

**BRITISH BRYOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
**TROPICAL BRYOLOGY GROUP**

*New objectives and directions for the TBG ?  
A summary of progress: the first 15 years of the TBG*

Michelle Price and Brian O'Shea

The Tropical Bryology Group (TBG) was created with a view to encouraging and promoting research on Tropical Bryophytes. It has been successful, perhaps even beyond the expectations of its founders, in achieving its original objectives. The TBG, specifically the core members of the group, have contributed to: increasing the knowledge of certain under-known tropical areas; to the scientific understanding of certain taxonomic groups; and to collecting efforts and herbarium activities in certain countries. They have produced over 50 publications resulting directly from their TBG involvement (see Bibliography). A website for TBG has been developed to contain and allow access to this rich source of tropical bryological information and resources.

Here we review the progress made by TBG between 1986 and 2002. This review is based on the original TBG discussion document (see publication 1 on the TBG website - currently at [http://nhm.ac.uk/hosted\\_sites/bbstbg](http://nhm.ac.uk/hosted_sites/bbstbg)) which summarised comments received by TBG members under the various topics of focus (collecting; herbaria; data storage and processing; research; literature / information; overseas responsibilities; conservation; funding). It also includes a look at possibilities for the TBG in the future, re-assessing TBG objectives and aims, focus and direction.

## **1. Introduction**

The formation of a Tropical Bryology Group was first proposed by Longton (1985a, b) who stressed the need to focus bryological research efforts on tropical areas. The tropics, in comparison to temperate zones, were bryologically under-known and remained at greater risk from habitat destruction as areas were exploited for their rich resources. It was considered especially important to encourage collaboration and cooperation between the members of a TBG and bryologists working in the tropics. The TBG was formed as a result of an informal meeting of interested parties during the annual meeting of the British Bryological Society in Leeds in 1986; the sixteen attendees discussed the setting up of a TBG, the need for such a group, aims and objectives, coordination of actions, and particular matters of interest to each party. The group was finally initiated in 1988, when its objectives were agreed and a report prepared by Martin Wigginton was discussed. This document included suggestions made by all the interested parties and made various proposals for the activities of the group. These proposals are reviewed here in the following section, with comments shown in bold.

## **2. TBG Discussion document: Synthesis of ideas, comments and suggestions.**

**2.1. Collecting:** It was agreed that systematic collecting of bryophytes was one of the most urgent tasks because of the rapid and continuing loss of habitats, especially in the tropics. Africa was subject to the least bryological focus and considered to be in the greatest 'bryological' need. Literature for that continent was poor, or lacking for many countries/regions, and previous

collecting efforts focused mostly on hot-spots such as Mt. Kilimanjaro. The TBG could do the following:

- advise on the most important and threatened areas: **International Association of Bryologists (IAB) have since undertaken this objective.**
- advise on how to collect in the tropics, on the habitats and niches of bryophytes, on the care of collections, etc; advise on the documentation of collections, stressing the importance of good collecting and full documentation; advise on photographic documentation; establish links with University Expedition groups, seeking to stimulate interest in bryophyte collecting, and advise on methods and prepare a 'Guide to bryophyte collecting in the tropics.' **These points have mostly been achieved with documents available on the TBG website. The guide to bryophyte collecting in the tropics was prepared and published (O'Shea BJ. 1989). It documents collecting, specimen processing, herbarium techniques and literature for the tropics.**
- establish links with other organisations, such as the Royal Geographical Society, armed services expedition groups, Operation Raleigh, etc., if collecting can be encouraged by these means: **This has not been done, mainly because their focus has been on objectives and areas that were not compatible with bryological activity.**
- act as a source of information on places in which to collect - national parks, nature reserves and other wildlife areas - and on practical matters on travel, export of collections; **This has not been done formally, although informal advice has been given to a number of individuals.**
- assist BBS members in overseas collecting trips, either as individuals or as a group. **Many TBG members continue to act in this capacity.**
- organise surveys in threatened areas habitats: **This has been achieved in part but remains open and ongoing as more habitats come under threat.**
- collaborate in major research initiatives, such as those based in Korup, Cameroons, or Gunung Mulu, Borneo: **This has not been done. Instead activities were directed towards regional collecting activities such as Uganda and Malawi. The reason for this was the lack of interest in such projects in supporting bryophyte-orientated activities - we would have to work in areas of limited bryological interest or in areas already documented.**

**2.2. Herbaria:** It was noted that there were many un-worked bryophyte collections in private and national collections in the UK and possibly collections that remain undocumented within local and national institutions. It was considered important that the TBG assisted in with this.

- locating herbaria of tropical material held in local institutions or privately in Britain; maintaining an inventory of these herbaria, including details of the state of the collections, e.g. whether the collections are identified, or fully documented, etc.. **This was done but the information gathered was erratic and unreliable, and the document was withdrawn from the web site. This would be worthwhile revisiting and a revised document prepared for the website.**
- sorting and documentation of un-worked collections held in institutions, including the documentation of information from herbarium packets. This should be readily possible for small collections, but daunting indeed for the larger ones held at NHM. **This has been**

achieved in part for some collections at the BM but the idea of reviewing existing unidentified collections proved difficult for two main reasons:

1. **Becoming aware of the existence of collections.** Information is only available at some herbaria, and the major collections were at BM. Many herbaria will only allow specimens to be sent to other herbaria, and not to private individuals, although BM allowed unidentified material to be sent out for the Uganda MALOU project (Mosses and Liverworts of Uganda).
  2. **Identifying the specimens.** The difficulties of identifying tropical African collections became clear following the Malawi expedition. Although participants came fairly quickly up to speed in identifying to family and genera, some genera are more or less impossible to penetrate without taxonomic revisions. This brought to the fore the idea of a flora of families and genera for Africa, as a first step – GBA (Guide to Bryophytes of Africa).
- act as a focus for the exchange of specimens, and for loans of collections. **The TBG has no official herbarium or reference collection thus exchanges and loans of collections have mostly been done through arrangements between individuals and sourced from private herbaria.**

**2.3. Data storage and processing:** The increasing importance of computers and computer programs was noted. It was suggested that TBG members could benefit from better data-handling, for instance in maintaining databases on the locations of tropical herbaria, lists of taxa, collections, specialists, locations of reference material, etc. **Brian O'Shea wrote and manages TAXA, a piece of software which has been used by 3 or 4 people in TBG to create a database of literature, scientific names, and collection information. However, the system predates Windows and has a large number of facilities that would require extensive development to convert to the Windows environment. Other people use different systems to manage their data and there is no centralised data facility for TBG.**

**2.4. Research:** It was felt that the TBG could make significant contributions to taxonomic and ecological research in the tropics.

- undertaking primary taxonomic research, and advising on methods; advising on research needs, vis-à-vis taxonomic groups and geographical areas; specialising in particular taxonomic groups. **These points have been addressed by the research carried out in the framework of the Malawi and Uganda projects (see Bibliography, and TBG reports and newsletters series).**
- establishing a panel of referees as our expertise develops. **This has been developed during the work on Malawi and Uganda collections. Coordinators are available for all African families, who can either confirm identifications or pass specimens on to other experts.**
- holding regular workshops to enhance the expertise of the whole group. Individual members could tutor on their specialisation. **One workshop was held on 21 September in Cambridge, 1990, and was attended by: Rob Gradstein, Mark Hill, Nick Hodgetts, Heike Hoffman, Eustace Jones, Malcolm McFarlane, Brian O'Shea,**

**Roy Perry, Tamás Pócs, Ron Porley, Paul Richards, Cliff Townsend, Harold Whitehouse, Martin Wigginton.**

- coordinating studies of un-worked herbaria, with a view to placing specimens in at least a broad taxonomic group. Indeed, even 'moss' or 'hepatic' written on a herbarium packet is a step forward. **This point has been undertaken by TBG members, especially focusing on Ugandan collections at the BM (eg. F Rose's collections). However there are still thousands of well-documented but as yet unidentified specimens from interesting areas in herbaria.**
- maintaining a reference collection of micro-slides of tropical material. **No slide reference collection was created; however slide collections remain with individual researchers. It should be noted that making permanent micro-slides requires access to chemicals that are usually only available to laboratories.**
- production of checklists; undertaking monographic work. **Both these points have been achieved with checklists having been produced for Malawi, Uganda and for sub-Saharan Africa, and a number of African genera monographed.**

**2.5. Literature / Information:** The small amount, or lack of, recent taxonomic literature on bryophytes, and the difficulty of obtaining literature, could be addressed.

- seek ways of obtaining essential literature and making it available; advise on appropriate literature for particular taxonomic groups; establish a library of literature pertaining to tropical bryology. **The TBG has no centralised source of literature (reprint collection or library). Instead individuals have developed personal collections of literature that can be shared with other TBG members. A literature list was prepared (Pócs & O'Shea 1991), but this is now out of date. It will partly be replaced by GBA.**
- prepare translations of important literature published in other languages. **Many keys to tropical taxa, especially for Africa, have been translated by TBG members and are available on the TBG website, although the rate of this activity has slowed in recent years. Some of the translated keys are now known to be unreliable, but revisions of them are awaited.**
- keep TBG members informed through information circulars or a newsletter. **Achieved through the publication of TBG newsletter series 1-17.**
- establish and maintain links with other sources of information, e.g. IAB, specialists in UK and overseas. **Many specialists are involved in GBA and MALOU, and several members are now regular participants at international conferences.**
- act as a focus for advice and information on tropical bryology. **Many enquires are now dealt with, and usually it is possible to give assistance.**

**2.6. Overseas responsibilities:** Unfortunately only limited responses were received from overseas members for this category. They indicated the following needs.

- a desire to develop cryptogamic herbaria in the country of origin: **The TBG has made contributions to the herbaria of MAL (Malawi), MHU (Uganda) and PRE (South Africa) as part of their activities.**

- a desire to collaborate in research. **The TBG, as a group, has provided literature to researchers overseas and helped with identifications, but so far has not developed extensive research relations. It is perhaps easier to establish collaborations between TBG individuals based at Universities or Museums/ Botanical Gardens than with the group as a whole.**
- a suggestion that BBS (TBG) should arrange collecting trips in collaboration with local bryologists. Some overseas institutions cannot support travel for collecting even locally. **This has been done in Malawi in collaboration with staff at MAL and in Uganda in collaboration with staff at MHU and Makerere University, both with funding found by TBG.**
- offer to provide lab. space for visiting bryologists. **This has not been realised by the TBG. Again this is not something the TBG can supply, per se, instead it must rely on individual members based at Universities, Museums or Botanical Gardens with such facilities.**
- a request for the exchange of information, literature and specimens, and general assistance. **This has been achieved within the framework of the Malawi and Uganda projects, through individual interactions between TBG members, and by information made available on the TBG website and in TBG publications/newsletters.**
- a suggestion that BBS (TBG?) seek research grants to assist tropical bryologists. **This has not been done - funding remains a problem.**
- suggestion that TBG collaborates with international organisations who are already involved in conservation in the country. **This has not been done. It is difficult to achieve this objective without first obtaining research grants, something that is difficult for the TBG as it stands.**
- advertise the availability of bryological training. **This has not been done by the TBG, although partly-subsidised training is now available through courses in Kampala and Helsinki. A local workshop was run in Uganda as part of the TBG project there. Academic institutions are more likely to get such grants; for instance NHM is currently seeking funding.**

**2.7. Conservation:** The TBG could act in an advisory capacity to:

- propose conservation strategies for tropical bryophytes in specific areas. **Such information on Ugandan forests was part of the report submitted to the Darwin Initiative, but generally has not been undertaken by the TBG**
- have an input into conservation work undertaken by other organisations. **This has not been done by the TBG directly. Instead contributions have been made in the form of taxonomic work, productions of checklists and generally by increasing the bryological understanding of particular areas. GBA would be a major contribution to getting bryophytes included in more general surveys.**

**2.8. Funding:** Funding for the TBG was discussed to facilitate research efforts. Funding could be sought for:

- collecting trips. **Successful for the Malawi and Uganda projects.**

- support for resident bryologists from tropical countries. **Not much money was obtained here but some was used to support involvement in collecting trips in Malawi and Uganda, and in running a workshop in Uganda.**

Funding could be sought from:

- Government and international organisations, such as the British Council, EEC, UNDP, IUCN etc. **No funding was obtained applied for/obtained from these sources, except for funding under the UK Darwin Initiative.**
- Non-governmental organisations, such as the Royal Society, RGS, National Geographic. **These sources have been used to fund conference attendance by TBG members.**
- Commercial sector - banks, industrials, forestry. **No funding has been applied for/obtained from these sources.**

As mentioned in the first discussion documents seeking funds was found to be a time consuming business, and to require detailed proposals.

### 2.9. Other:

- The TBG may consider the need to 'recruit' skilled botanical illustrators to produce figures for taxonomic papers. **This remains an issue. Several skilled artists are contributing to GBA and MALOU, and BBS funding has also been granted for providing illustrations for MALOU.**

### 3. Suggestions for general and specific aims of the Tropical Bryology Group

The initial aims outlined by the TBG of :

- setting up a small working party to chart the way forward
- specialising in one particular geographical region of the tropics (Africa)
- developing a focus on particular taxonomic groups
- to collaborate in the *Bryologia Africana* project

were all achieved. The working party was able to plan and manage the Malawi and Uganda expeditions and make significant contributions to the bryological knowledge of these countries. Although the *Bryologia Africana* project, managed by MBG, has not progressed, an essential precursor has been initiated in GBA, which will form the basis of a future species-level flora.

The need to overcome the fundamental barrier of taxon identification is central to progress within TBG as well as in Africa as a whole, and should remain a key long term objective, leading to the production of GBA, MALOU and in the longer term *Bryologia Africana*.

The other aims outlined were not achieved or were achieved only in part:

- to have a planned strategy and to set targets, with some time-tabling. **Not done, but probably impractical when TBG members are contributing only in their spare time.**
- to investigate the possibility of collecting trips in collaboration with local bryologists / institutions, and investigate sources of funding. **This was achieved in part through the Malawi and Uganda projects.**
- to investigate ways in which the TBG could assist overseas members, perhaps including the exchange of information, literature and collections. **In part - a number of queries have resulted in small pieces of collaborative work.**

- to investigate means of making bryological literature more available to TBG members. **Only partly achieved by those who have access to the literature and are able to make copies of it.**

#### 4. Proposals for action in the shorter term

- to write a Guide to Bryophyte Collecting in the Tropics, including methods of collection, storage and documentation of specimens. This would be aimed at both BBS members, and external groups, e.g. University expeditions. **Achieved: (O'Shea B.J. 1989.) - see bibliography.**
- to compile a list of herbaria (both held privately and in institutions) which contain collections of tropical bryophytes, and to establish ways of documenting them if not already done. **Only partly achieved - see paragraph 2.1 above.**
- to issue a Newsletter to TBG members, once or twice a year, to include news and views, details of research, literature, conservation matters etc. **Achieved: TBG newsletter now up to volume 18.**

#### 5. Summary: the success of the TBG group: 1986-2002.

**5.1 Executive committee and TBG coordinator:** The success of the TBG so far can be attributed to efforts of a core group of researchers, the TBG executive committee, and to the efforts of the TBG coordinators since the founding of the group (Martin Wigginton 1986-88 and Brian O'Shea 1988-2001).

**5.2 Contributions of TBG:** The contributions of the TBG to tropical bryology research efforts have been both diverse and far-reaching in effect. The list of publications by TBG members in association with TBG projects highlights this well (see Bibliography) with over 30 publications resulting from TBG activities in Malawi and Uganda. Perhaps the most significant element of TBG research has been the production of local and regional checklists, taxonomic contributions to different floras, and through the development of the Guide to Bryophytes of Africa (GBA), Liverwort flora of West Africa (WAFLO) and Mosses and Liverworts of Uganda (MALOU)

The TBG has been successful in achieving almost all of its original aims and objectives. Members have made significant contributions to bryological research in the tropics and to increasing the knowledge of tropical bryophytes. For this success to continue we must reconsider the TBG, its role, and TBG directions and goals for the future.

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**The TBG website:** The TBG website, developed and managed by B. O'Shea, has been very successful in centralising information on TBG activities, disseminating information and as a general resource on tropical bryophytes. It is currently available at: [http://www.nhm.ac.uk/hosted\\_sites/bbstbg/](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/hosted_sites/bbstbg/)

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**The TBG newsletter:** The TBG newsletter has been the focus point of the TBG group and the forum for exchange of information.

- TBG Newsletter **1** (Jan 1991) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **2** (Aug 1991) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **3** (Jul 1992) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **4** (Sep 1992) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **5** (Jan 1993) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **6** (Jul 1993) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **7** (Jan 1994) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **8** (Sep 1994) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **9** (May 1995) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **10** (Feb 1996) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **11** (Oct 1996) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **12** (Dec 1997) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **13** (Aug 1998) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **14** (Aug 1999) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **15** (Aug 2000) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]

TBG Newsletter **16** (Aug 2001) Brian O'Shea [TBG coordinator]  
TBG Newsletter **17** (Aug 2002) Michelle Price [TBG coordinator] & Brian O'Shea  
TBG Newsletter **18** (Aug 2003) Michelle Price [TBG coordinator]