Report of the Committee for Fossil Plants: 2

Judith E. Skog

The previous report of this committee appeared in Taxon 42: 869-872. 1993. The Committee for Fossil Plants has since then considered three proposals for conservation and recommends all three. The Committee also expresses an opinion on proposals to amend the Code that affect fossil plant nomenclature and on several nomenclature items of general concern, such as the proposed “BioCode”, registration of names, and names in current use.

Membership of the Committee was as established by the last Congress (see Taxon 42: 924. 1993) except for the following changes: J. Skog assumed the duties of Secretary of the Committee in 1994; R. Ravn and F. Schaaarschmidt were considered to have resigned under the current Committee Guidelines (Taxon 45: 526. 1996) due to lack of response. The Committee thus consists of 13 members, but only 10 of them responded to the ballot. Under the current Committee Guidelines, 8 votes (60 % of the membership) are needed to recommend for or against a proposal. The votes are recorded in the order yes : no : abstention.

Conservation proposals


The modern fern name Cyclopteris Schrad. ex Gray is an illegitimate renaming of Cystopteris Bernh., yet it is a validly published and predates Cyclopteris Brongn. The latter name refers to a genus of fossil leaves and is in general use. The illegitimate fern name is not in use, and the Committee for Pteridophyta (in Taxon 48: 134. 1999) has agreed to its rejection. The loss of the fossil name would destabilise many Carboniferous plant species names. Conservation is necessary.


The basionym was originally published as Filicites [unranked] Nevoxopteris Brongn., but the spelling was changed to Neuropteris by Sternberg when he adopted generic rank. The generic name is in common usage. The holotype of the name of the single original species, F. heterophyllus Brongn., was recently rediscovered and proved to belong, not to the species to which it is currently applied but to a different species known by the later name N. tenuifolia Schloth. ex Sternb. (and recently transferred to a genus distinct from Neuropteris, as Laveineopteris tenuifolia (Schloth. ex Sternb.) Cleal & al.). Without conservation as proposed, the species now known as N. heterophylla would require a new name, whereas L. tenuifolia would disappear and be replaced by N. heterophylla; Laveineopteris would be synonymous with Neuropteris, requiring description of a new genus for Neuropteris sensu Cleal & al. and transfer of numerous species presently assigned to that genus.

1 Biology Department, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030, U.S.A.
Conservation of the names *Neuropteris* and *N. heterophylla* with the Brongniart 1831 specimen as type, as proposed, will avoid this confusion, which would affect many of the older Carboniferous floras and stratigraphic works, making comparisons difficult. The majority of the committee agreed. Two members felt that the arguments were not clear and compelling enough for conservation and that, after renewed study of the material, the numerous necessary name changes should be made.


The proposal seeks to establish the more commonly used name for the family, as it is based upon *Rhaetogonyaulax*, the widely known name of a genus of Triassic dinoflagellates, rather than on its seldom cited junior synonym *Shubilkodinium*. The family name based upon the latter has priority. The proposal promotes clarity and consistency, especially since the subfamily name *Rhaetogonyaulacoideae* Below also exists. The Committee agrees (see also Taxon 48: 812. 1999).

*Proposals to amend the Code*

The Committee was asked to express its opinion on a number of proposals concerning fossil plant nomenclature. Since there were some general principles involved in several of these proposals, the Committee also considered the question whether some change was needed in handling the problem of "form taxa". The Committee clearly wants clarification regarding these issues.

General question (A): Is change needed in the *Code* for treatment of "form taxa", regardless of what they are called? – Votes: 8 : 2 : 0.

General question (B): Should these provisions be in the body of the *Code* rather than in a separate Article? – Votes: 9 : 0 : 1.

In addition, the committee was encouraged to express its opinion on three general subjects: the BioCode, registration, and names in current use. General comments on all these proposals expressed the view that more thought was required ahead of their implementation. Some concern was expressed that the year 2000 (and millennium fever) had an attraction for change, resulting in proposals that required more analysis. The main misgivings on registration concerned the acceptance of the date of registration rather than the date of publication, and the increased paperwork required. Generating NCU lists of fossils was considered as an overwhelming task, acting as a deterrent. No one was comfortable with the thought of adopting any of the lists currently available for fossil groups.

Biocode. – Votes: 0 : 9 : 1.
Registration. – Votes: 2 : 6 : 2.
Names in current use. – Votes: 0 : 9 : 1.


Opinions on these proposals varied. Most Committee members disliked the term "parataxa", feeling that it introduces confusion of taxonomy and nomenclature into the *Code*, or that it involves the risk of ambiguity of meaning, or because it is not used in the zoological *Code*. Some members felt that Art. 1 was perfectly clear as it
stands and that no change is necessary: "No matter what the prefix is, a taxon is a taxon, period."


The Committee was quite clear that fossil plants should not be mentioned under Art. 3, because they do fall into the general hierarchy of names. Giving special status to some genera because they are not assignable to a family confuses the issue. Other plants are not assignable to families either, yet they do not receive special mention in this Article.


Comments by those voting indicate that, had the words "only if the holotype is completely degraded or lost" been added, Prop. (49) might have been favoured. Microfossils were recognised as being a special case. Also, the vote was influenced by other proposals concerning these articles, such as deletion of Art. 8.3 (Prop. (94) = Art. 8 Prop. D), favoured by some Committee members.


The Committee considered these proposals as a welcome clarification.

[to follow the opinion of the Committee for Algae].

The Committee votes indicate that it is necessary to allow two or more names to exist for the same biological entity in cases where the names are applied to different parts; also, one name may stand for a concept encompassing several biological entities, and should not be tied to one of them. This situation exists because of taphonomic processes, and such names often have stratigraphic value. A change is favoured.


In a general way (see question (B), above), a separate Article for fossil plants was not favoured by the Committee; however, the proposal hinges on the fate of other proposals, and no definite consensus on this specific issue was reached in the Committee. If the proposals made under Art. 11 did pass, there might be no need for a separate Article.