncertainty often prevails in the question of whether or not a name is validly published. This is not due to advances in technology, but to the post-war tightening of the requirements for valid publication which, inevitably, has led to a proliferation of borderline cases. By consequence there has been a general tendency towards making the relevant provisions of the Code more detailed and more explicit (see the report on the Sydney debates—Englera 2: 72–84). Doubtless the Special Committee on Valid Publication that was appointed after Sydney will propose a number of useful clarifications. One must however face the fact that rules covering every possible issue can never be devised since, as we all know, it is impossible to predict the manyfold whims of botanical authors.

A further important point in which increased precision would be most desirable is that of the date of names. This problem is as old as nomenclature itself—yet we have by no means come closer to its solution. The unsettled question of the exact dates of two competing names, Linaria turisdica B. Valdés and Linaria donyanae Valdés-Berm. et al., which have almost equal claim to priority (see Cabezudo in Trab. Monogr. Dep. Bot. Málaga 2: 131–132. 1981), is a recent example to illustrate this. (Props. 228A–228B also include options for a mechanism for dating new names more accurately.)

The inherent weakness of the present system is that it burdens the individual botanists with the responsibility of deciding on effectiveness of publication, validity and date of the names they want to use. This results, not only in tedious and time-consuming searches detrimental to the taxonomic work proper but, worse, in different answers being given by different people to the same question.

The remedy is: registration. A registered name is guaranteed to be validly and effectively published, and available for use from a date that can be recorded with greatest precision. The criteria for effectiveness, validity and date would be applied by an authorized and experienced group of persons in a uniform way to each individual name (and a committee would stand ready to decide on controversial cases). The botanical user could take all names placed on the register at face value, without further checking.

The problems are not new, but the answer is. Past attempts to resolve some of the difficulties just outlined—e.g. by limiting valid publication of new names to one or a few journals—have failed because they restricted the freedom of individual botanists intolerably, and also because they were judged to be unrealistic from an economic and organizational point of view. It is the Committee's belief that, with the proposed registration system, recent advances in technology will permit to overcome these difficulties.

Systematic biologists attending the III International Congress of Systematic and Evolutionary Biology in Brighton, July 1985, felt the same. In a resolution, they "urged the General Committee for Botanical Nomenclature . . . to take steps to establish registration procedures for new scientific names in Botany" and "encouraged the next International Botanical Congress, through its Nomenclature Section, . . . to consider introducing provisions into the Code to make registration of new names mandatory once satisfactory registration procedures have been established and are operating". (A similar plea was addressed to the zoologists, who are facing the same problems as we botanists.) The International Union of Biological Sciences, at its XXI General Assembly in Budapest, September 1985, endorsed the ICSEB resolution and transmitted it to the General Committee for appropriate action. The present report proposes the terms of a timely answer to a request addressed by the whole biological community to those who are in charge of the rules of nomenclature.

The Proposed Procedure

Time was too short to devise a fully operational registration procedure, and the basic questions of division of labour and of requirements of equipment, staff and finance are yet unanswered. There was a general consensus, however, on the following essential points:
A decentralized registration system is to be preferred, operating under the ultimate authority of the General Committee and of the International Botanical Congresses, and implemented and coordinated by the IAPT.

In view of the fundamental analogy between traditional indexing and the proposed registration, the existing and planned indexing services should be asked in the first place to serve as centres for the registration of names in their respective fields (which would take care of all living organisms whose names are governed by the Botanical Code, but not so far of the fossil plants); first exploratory contacts have been encouraging.

A fully operational system must be in place, and must have been tested by a trial run, before registration becomes mandatory.

The system must be financially self-supporting in the long run, although one may reasonably expect partial funding of its set-up through appropriate sources. Registration shall be free of charge for the authors of names, and shall not result in any kind of taxonomic censorship.

The Committee was facing a major dilemma insofar as procedure and timing are concerned. On the one hand, it would be unrealistic (and indeed unfair) to ask the Nomenclature Section to accept a system that is not known in detail, and whose material background is far from being secured. On the other hand, negotiations for a concrete set-up and, worse, trial runs based on existing indexing services are impossible to achieve on a background of uncertainty as to whether the principle of registration will eventually be approved. The planning and implementation of a registration system inevitably will cost, and any potential sponsor will need some kind of guarantee of the chances of final success.

The proposals now submitted try to get around this difficulty in a somewhat unorthodox way. They would introduce the principle of registration into the Code, but would not make it mandatory till after the XV International Botanical Congress in 1993. In the meantime, detailed guidelines for registration would have to be worked out, and the whole system of registration would have to be put into place and tried out. The Nomenclature Section would then, in 1993, be free to either proceed and make registration mandatory, or postpone it to a later date, or even step back from the registration concept if it should prove to be viable.

The majority of the Committee feel that this is a fair approach, and the only one that can realistically be successful. The one dissenting member (Brummitt) wants to have it put on record that he disagrees with the proposed procedure, not necessarily with the principle of registration. He considers it undesirable to place a definition in the Berlin Code of something which cannot exist until after the following Congress, and does not wish to commit that Congress in advance to making decisions on particular issues. He also emphasizes the undesirability of an expensive new bureaucracy, and feels that the concept of registration has to be considered in the light of proposals currently submitted to the Berlin Congress concerning Arts. 29 and 30 and their impact on defining effective publication and accurate dating of new names. However, he supports this Committee's proposals to set up a mechanism for investigating registration.

The Committee will not be inactive between now and the Berlin Congress. It will, as a next step, devise the guidelines and rules that might govern the registration of plant names in the future. It will, in particular, identify potentially controversial issues and will stand ready to submit these to the Section, for an opinion, in the event that its basic proposals are accepted. This would ensure that the future guidelines meet the needs and wishes of the taxonomic community in the best possible way.

It is hoped that some of the new technology now available for indexing and registering names can be demonstrated to the members of the Nomenclature Section during their meeting in Berlin.

Proposals

The Committee submits the following proposals for amendment of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature to the Nomenclature Section of the XIV International Botanical Congress (the Committee vote is added parenthetically after each proposal):

(214) Proposal to add a new paragraph after Art. 6.2: "Registration is achieved by entering into an official register names that otherwise meet the criteria for valid publication (see Art. 32.1(e))."—(4: 1).

This is the proposed definition of the term "registration". The word "otherwise" makes it clear that, after the date mentioned in Art. 32.1, registration will be one of the requirements to be met for the valid publication of a name.
(215) Proposal to add a new item to Art. 32.1: “(e) in addition, names (autonyms excepted) published on or after a date to be established by the XV International Botanical Congress must be registered.” — (4:1).

(216) Proposal to insert in Div. III.2, after (1): “Committee for Registration, including the ex-officio members of the General Committee.” — (5:0).

If this is accepted, the secretaries of the other permanent nomenclature committees, the rapporteur-général, and the president and secretary of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy would be ex-officio members of the new committee. Others would be added at the discretion of the Section.

(217) General proposal “That the General Committee, upon proposal by the Committee for Registration, set up a "Guide for the Registration of New Plant Names", to be published in “Taxon” and to be submitted to the XV International Botanical Congress.” — (5:0).

(218) General proposal “That the Committee for Registration be given mandate to actively investigate, negotiate and test the structures, procedures and mechanisms, including finance, required for the implementation of a system for the registration of new plant names.” — (5:0).

Having extensively discussed the question of criteria to be met by vehicles of newly proposed plant names in order to qualify as effective publications, the Committee draws attention to the fact that rulings to this effect are being proposed (Props. 226–228B) separately by three of its members; and, in the event that their proposals should not gain general or immediate acceptance at the Berlin Congress, further recommends

(219) Proposal “That the Committee for Registration be instructed to devise incorporating the requirements for effective publication into the “Guide for the Registration of New Plant Names.” — (5:0).

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(220)–(223) Proposals to treat names covered by Art. 69 under Art. 14.

The question of whether the Code should allow for specific names to be either conserved or rejected has been much debated in recent decades. One of the strongest arguments against having formally approved lists of such names has been that the number of cases will be too great for the relevant committees to deal with. Nevertheless, formal rejection of specific names under Art. 69 and their placement on a list was introduced at the Leningrad Congress in 1975, and conservation of specific names (restricted to species of major economic importance) was allowed at the Sydney Congress in 1981. In the Sydney Code the list of rejected names was established as Appendix IV on p. 427, though it consists of only a single name, *Bromus purgans* L., the only one passed by the relevant committees between 1975 and 1981. It is, however, clear that, as the Code stands at present, future editions will be required to include two appendices of specific names, those rejected under Art. 69 in Appendix IV and those conserved and rejected under Art. 14 in (presumably) Appendix V. In addressing ourselves to these problems we have come to realize that the listing of names in the Code could be simplified, and stability of names could be promoted, by introduction of a simple procedure which would involve committees in no more work than they currently are required to do.

At present a name which has been widely and persistently misapplied may be rejected under Art. 69. This requires publication of a proposal in *Taxon*, detailed consideration by the committee for the appropriate plant group, publication of a recommendation by that committee in *Taxon*, adoption of that recommendation by the General Committee, and finally formal approval by an International Botanical Congress. Exactly the same procedure is required for conservation of a name under Art. 14. To an outsider, and indeed to many involved in the process, it may seem ridiculous that such an amount of time and effort is put into rejecting well known names when with certainly no more effort...