

# THE SYSTEMATICS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

**December 8th 2010** Council Room, 5 pm  
Linnean Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0LQ.



## **Present:**

*Council:* E. Michel (Acting President), R. Jenner (Newsletter editor and Acting Secretary), P. Olson (Treasurer), D. Gower (Editor-in-Chief), R. Wilson (WebMaster), B. Klitgaard (Grants & Awards Secretary), S. Evans, G. Bramley, D. Hawksworth. *Non-council:* 6

Apologies: J. Brodie (President), J. Bennet (Membership Secretary), J. Cotton (Programmes Secretary), P. Wilkie (Secretary), T. Richards, J. Todd, D. Bass, J. Day.

## **1. Minutes of 2009 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 Treasurer's Report of the 2009 minutes, 'Olsen' in the first line should read 'Olson'.

## **2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **3. President's Business**

Juliet Brodie's President's Business was read out by E. Michel.

First of all I send my sincere apologies for not being present at the AGM and I am very grateful to Ellinor Michel who has agreed to deputise for me. Welcome to the Systematics Association AGM.

My first year as President has seen an enthusiastic and largely new Council working extremely hard for the Systematics Association. There have been both highlights and challenges. Starting with the challenges, our excellent secretary, Peter Wilkie, has been on a sabbatical for part of the year which has meant extra duties for some members of Council and I wish to thank Julia Day, Ronald Jenner and Simon Mayo for taking minutes at the Council meetings. The 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial, which I am sure is going to be a highlight in July next year, started out with a challenge of finding a venue. A number of options were explored but finally we had an offer from Professor Christine Maggs to hold the meeting at Queen's University, Belfast. Chris Maggs has been a colleague of mine for many years and has organised several large and successful conferences so I am sure that Belfast is an excellent choice. There will be more on this in the programme officer's report. The economic situation continues to be a challenge but we have been financially able to continue to support our activities this year and I hope we will be able to continue to do so.

Another challenge has been to find a new secretary of the Grants and Awards subcommittee. Tom Richards has done a tremendous amount of work for the Association in this role for which we are extremely grateful. I am very pleased to announce that Bente Klitgaard has agreed to take on this role.

Highlights have included two excellent lectures: the joint policy lecture with the Linnean Society, by Martin Sharman and Sir Julian Huxley lecture by Andy Purvis. I also particularly want to mention the YSF which took place last Wednesday. This is the 12<sup>th</sup> year of this event and it goes from strength to strength. It was a really excellent day and I think the fact that it increasingly attracts young people from different parts of the world is a testament to the esteem in which the meeting is held. So I particularly want to thank the organisers David Bass, Ellinor Michel and Jon Todd for making it such a great occasion.

Finally, I want to thank all the officers and council members of the Society for all the work that they do. In addition to all the people I have already mentioned, I wish to thank Pete Olson (treasurer) James Cotton (programmes secretary), Ronald Jenner (newsletter), David Gower (Editor in chief), Rupert Wilson (webmaster), Jon Bennett (membership), and Gemma Bramley and Susan Evans for their wise advice at council meetings.

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

Peter Olson presented the following report.

Accounts of the financial year to the end of April 2010 were recently approved by an independent examiner and will be circulated to members electronically. The finances of the Association were dominated by expenditure on symposia and grants, while income from royalties was down compared to the previous financial year. The substantial decrease in royalties can be attributed in part to the change from CRC Press to CUP and to a lack of new publications. However, with seven books already contracted by CUP and more on the way, we can expect income from royalties to increase in the near future. Member subscriptions were only £600 above a 15-year average ~ £3,000, despite doubling the price of subscriptions to £10 (student) and £20 (regular). Thanks to careful negotiations, the jointly-held Leiden Biennial was effectively cost-neutral to the Association, and netted a profit of over £3,000, although this was not received until the current financial reporting year (i.e. 2010-2011). Expenditure continues to exceed income, with the 2010 net receipts of -£7,696. However, substantial gains from the previous year in the value of our stock portfolio and the dividends it generates resulted in an overall increase in the net worth of the Association increasing from £86K in 2009 to £92K in 2010. Thus while receiving sufficient income to offset our fixed annual expenditure remains precarious in the long term, the overall finances of the Association were healthy and saw an upward trend in net worth.

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

E. Michel read out the following report.

First of all, my apologies for not being able to attend the AGM and present this report in person.

The Association had a relatively quiet program this year, as usual for a non- biennial year. This has probably also been affected by our moratorium on funding independent meetings that are not planning to publish through the SA book series. Having said that, we still supported the usual roster of 3 named lectures, the Young Systematists' Forum, and sponsored two other meetings.

*April:*

The 3rd Annual biodiversity policy lecture (joint with Linn Soc) was another success. Given by Martin Sharman, head of the biodiversity and ecosystems sector in the directorate general for research of the European Commission. '*The obvious solution to biodiversity loss: a bigger planet*'.

Later in the month, we were pleased to be able to support the Natural History Museum Student Association's annual conference, providing prizes for the best systematics talk and best systematics poster – we did this at no cost to the Association through very generous book prizes from Cambridge University Press and donating free SA membership to the prize winners.

*July:*

The *Julian Huxley lecture* was given by Prof. Andy Purvis, Imperial College. The talk was entitled "*Species for Macroevolution*" This was an excellent talk, on using the incredible fossil record of planktonic Foraminifera to try and answer fundamental questions in macroevolution, with around 60 people attending.

Also in July, the Association sponsored the '*Early events in Monocot Evolution*' meeting on the origin of monocots and the evolution and systematics of early-diverging monocot lineages. Held at the Linn. Soc and Kew Gardens. Around 80 attendees, of which around 40 were from the UK and Ireland. International attendance was somewhat reduced as the meeting was originally scheduled for April, and delayed due to the Icelandic volcano.

*December:*

*Young Systematists' Forum* was another success with about 90 registered participants, a program of 19 talks and 22 posters, all of the usual very high quality. There was good international attendance, including speakers from as far afield as Russia and the USA. Now in its 12th year the YSF is going from strength to strength and is now a major event in the SA's calendar.

The "*President's lecture*". was given by Prof. Ole Seehausen who spoke on '*Cichlid fish as a model for studying the microevolution to macroevolution continuum*'

*Looking ahead – 2011:*

We plan to hold the usual programme of named lectures, including the *Biodiversity policy lecture* in April, the *Julian Huxley lecture* and the *President's lecture* in December. Speakers are still to be confirmed. The Julian Huxley lecture will be moved to the 5th of October, to avoid clashing with the Biennial meeting.

The biennial is the major programme's business of next year. This will be held at Queen's University Belfast. We have currently approved support for two symposia –

*'Next Generation Systematics: Studying evolution and diversity in an era of ubiquitous genomics'* and *'Arthropod systematics: are morphology, palaeontology and molecules coming together?'*, and are expecting applications for two more symposia – on algal systematics and on molecular systematics from museum specimens - in the very near future.

Thanks to the organisers of our SA-sponsored symposium, and in particular to David Bass, Elinor Michel and Jon Todd for organising the Young Systematists' Forum.

## **6. Editor-in-Chief's Report**

D. Gower presented the following report.

The main news for the year 2010:

(1) Alan Warren stood down from Council and from the role of Editor-in-Chief after 12 years of exceptional service. Alan's work for the Association in this role is greatly appreciated, especially navigating us through the tricky and lengthy handover from CRC (Taylor & Francis Group) to our new publisher, Cambridge University Press (CUP).

(2) David Gower took over from Alan Warren as Editor-in-Chief early in 2010. I thank Alan for making this handover relatively smooth and painless.

(3) The delayed final SA volume to be published with CRC Press is now close to submission:

*Palaeogeography and Palaeobiogeography: biodiversity in space and time*, edited by Paul Upchurch, Alistair McGowan and Claire Slater.

(4) Manuscripts for three volumes have been submitted and are now in production with CUP:

*Climate Change and Systematics*, edited by John Parnell, Michael Jones, Trevor Hodgkinson and Stephen Waldren.

*The Importance of Being Small: Does Size Matter in Biogeography?* edited by Diego Fontaneto.

*Flowers on the Tree of Life*, edited by Livia Wantorp and Ronse de Craene.

(5) Four 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.

*Evolution of Plant-Pollinator Interactions*, edited by Sébastien Patiny.

*Biotic Evolution and Environmental Change in Southeast Asia*, edited by David Gower, Kenneth Johnson, James Richardson, Brian Rosen, Lukas Ruber and Suzanne

Williams.

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

(6) Contracts have been signed for one textbook:

*Cladistics: a guide to systematics in biological classification*, to be written by Malte Ebach and David Williams

(7) Previous Association volumes continue to sell and raise revenue for us. For example, the two most recently published volumes (*Unravelling the algae*; *The new taxonomy*) sold 66 and 69 copies, respectively, between October 2009 and October 2010.

Thus, the hiatus in publishing (since April 2008) is almost at an end, and we have several exciting volumes under various stages of production that will appear over the next couple of years. We look forward to these re-invigorating the Association's publishing output, and raising additional funds in the form of royalties.

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

B. Klitgaard (BK) has taken over responsibility for the SRF grants from T. Richards (TR), who at the end of 2010 is stepping down as Grants & Awards Secretary. However, TR will remain involved with the SynTax scheme. BK reported that the deadline for SRF applications, with the approval of the Treasurer, will be postponed until the end of March. The council's decision to place a restriction on SRF applicants to be either members of the Systematics Association or the Linnean Society was reiterated, as was the decision of the council (at the council meeting in October 2010) to offer a discounted membership rate to people from developing countries.

BK read out a report from TR, dating to July 2010, about the Grants & Awards programme, a summary of which is given below.

### *Syntax Report*

This was the first year of the new Syntax programme funded by NERC, BBSRC, and DEFRA totalling ~£290,000 (the standard BBSRC contribution is now £150,000 and NERC is £100,000).

85 Syntax applications were received and the panel (composed of TR, two representatives elected by the Research councils, two representatives put forward by Linn. Soc., and two representatives put forward by S. A) met on March 10<sup>th</sup>. 12 projects were selected for funding and the results have been published on the S.A. website.

### *Further Syntax Issues*

#### **1: Panel members**

Due to the number of applications from Kew and/or NHM it is clear that the panel membership needs to be expanded as a number of panel members have formal connections to these institutions and therefore can not review the proposals. Two additional panel members ideally from outside London (e.g. Scotland and Wales) who are also prepared to sit on SA council are currently being sought. Once names have

been collated they will be circulated for council voting.

## 2: Syntax administration Fee.

Both societies will receive a 1% administration fee (£2,500 a year) per round of the Syntax funding programme from the Syntax funding pot. The treasurer and TR are currently trying to arrange payment with Linn. Soc. who have control of the funds. It should be noted that TR was keen to have this money allocated to projects instead.

## *SRF report*

261 applicants for the SRF grants were received representing another ~40% annual increase. As agreed at SA council strict rules regarding disqualification were enforced. These rules (which were very clear on the application form) resulted in a total of 187 valid applications.

This year the scoring process was simplified to try and standardise the application of the scoring rules. Six referees from the SA council (many thanks) were identified providing two reviewers for each grant. The Linn. Soc. matched this to give 4 reviewers per application. Unfortunately, two reviewers from the Linn. Soc. did not complete the assigned reviews so some applications were judged based on three scores. Proposals were ranked according to average scores. The results of this years round are published on the S.A. website.

## Future of the SRF

Due to the large yearly increase in number of applications (40% last year) it is imperative that the administration and assessment process of the SRF is reviewed and modified as a matter of urgency. The current system is simply unsustainable!

Perhaps a more targeted program for early career scientists within our research community who in the future will add directly to the S.A. community could be a solution. My time in this role is coming to an end and I have so far failed to make any changes. However, I feel a change is very important if this programme is to continue. I suggest the following voting point: The S.A. is to restructure the SRF (with or without the Linn. Soc. and their funding contribution) so that applicants are: 1) Early career scientists (PHD/Postdoc/within three years of first independent academic post) and are, 2) Members of S.A. (or Linn. Soc. if it remains a joint venture).'

## *Retirement*

It is important we try to overlap duties for the 2010/11 Syntax and SRF duties with the person taking over this role.

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

E. Michel read out the following Membership Secretary's report.

1. As of December 2010, there are 398 members, and increase of 19 from last year. 292 of whom are UK-based, with 53 from the rest of Europe and 53 from the rest of the world.
2. An increasing number of overseas members are making use of the on-line payment system. We hope to extend this in the new year so that all renewals can be handled by this method.
3. There are still a number of members who have standing orders for £10 or in some

cases £5. These members are being contacted to ask them to change to the new membership fees of £20 per annum.

4. The membership database was overhauled during the summer and where we have a current email address members were added to the SA electronic mailing list.

5. I would like to thank Rupert Wilson for 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.

## **9. Newsletter Editor Report**

R. Jenner presented the following report.

Two issues of *The Systematist* (numbers 31 and 32) were published this year. They included six symposium/meeting reports, two SRF reports, a president's report, eight book reviews, a review of the Natural History Museum's new Darwin Centre, two *Inspirations* interviews, an *In memoriam* of Chris Humphries, a past president of the Association, an article on the role of systematics in prioritizing conservation efforts, and an essay on the numerical taxonomist Robert Sokal. We are grateful for all these contributions and look forward to two new issues in 2011.

## **10. Webmaster Report**

R. Wilson presented the following report.

In the last year the SA website has received 7,476 unique visitors from 130 countries up 11% on last year. There was a 50/50 split between new and returning visitors with 51% of the visits arriving via search engines. Referring sites contributed to 20% of the visits.

The most popular area of the website is still the Awards section which received 39% of the total (33.5K) page views. Other popular areas include the YSF, publications and events.

Background work is currently underway to refresh the look of the site; we also hope to extend the online payment of membership dues to all members.

## **11. Election of Officers**

B. Klitgaard has taken over from T. Richards as the Grants and Awards Secretary responsible for the SRF.

Council agreed unanimously that the webmaster R. Wilson and newsletter editor R. Jenner become official officers of the Association.

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

Four new Council members were nominated: Alex Monroe, Maria Vorotnosova (present at the meeting), Tim Uttridge and Eve Lucas. They were approved as members near unanimously; D. Gower abstained from voting for the two potential council members not known to him [Maria Vorotnosova and Eve Lucas].

Simon Mayo and Tom Richards are retiring from council in 2010 and Mark van der Giezen reluctantly stepped down owing to other commitments. All are thanked for their service on Council. One place on council remains empty.

### **13. Any Other Business**

Dave Williams pointed out that with B. Klitgaard taking over only the SRF from T. Richards, they were in effect jointly filling the Grants & Awards Secretary position. He wanted to know if that is acceptable. Although R. Bateman remarked that there is a precedent for this in the Association it would not justify it. However, B. Klitgaard reminded us that T. Richards was retiring from council at the end of 2010, which would solve this dilemma but would mean that no council member of the Association would be involved in administering SynTax. It was agreed that Council would need to look further into this.

The AGM closed at 5.50pm.