

# THE SYSTEMATICS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011

30<sup>th</sup> November 2011 Meeting Room, 5 pm  
Linnean Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0LQ.



**Present:** *Council:* J. Brodie (President), P. Wilkie (Secretary), P. Olson (Treasurer), J. Cotton (Programmes Secretary), R. Jenner (Newsletter Editor), D. Gower (Editor-in-Chief), R. Wilson (WebMaster), S. Evans, G. Bramley, E. Michel. *Non-council:* 6.

Apologies: B. Klitgaard (Grants & Awards Secretary), D. Hawksworth, R. Scotland, J. Bennett (Membership Secretary), E. Lucas. M. Wills.

## 1. Minutes of 2010 AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM were accepted and approved (with the change below) as a fair and accurate representation of the meeting.

Approved change: in the Programme Secretary's Report 'Elinor' in the last paragraph should read 'Ellinor'.

## 2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

## 3. President's Business

The President formally opened the meeting by thanking those attending. She also thanked the people who ran the AGM last year, particularly Ellinor Michel for standing in for the President and Ronald Jenner for standing in as Secretary.

It was reported with sadness that Frank Bisby (1945-2011) passed away at the end of October this year and highlighted that Frank was a loyal supporter of the Systematics Association, including a term as an officer. Lynn Margulis (1938-2011) had also passed away in November and was a leading scientist in the field of evolutionary biology, in particular Endosymbiosis and her theory of symbiogenesis and somewhat controversial Gaia hypothesis.

The President reported that her second year in the post had been another very active year for the Society and that a lot had been achieved thanks to the very hard working members of the Council. She was very relieved that Peter Wilkie had returned from sabbatical and was very grateful to all of the Council members who had stepped in to take minutes etc.

The SA series of talks had been well attended and very successful. The biennial, although smaller than usual, also went well and she thanked James Cotton and Pete Olson for their help. She thought that in future biennials may be slightly shorter, possibly over 3 days instead of 5. She commented that the YSF continues to go from strength to strength and that it was probable that the event tomorrow would be one of the biggest meetings yet.

Cambridge University Press (CUP) are now firmly established as the publisher for the SA Special Series. The President felt the relationship with them was developing well and also wished to formally acknowledge their generosity in sponsoring SA events.

The voting system for Presidential elections is now fully electronic and she hoped to streamline other activities in the future. The President was looking forward to working with the President Elect and to celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SA at a special event on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

#### **4. Treasurer's Report**

Peter Olson presented the following report.

Accounts for the financial year to the end of April 2011 were circulated with the December Newsletter and were approved by an independent examiner on 3 November 2011. It was noted that there was a £15 discrepancy in the banks favour and this was corrected. It was also noted that better documentation of the biennial finances was suggested. For the first time since taking over as Treasurer in 2009, the SA has had a positive net annual balance (£1,906 cf. -£7,695 in 2010, -£1,720 in 2009, -£2,822 in 2008), which resulted from a combination of factors, including:

- Income from CoSyst administration (£2,500; N.B. scheme will end after current financial year)
- Increase in Subscriptions (£4,369; however, only 4.5% higher than in 2000 despite doubling of fees and introducing membership requirement for SRF applicants)
- Fewer symposium support grants collected than awarded
- Savings by holding Council meetings at an alternative venue

The SA's net worth has also increased to just over £100K due primarily to positive gains in the stock market (N.B. albeit these have yet to recover the full losses in value resulting from the downturn in the market in 2008 and 2009). At the end of financial year the SA's net worth of £100,604 exceeded the 22-year average of ~£95K, but was ~£14K less than the all-time high in 1999. An accounting of the 2011 Belfast Biennial remains outstanding, and thus please note that "Biennial Income including Donations" is almost entirely donations given to support symposia and running costs of the conference. Verbal reports suggest that the 2011 Biennial made a modest profit.

Overall, efforts made by Council to increase earnings and reduce expenditure have contributed to a healthier balance sheet in 2010-11 and the Association is currently in a sound financial position.

#### **Q&A**

Richard Bateman asked if the doubling of subscriptions had resulted in fewer members (given the only slight increase in income). Pete Olson did not think so and that a range of other factors explained this. It was suggested that the impact of increased subscriptions should be investigated.

Juliet Brodie thanked Pete for his work over the past year, in particular regarding the biennial and was very happy to see the SA on a stable financial footing.

#### **5. Newsletter Editor Report**

Ronald Jenner presented the following report.

We published one new issue (33) of *The Systematist* this year in October. The delay was chiefly caused by the challenge of getting enough copy. I hope to be able to put one more new issue together before a special issue for our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but again, whether this will be successful depends on there being enough new copy.

Ronald thanked a wide range of people who had contributed copy over the year and indicated that he would step down after the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition. He suggested that the position should be shared by two people in order to spread the workload and increase the network of possible contributors.

## **Q&A**

Peter Wilkie asked if it was possible to produce the newsletter in colour. Ronald replied that it was possible but there would be financial implications. Rupert Wilson highlighted that it was available in colour on the SA website (after the next issue has been published).

Juliet Brodie thanked Ronald for his continued hard work and enthusiasm and that council would need to think about a replacement.

## **6. Programme Secretary's Report**

James Cotton presented the following report.

The Association's program this year consisted of the 3 named lectures, the Young Systematists' Forum, and the biennial meeting.

April: The 4th Annual biodiversity policy lecture (joint with Linn Soc) was another success. Given by Dr Peter Bridgewater, chair of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. 'Seeing REDD: Science, Policy and Politics in Biodiversity and Climate Change'.

July: The 8th biennial meeting was held at Queen's University Belfast between the 4th and 8th of July. The programme consisted of contributed talks and posters, and four themed symposia – 'Algal systematics – where next?', 'Next Generation Systematics: Studying evolution and diversity in an era of ubiquitous genomics', 'Arthropod systematics: are morphology, palaeontology and molecules coming together?', and 'Advances in using museum specimens and ancient DNA in systematics research'. An SA volume based on the 'Next Generation Systematics' symposium is in preparation. Attendance, at a little over 80 people, was very low – less than half of the previous meeting. It is unclear why this was – the meeting was announced a little late, and in particular details advertised and registration were open rather late, and there was competition from the International Botanical Congress. I have heard comments that this might be due to poor financial climate and the programme might not have appealed to some systematists. Given its importance as a cornerstone of the association's programme, in bringing together the active membership, and its importance in the association's finances, low attendance at this meeting is a major concern, particularly as a stand-alone biennial seems likely to only be held every four years in future.

October: *Julian Huxley lecture* was given by Prof. Charles Godfray, Oxford University. Entitled “*Taxonomy in the 21st Century*”. I understand that this was well attended and well received, with around 60 people attending.

November: In tonight’s “*President’s lecture*”. Prof. Jenny Clack will speak on ‘*The earliest tetrapods: What were they, and what are they?*’. The final event of the calendar – the *Young Systematists Forum* – the 13th - will be held tomorrow.

Note that there were no stand-alone meetings this year - probably due to our ongoing moratorium on funding independent meetings that are not planning to publish through the SA book series, which was renewed by a vote in Council. I think supporting meetings of this sort is a key part of the Associations’ role, and something I would like to see reinstated when financially possible.

Looking ahead to 2012, we plan to hold the usual programme of named lectures, including the *Biodiversity policy lecture* on the 19th of April, the *Julian Huxley lecture* on the 10th of October and the *President’s lecture* on the 28<sup>th</sup> November. A special event will be held on the 20th June to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Association, including presentations during the day and an evening talk by Sir David Attenborough.

Thanks to the organisers of the Young Systematists’ Forum - Ellinor Michel, Jon Todd and Maria Vorontosova as well as Christine Maggs and the other local organisers of the Biennial meeting, and the organisers of the various biennial symposia.

James announced that he is stepping down as Programme’s secretary after two and a half years, and leaving council after 4 years and would like to thank the members of the Programme’s subcommittee, and all of the officers and council members for their help over the years and for their contribution to the Association in general. He was pleased to announce that Alex Monro had volunteered to replace him.

James suggested that the SA should review funding stand alone symposia in light of the better financial standing of the SA.

## **Q&A**

Paula Rudall suggested that the low turnout at the biennial was due to increased financial pressures on institutes and individuals as well as the range of other conferences that were taking place around the same time. Ronald Jenner suggested the late announcement of the meeting had meant some people could not attend. Juliet Brodie suggested a shorter meeting would have been more appealing to some people.

Juliet Brodie thanked James for his hard work over the years.

## **7. Editor-in-Chief’s Report**

David Gower presented the following report.

The main news for the year since 8 December 2010:

(1) The hiatus in publishing SA Special Volumes is over. The first volume (no. 78) with our new publisher (Cambridge University Press: CUP) was published in April 2011, exactly three years since publication of the previous Special Volume (no. 76).

(2) The much-delayed final SA Special Volume (no. 77) with our previous publisher (CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group) was published 24 October, 2011.

(3) Four SA Special Volumes have been published in 2011:

77. Upchurch, McGowan and Slater, *Palaeogeography and Palaeobiogeography: Biodiversity in Space and Time*.

HB @ £76.99, published by CRC Press, October 2011.

175 copies sold

78. Hodkinson, Jones, Waldren and Parnell *Climate Change, Ecology and Systematics*.

HB @ £75.00, published by CUP, April 2011.

309 copies sold

79. Fontaneto, *Biogeography of microscopic organisms. Is everything small everywhere?*

HB @ £60.00, published by CUP, May 2011.

194 copies sold

80. Wanntorp and Craene, *Flowers on the Tree of Life*

HB @ £60.00, published by CUP, September 2011.

125 copies sold

(4) Manuscripts for two additional Special Volumes have been submitted and are now in production with CUP:

Patiny, *Evolution of Plant-Pollinator Interactions*

Gower, Johnson, Richardson, Rosen, Rüber and Williams *The past, present and future of Southeast Asian biodiversity*

(5) Three additional CUP volumes are at an earlier stage, with contracts already signed and editors and authors working on manuscripts

*Descriptive Taxonomy; the foundation of biodiversity research*, edited by Mark Watson and Chris Lyal.

*Early Events in Monocot Evolution*, edited by Paul Wilkin.

*Next Generation Systematics: Studying evolution and Diversity in an Era of Ubiquitous Genomics*, edited by James Cotton, Joseph Hughes and Peter Olson.

(6) The manuscript for one textbook (contract signed) is also in preparation:

*Cladistics: a guide to systematics in biological classification*, by David Williams

(7) Previous Association volumes continue to sell and raise revenue for the SA. For example, the two most recent pre-hiatus volumes (*Unravelling the algae*, Nov 2007; *The new taxonomy*, April 2008) sold 35 and 71 copies, respectively, between October 2010 and October 2011.

(8) Permission has been granted for Oxford University Press to make out-of-print SA Special Volumes 38 and 41-52 available in an online library. The SA remains eligible for royalties from sales of these e-books (at half the rate of printed volumes).

David Gower thanked Alan Warren and Richard Bateman for brokering the deal with CUP

### **Q&A**

Dave Williams asked how the volumes were advertised. David Gower responded that it was mainly on the CUP website, at CUP stalls at meetings and in the SA newsletter but that he was happy to prompt CUP to do more.

Richard Bateman commented that prepublication sales to Libraries etc appear to be less than usual and that this could be potentially worrying. David Gower replied that CUP appeared to be happy with level of sales.

Ellinor Michel asked if they would be sold at the YSF to which David Gower said he would be happy to discuss it with her.

Juliet Brodie thanked David and highlighted that symposia ideas for Biosyst 2013 are currently being requested. As it is the main income revenue for the SA proposals need to be encouraged.

### **8. Grants and Awards Secretary's Report**

Juliet Brodie read out the following report on behalf of Bente Klitgaard and Tom Richards:

#### **SRF:**

##### **Funding**

Since its initiation the SRF has been funded jointly by the Linn.Soc. with £20,000 and the Syst.Ass. with £6,000 per year. This year we received confirmation from the Linn.Soc. that it is willing to keep putting up £20,000 funding for the foreseeable future as long as the Syst.Ass. keeps contributing the agreed £6,000. Historically the Syst.Ass. manages the application-selection and reporting processes, while the Linn.Soc. manages the financial side of the Fund.

##### **Round 2010/11**

After a few hiccups, technical as well as misunderstandings in the takeover phase, the call was announced on the Syst.Ass. and Linn.Soc. websites, TAXACOM, etc. in the beginning of January 2011 with a March 31<sup>st</sup> deadline. A criterion for applicants to be paid up members of the Syst.Ass. or the Linn.Soc. for 2011 was put into place for the first time and applications fell from 261 in 2009/10 to 73 in 2010/11. The grant panel consisted of seven representatives from each of the two participating societies: Bente Klitgård (SA, chair, RBGKew), David Williams (LS, NHM), Colin Pendry (LS,

RBGEdinburgh), Anne Jungblut (LS, NHM), Tiina Sarkinen (LS, NHM), James Tosh (LS, NHM), Irina Brake (LS, NHM), Silvia Pressel (LS, NHM), Julia Day (SA, UCL), Maria Vorontsova (SA, RBGKew), Gemma Bramley (SA, RBGKew), Eve Lucas (SA, RBGKew), Jonathan Todd (SA, NHM), and Juliet Brodie (SA, NHM). Each application was reviewed by three panel members who scored the applications on a scale from 0 to 4. As 28 applications scored from 11 to nine points, and it seemed unnecessary to convene all 14 members to discuss the top applications, the chair decided (after consultation with the panel) to award all 28 projects the amount of money applied for up to but not exceeding £1,000, rather than having to choose among the ones scoring nine points in order to make ends meet. The results were posted to the successful applicants, and on the Syst.Ass. and Linn.Soc. websites on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### Round 2011/2012

Since the Linn.Soc. has agreed to support the SRF for the foreseeable future, the 2011/12 round was announced mid November 2011 with a February 13<sup>th</sup> deadline. The date was chosen to accommodate the few who may plan to apply to both Syn-Tax (deadline 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012) and SRF. It is the plan to convene the panel by mid February 2012 and to post the results by the end of April 2012.

Bente Klitgaard 22 Nov. 2011

#### **Syn-Tax:**

##### Funding.

Current funding is from NERC and the BBSRC. The contributions keep changing from year-to-year, in round two DEFRA did not provide any funding reducing the funding available by £50,000. The scheme had a total of £250,000 for funding (£150,000 from the BBSRC and £100,000 from NERC). Funding for the third round (2011/12) is currently not known but expected to be the same as round 2 (2010/2011).

#### Results of round 2 (2010/11)

2010/2011 was the second round of the SynTax programme. We received 79 applications. The grant review panel consisted of Tom Richards (chair - NHM), Louise Allcock (National University of Ireland Galway), William Baker (Kew), Mark Blaxter (Edinburgh), Neil Hall (Liverpool), David Harris (RBGE), Sandra Knapp (NHM), Robert Scotland (Oxford), Max Telford (UCL), Wolfgang Wuster (Bangor) and representatives from NERC and BBSRC. All members of the panel reviewed and scored all 79 applications and wrote up feedback. The panel met on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. A ranking list was created and all applications in the top 35 were discussed and scores revised based on these discussions. The top 14 projects were funded and are listed on the Systematics Association website.

#### Round 3

The application for round 3 (2011/12) went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2011 on both the SA and Linn. Soc. websites. The panel meeting will be held in April/May 2012.

#### Further Syntax Issues

1) Although all members of the panel wrote up feedback for each grant the research council administrators decided, in contradiction to round 1, not to provide feedback on failed applications. I was not part of this decision and I'm trying to find out why

this happened and if alternative avenues for access to the feedback were provided.

2) I have so far received no reports on the outcome of each individual grant awarded in round 1 (2009/2010). These should start to come in summer 2012. The SA and Linn. Soc will need to identify someone who will take stewardship of this role and be responsible for curation of the grant reports and specifically the success of follow up research council grant applications. This will be the key metric on which SynTax is judged as a success or failure by the research councils. This is therefore very important in terms of getting renewal of the SynTax programme or further funding for taxonomy/systematics grant schemes from the Research Councils. I will not be able to carry this on after the 2012 panel meeting.

3) Syntax administration Fee: The Systematics Association is due a 1% fee (£2,500 a year) for each year we run this scheme. The treasurer informs me we received the 2010/11 fees. We will need to follow up on the 2011/12 fees.

4) The Syntax scheme is funded for three rounds and, unless extended, will close in 2012. I have made one informal enquiry regarding renewal of the scheme or future plans. I will follow this up with a formal enquiry.

Tom Richards 17 Nov. 2011

## **Q&A**

No questions.

Juliet Brodie thanked Bente and Tom for their hard work.

## **9. Membership Secretary's report**

Juliet Brodie read out the following report on behalf of Jonathan Bennett.

1. As of 27 November 2011, there are 462 members, and increase of 64 from this time last year. 298 of whom are UK-based, with 72 from the rest of Europe and 92 from the rest of the world.

2. An increasing number of overseas members are making use of the on-line payment system. We have extended this payment system over the past year so that all membership applications, renewals and change of address notifications can be handled on-line. Very few members now submit hard-copy forms. Although there were a few teething problems early on, these have been corrected and the new system works well. More of the SA's activities are being co-ordinated on-line and this is an important change that has been completed this year. For instance, members now have the option to receive *The Systematist* newsletter on-line and many new members are opting for this instead of the hard-copy version.

3. The membership database was cleaned up during the summer. A large number of members have not provided a current email address and this is an area that we will address in the coming year.

4. I would like to thank Rupert Wilson for his extensive assistance with the website and Pete Olson for his continued assistance with the gift aid refunds and James Cotton for help with the SA mailing list.



## **Q&A**

No questions.

Juliet Brodie thanked Jonathan for his hard work over the past year.

## **10. Webmaster Report**

Rupert Wilson presented the following report.

In the last year the SA website has received 9,139 unique visitors from 137 countries up 22% and 7 countries on last year and doubling the increase from the previous year. There was a 52/48 split between new and returning visitors with 48% of the visits arriving via search engines. 32% of the visitors arrived directly whilst referring sites continue to contribute to 20% of the visits.

Overall there was a 15% increase in page views to 38.6K page view. The most popular area of the website remains the Awards section which received 36% (down 3%) of the total page views. Other popular areas include the YSF, publications and membership, there has also been a 12% increase in the traffic to the home page.

The online membership application scheme has been extended to all new and renewing members and existing members can also inform us of address or e-mail changes online. The publications pages were refreshed to take account of the change of publisher to CUP and we are now moving ahead with the use of Twitter to publicise the SA; thanks are due to Ross Mounce for his help in this area.

## **Q&A**

No questions.

Juliet Brodie thanked Rupert for his hard work over the past year.

## **11. Election of Officers**

Alex Monro was elected as Programmes officer without objection.

## **12. Election of Council Members**

Five new Council members were nominated and approved at the meeting:

Dr Matthew A Wills, Evolutionary Biology, University of Bath (Proposed EM, RJ)

Dr Wolfgang Wüster, Zoologist, Bangor University (Proposed DG, JB)

Dr Stefanie Klug, Palaeontologist, Bristol University (Proposed DG, JD)

Dr Tiina Sarkinen, Botanist, The Natural History Museum (Proposed AM, Sandy Knapp)

Dr Michael Kuhlmann The Natural History Museum (Proposed DG, LR)

Juliet Brodie thanked David Bass, Susan Evans, Mark van der Giezen who officially stepped down as council members.

## **13. Any Other Business**

The request to remove “resident in British Isles” from constitution (from Council minutes 13 April 2011) was approved. Mark Carine highlighted that since expenses to attend council were paid that there could be potentially large financial implications to

this decision. Juliet Brodie replied in theory it could but that council would consider this before nominating someone. Peter Wilkie highlighted that it was important that the SA had representatives from outside London.

The creation of a Student Representative on Council (from Council minutes 5 October 2011) was approved.

Richard Bateman asked if this position was supernumery to which Juliet Brodie responded yes.

Juliet Brodie announced the results of the SA presidential election:

Robert Scotland 39 votes

David Hawksworth 37 votes

None of the above 3 votes

Invalid 2 votes

Robert Scotland was officially announced as President elect.

Dave Williams asked how votes could be invalid to which Rupert Wilson replied that the voters had entered invalid member numbers.

The AGM closed at 6.01pm.