

Codes must be updated so that names are known to all

SIR — Sandra Knapp and colleagues, in their commentary article “Spreading the word”, (*Nature* **446**, 261–262; 2007), stop short of urging the radical steps required to effectively transform nomenclature and access to plant and animal names. Some important and necessary steps have been made towards opening access to existing literature, by efforts such as AnimalBase, Cornell University’s Core Historical Literature of Agriculture and the Biodiversity Heritage Library (www.animalbase.de, chla.library.cornell.edu, bhl.si.edu). But the name-access problem remains, and there is no excuse for enlarging it with each passing year.

Immediate and mandatory registration of names should be adopted as an emergency measure by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) and the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN). It is irresponsible, in a world so dependent upon reliable information, to permit 25,000 new names to be introduced each year, with no requirement for them to be universally known and accessible. A registry such as the proposed ZooBank (A. Polaszek *et al.* *Nature* **437**, 477; 2005) can only ensure that names ‘available’ under the codes are truly available. We would strongly oppose any measure that was prohibitive or that imposed censorship.

We urge the relevant botanical and zoological bodies to make three immediate, decisive amendments to the codes. First, require such registration before a name is formally available for use. Second, require full text descriptions of species to be deposited by publishers or authors in a central, publicly open ‘bank’, free of charge, such as will be provided by ZooBank for zoological names (A. Polaszek *et al.*, *Bull. Zool. Nom.* **62**, 210–220; 2005). And third, require electronic publications to include a ‘hot’ link to these banks of names and descriptions. This will ensure precision in reference to names.

At the same time, we would urge those bodies to work with publishers to institute an electronic counter that notes every e-publication that mentions, or links to, a scientific name. In this way, each reference to a species would count as the equivalent of a citation, and circumvent the serious problems imposed upon taxonomy by current citation indices such as the impact factor (F. T. Krell, *Nature* **415**, 957; 2002).

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