

THE SYSTEMATICS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

Minutes of meeting: **December 9th 2009** Council Room,
Linnean Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0LQ.



Present:

Council: R. Bateman (President), P. Wilkie (Acting Secretary), P. Olson (Treasurer), T. Richards (Grants & Awards Secretary), J. Cotton (Acting Programmes Secretary), A. Warren (Editor-in-Chief), R. Wilson (WebMaster), Dr Ronald Jenner (Newsletter editor), J. Brodie (President Elect), L. Ruber, P. Rudall, M. van der Geizen, A. Vogler, D. Williams, D. Gower, D. Bass, W. Baker, Z. Griffiths. *Non Council:* 12

1. Minutes of 2008 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: 3a, line 4. Should read “CABI’s Fungal Herbarium”.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. President’s Business

Richard Bateman started by acknowledging the death of Professor Chris Humphries, a former council member of the Systematics Association (SA), and paid tribute to the remarkable contribution he made to the SA and to the Systematics community as a whole.

The president highlighted the implications of the credit crunch on the SA and stated that although it would provide a financial worry over the coming years the SA should be able to weather the storm. In response to the financial pressures faced by the SA it had been decided that a moratorium on funding for meetings that did not produce SA volumes would be in place for the foreseeable future, in order that resources were not diverted from SRF grants. On a more positive note, the president had initiated a financial review of the SA and as a result the SA had laid the foundations for a new membership drive and produced a new flyer. The long awaited agreement with CUP had also set the SA on course for financial gains and ongoing high-quality publications over the coming years.

The 7th Biennial meeting was held in Leiden as part of the first Biosyst EU ‘Systematics’ conference and the president hoped that this was the beginning of a new European Federation of Systematic Association in which the UK SA would play a lead role. One major benefit had been to stimulate the formation of new systematics societies across Europe. The UK Biennial would of course continue to play an important part in SA activities. It was also noted that the LS/SA policy lecture by Professor John Beddington, the Governments chief scientist, was a great success.

Richard’s presidency had seen the House of Lords Review of Systematics but he felt

there has been little positive response to the ensuing report. During his term CoSyst had been unduly criticized, while at the same time several organisations were vying to claim credit for its establishment. On a positive note he highlighted that SynTax, the follow on from CoSyst, will be far better resourced and that this source of funding was needed more than ever for Taxonomy and Systematics.

Early in his presidency there had been great hope for the new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) but events had already seen its demise. This period has also seen systematists getting to grips with the REF, which replaces the RAE review system of UK universities. The Copenhagen COP 15, currently in session, will most likely have significant implications for the Systematic community in the context of climate change.

Next year the SA financial challenges will continue. It had been fortunate that last year our financial position was offset by a donation brokered by Colin Hughes, the SA's former treasurer. However, we are looking at a possible loss of ca £2k a year for the foreseeable future. The president felt that the reinvigoration of the Biennial is needed over the coming years, as is the willingness of people to contribute to the activities of the SA and its council. In conclusion, he said it was good to see so many young people becoming members of the SA and council at a time when they are facing ever-increasing demands on time from their own institutes, and that this continued commitment would surely put the SA on a good footing for the future.

4. Treasurer's Report

Dr Peter Olsen presented the annual accounts to the meeting. He commented that the major income this year came from royalties and subscriptions and although it was a biennial meeting year, the circumstances of this year's joint meeting resulted in it being effectively cost-neutral (usually the biennial brings in a small profit). The major decrease in total assets from the previous year (2007-2008) were the result of the decline in the stock market, resulting in the loss of nearly £20k of stock assets. However, a significant upturn in the market had resulted in the recovery of some of this notional loss of value. The SA continued to run at a loss, albeit minimal (less than £1k), but remains in good financial standing.

5. Programme Secretary's Report

Dr James Cotton highlighted that the SA had had a busy program of meetings this year, supporting 3 named lectures, 3 symposia (at the Biosyst EU meeting), the Young Systematists' Forum, and 3 other meetings.

Professor John Beddington, the current Government Chief Scientist, gave the 2nd annual Biodiversity Policy Lecture (joint with Linnean Society (LS)) entitled "*Biodiversity in a changing world*" to a capacity audience. The Sir Julian Huxley lecture by Professor Mike Sanderson entitled "*Phylogenetic analysis of clade diversification: is robust inference possible?*" and the "President's lecture" by Professor Richard Bateman entitled "*Gradualism: Darwin's biggest mistake?*" were both well attended and well received.

The 7th Biennial meeting was held in Leiden as part of the first BioSyst EU 'Systematics' meeting. This meeting was similar in size to previous biennials (260 participants) and organised similarly. Although scientifically successful there was a

disappointingly small UK attendance (35), and a modest financial loss (not to the SA). The SA supported 3 symposia, all of which will result in the production of SA volumes, namely: (i) *The rediscovery of floral morphology in phylogenetic systematics* by Livia Wantorp and Louis Ronse de Craene; (ii) *The importance of being small: does size matter in biogeography?* by Diego Fontaneto & Juliet Brodie; (iii) *Pollinator-plant interactions: systematics, phylogeny and co-evolution* by Sebastien Patiny

In December the 11th Young Systematists Forum (YSF) was held (see report below). The three other meetings supported by the SA were: (i) The *Conference on Polyploidy, Hybridization and Biodiversity* held in St Malo (248 delegates, 20 from the UK/Ireland); (ii) The *Late Triassic terrestrial biotas and the rise of the dinosaurs*, symposium (run as part of the SVP annual meeting and held in the UK (Bristol) for first time (ca. 200 participants at the symposium); (iii) The *Southeast Asian Gateway Evolution* (SAGE) meeting held at Royal Holloway (146 attendees, 47 UK/Ireland). Of these meetings only the SAGE meeting will result in the publication of an SA volume.

Due to financial constraints the SA council had approved a moratorium on supporting meetings that do not propose an SA series volume. Thanks were given to everyone who organised SA-sponsored symposia, in particular David Bass and Tom Richards who organised the YSF and Bill Baker who stepped down as Programme Secretary after 5 years.

6. Editor-in-Chief's Report

Dr Alan Warren discussed the main news for the year which was the satisfactory conclusion to the protracted search for a new publishing partner. In October the SA finally signed a long-awaited publishing agreement with Cambridge University Press (CUP). Initially the agreement is for 3 years but, assuming both partners are happy with the arrangement, it is envisaged that this partnership should continue long into the future. The early signs are good, as CUP have already proved themselves to be flexible and responsive to requests. During the long period without a formal publisher the SA was not able to take on any new projects, consequently there were no new books published in 2009. However, since signing the new agreement 4 volumes have been contracted: (i) *Climate Change and Systematics*, edited by John Parnell, Michael Jones, Trevor Hodgkinson and Stephen Waldren; (ii) *Descriptive Taxonomy; the foundation of biodiversity research*, edited by Mark Watson and Chris Lyal; (iii) *Biogeography of Microscopic Organisms: is everything small everywhere?*, edited by Diego Fontaneto; (iv) *Evolution of Plant-Pollinator Interactions*, edited by Sébastien Patiny.

In addition CUP has agreed to publish two other volumes: (i) *Flowers in the Tree of Life*, edited by Livia Wantorp and Louis Ronse de Craene; (ii) *Biotic Interactions and Environmental Change in Southeast Asia*, edited by David Gower, Kenneth Johnson, James Richardson, Brian Rosen, Lukas Ruber and Suzanne Williams.

The remaining volume contracted with CRC Press, *Palaeogeography and Palaeobiogeography: biodiversity in space and time*, edited by Paul Upchurch, Alistair McGowan and Claire Slater, has seen extensive delays in getting the manuscript completed but should be ready for submission in January 2010.

Dr Alan Warren noted that it is his 12th year as Editor-in-Chief and now that the SA has secured a publishing agreement that it was time to hand over to somebody else. He was hopeful that a well-qualified replacement would be confirmed early in the New Year.

He thanked the editors and contributors of the various volumes mentioned above and his fellow members of the publications committee: Richard Bateman, Peter Olson, James Cotton, David Gower, Mark van der Giezen and David Williams.

7. Grants and Awards Subcommittee Report

1. Systematics and Taxonomy research scheme (SynTax)

Tom Richards reported that the daughter programme of CoSyst, SynTax, was launched in November 2009. This new programme is a collaborative venture between BBSRC, NERC, DEFRA, LS and the SA. The main changes from CoSyst include an increase in funds available (ca. £270,000 pa), an increase in the value of each research grants (max. £30,000), the removal of the essential requirement for interdisciplinary collaboration as part of the research project, and the possibility of paying staff salary (as subsistence) on the project grants (although overheads and indirect costs for staff and personnel cannot be charged). In general, he considered these to represent positive additions to the scheme and to provide an important source of funding for Systematics and Taxonomy in the UK. The web application form is hosted on the LS and SA websites with a closing date of 31st January. In response to concerns raised by the systematics community a specific statement describing the use of systematics and taxonomy in the proposed research project has been added. This should help inform how effectively this scheme serves this specific community.

2. Results of CoSyst 3

The competition closed on 31st January 2009 with only 22 applications received. Nine applications were funded at a cost of £94,969 and represented a success rate of 41% (this compares to nine awards in the previous year with a 24% success rate). A full list of the successful candidates can be found on the SA web page. The judging panel was composed of two members from the SA Council, two from the LS Council and two members without direct links to either society (selected by BBSRC). BBSRC and NERC administrators acted as observers.

3. The Systematics Research Fund (SRF)

This year the SRF received 184 applications from 34 different countries. The total sum available to distribute was £27,000 (£20,000 from LS, £6,000 from SA and £1,000 from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew). This sum was down on previous years as the Bentham-Moxon Trust had stopped contributing and the NERC award for supporting taxonomic publications had finished. After review, a total of 25 grants were awarded (success rate 13.6%). The number of applications this year was up compared with the 137 applications in 2007/8 and 97 in 2006/7. This represents an expansion rate of c. 40% per annum! Over the same period funding has decreased from c. £35k to c. £27k. In 2007 37 projects were funded, in 2008 35 projects, and in 2009 25 projects. Only 34 applicants this year came from the UK (18%), of which 10 were funded. 63 applications came from the USA (34%), of which 9 were funded. The standard of applications had improved and was of a quality similar to the final year of CoSyst. There seemed to be a higher proportion of applications from the USA

and 'professional scientists', suggesting that the award is now being targeted by front-line researchers, not just early career or retired scientists. The secretary was glad that the SRF programme attracted such diversity of applicants, but worried that the proportion of early career and retired scientist funded may suffer because of this trend.

Dr Tom Richards thanked David Gower, David Bass, Mark van der Giezen, Richard Bateman, Ruth Temple, Russ Stothard, David Goyder and Andrew Polaszek for reviewing the grants, and indicated that reviewers for the 2010 round are now needed.

Tom highlighted that given the increased numbers of applications and reduced funding the SA need to think about the future direction of the SRF programme. He had spoken to various people involved in SRF on the SA and LS councils and had circulated a list of possible amendments to the scheme. He had been trying to set up a meeting for three SA council members to meet up with three LS members to discuss how best to proceed. As this had not yet happened the SRF will be run this year using the standard formula. Discussions for format change are now a matter of urgency.

Tom stated that he will retire from council in 2010/11 and that a replacement as G&A secretary needs identified so that they can overlap in the role for 1 year with his replacement.

Report on YSF11

The YSF was held on the 2 December 2009 at the NHM. There were 12 talks and c. 20 posters. The total number of participants was c. 90 and included visitors from France, Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Hungary, and foreign students already studying in the UK. There was a good showing from the NHM and local educational institutes, although Richard Bateman pointed out there were fewer people from Kew than in previous years. In the future the SA might consider compiling a list of potential funding sources to send to people who ask for it. The NHM recommended accommodation list was adapted for those travelling long distances and was greatly appreciated. The general standard of presentations and posters was high. Due to a misunderstanding on the part of CUP this year there were six prizes in total: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd for both talks and posters. CUP appeared willing to maintain this increased level of support in future years. The NHM Science Directorate allocated c. £600 to YSF to cover catering and the SA is waiting for their final invoice but it was very likely that the event costs were covered by that budget (not including any expenses or other costs submitted to/directly incurred by the SA).

There were 4 fewer talks than in previous years which meant the day was less busy and that participants had more time to look at posters and talk to each other. This could be a useful model for future years. It was also suggested that the SA consider an overlap between organisers of one year to allow the organisation to evolve more coherently than at present.

8. Membership Secretary's report

The president read out the Memberships report on behalf of Jonathan Bennett, the Membership Secretary. As of December 2009 there were 379 paid up members, an increase of 26 from last year. 281 were UK-based, 52 from the rest of Europe and 46 from the rest of the world. This year the SA launched the ability to pay for

membership using PayPal and 6 people had used this method to date. The SA had also sent out gift aid forms to all UK members from which 48 had been returned. Delays in the production of the Systematist Newsletter meant that no gift aid forms had been mailed this year but these will be included with the January edition. Rupert Wilson was thanked for his assistance with setting up the new PayPal system and Pete Olson for his help with implementing the gift aid refunds.

9. Newsletter Editor Report

Dr Ronald Jenner reported that he had recently finally taken possession of copy for the newsletter from Dr Marcello Ruta. He will combine this with the copy he has solicited in the meantime and hopes to have it published early in 2010.

10. Webmaster Report

Dr Rupert Wilson reported that the SA website had received 6,682 unique visitors from 132 countries during the past twelve months. These visitors made over 10,000 visits and viewed over 27,000 pages on the site. 45% of the traffic to the site came from search engines, the remaining traffic was split 50:50 with visitors arriving from other referring websites (non search engines) or directly. Analysis revealed an increase of 7% in the number of visitors to the site.

The most popular areas of the site remain the Awards pages, including the SRF, CoSyst and most recently the SynTax page, which has received over 800 visits since it was published last month. Other popular areas include the YSF, publications and events.

A new initiative in 2009 was the ability of UK based members to join the SA and pay their membership dues electronically using the popular PayPal system.

11. Election of Officers

Dr James Cotton was formally elected as Programme's Secretary and Dr Peter Wilkie as Secretary.

12. Election of Council Members

Dr Julia Day, Dr Gemma Bramley, Dr Ellinor Michel, Prof. David Hawksworth and Dr Jon Todd were elected to the SA council.

Prof. Richard Bateman, Dr Paula Rudall, Dr Lukas. Ruber, Dr Marcello Ruta, Dr Robert Scotland, Dr Alfried Vogler, Dr David Williams retired from the SA council. The president noted that 4 council places remain unfilled and that the SA is looking for people willing to be active council members to apply.

13. Any Other Business

The president thanked Juliet Brodie, Pete Olson, David Bass and Tom Richards for their work on the YSF which was clearly going from strength to strength. He thanked the organisers of the Edinburgh Biennial, in particular Pete Hollingsworth and James Richardson, for making it such a success and also Peter Hovenkamp and Eric Smets for bringing the Leiden 7th Biennial meeting to fruition. He thanked Rupert Wilson for bringing the webpages up to date and providing such aesthetic appeal and Marcello Ruta and Ronald Jenner for their work on the newsletters. He expressed his gratitude to first Geraldine Reid and then Jonathan Bennett (Membership Secretaries),

Julie Hawkins and later Tom Richards (Grants and Awards Secretaries), Alan Warren (Publications Secretary), First Bill Baker and then James Cotton (Programmes Secretaries), and first Colin Hughes and then Pete Olson (Treasurers). He ended by giving particular thanks to Zofia Griffiths, who has proved to be an indispensable secretary for the SA over an unprecedented 25 year period!

The meeting ended with the president elect, Juliet Brodie, thanking Richard Bateman for his time, commitment and enthusiasm as President over the past 3 years while also noting that he had also been an active member of the SA council for the past 17 years!