

Editorial Comment

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50th Anniversary of *Systematic Biology* and Introduction of Editor-Elect

The year 2001 marks the 50th year of publication of *Systematic Zoology/Systematic Biology*. Our science has seen many changes during the past half century, and the pages of our journal have documented many of the most important of them. The Society of Systematic Biologists (SSB; formerly Society of Systematic Zoology) has grown steadily over that time, and *Systematic Biology* has benefited from members submitting their best work for publication in its pages. With this issue, we recognize the importance of the first 50 years and lay the groundwork for an expanded role for *Systematic Biology* in the new millennium with two new features.

Beginning with this issue, *Systematic Biology* changes from a quarterly to a bimonthly journal. By moving to six issues per year, the journal will be able to publish more outstanding systematics papers from SSB members and the international systematics community as well as bring papers to press more quickly than was possible on a quarterly schedule. This change has been predicated on the increasing submission rate and the need to continue to maintain a high-quality journal that is accessible to members of SSB.

In recognition of 50 years of publication, beginning in this issue and continuing through the year, we will publish a series of historical essays by individuals who have contributed to SSB and the success of *Systematic Zoology/Systematic Biology* over the years. In this issue, one of the founding members of the Society of Systematic Zoology and a former president of SSB will describe some of the important events of the early years of the Society and its journal.

During the past 50 years, the field of biological systematics has grown in stature, and

a phylogenetic perspective has transformed virtually every field of biology. The central role of *Systematic Biology* in that transformation is reflected in its impact rating by the Institute for Scientific Information (publishers of Current Contents and Science Citation Index). They rate *Systematic Biology* second among 68 journals in the category "Biology," which includes journals with a focus on evolution and other specific areas in biology. I am proud to have served SSB as Editor of *Systematic Biology*.

As I begin my last year as Editor, I am pleased to introduce the Editor-elect and next Editor of *Systematic Biology*, Chris Simon. Chris has served the journal as an Associate Editor for the past two editors and SSB as Program Chair and Secretary in consecutive terms spanning the past six years. Chris is an insect molecular systematist with a broad perspective on systematics; I am confident that she will be an excellent Editor. All new submissions should be sent to Chris. I will continue my duties as Editor through volume 50 and Chris will become Editor with volume 51.

We are now entering the fourth year with our new publisher, Taylor & Francis. In addition to having done a fine job of publishing *Systematic Biology*, they have contributed to SSB and the journal in many ways. We owe them thanks for sponsoring the opening reception at our annual meetings and, more importantly, for sponsoring the Publisher's Award for Excellence in Systematic Research, which recognizes with a \$500 cash prize the best papers based on student research published in the journal each year. Taylor & Francis is also responsible for making *Systematic Biology* available on line in a fully searchable format through "Catchword" to

members (see the Taylor & Francis website) and to institutions with subscriptions. Back issues of *Systematic Zoology/Biology* are now available through JSTOR (www.jstor.org).

I also take this opportunity to thank Patrick Reeves, my Editorial Assistant; David Cannatella, for his assistance in many ways, including as Book Review Editor and Webmaster; and Lori Bockstanz, Assistant Webmaster. However, the greatest thanks belong to the many individuals who have served as Associate Editors, Editorial Board members, and reviewers for *Systematic Biology* during my tenure as Editor. Their conscientious and selfless efforts, along with the confidence that authors have in the journal, deserve praise for the continuing success of *Systematic Biology*.

—Richard Olmstead

On behalf of all members of SSB I thank Richard Olmstead for his outstanding service as the 15th Editor of *Systematic Biology*. Over the last three years, he has worked harder than anyone else to make the journal a success, giving generously of his time and putting authors' work before his own. His insightful comments were, I'm sure, appreciated by the author's with whom he worked. Dick has instituted several changes in the journal, the most important of which is an increasing trend toward electronic submissions and electronic reviews, which were begun during David Cannatella's term. In this transitional period, Dick has patiently dealt with large numbers of different figure formats and word-processing programs. It's hard to believe that only six years ago were the first manuscripts submitted to the printer on computer diskettes.

I will continue the trend toward electronic publication and reviewing with the eventual goal of having all manuscripts submitted as PDF files. Special exceptions will still be made for members without access to appropriate technology. Electronic manuscripts received by me will be sent via the Internet to editors and reviewers. Reviewers will be asked to return reviews electronically to the Associate Editors. Reviews will be returned to authors in this same efficient manner. This will increase the speed of using non-U.S. reviewers and of reviewing manuscripts from overseas authors. I'm sure our procedures will evolve as technology changes. We are currently investigating web-based review-

ing. We will continue to improve the SSB website begun under the editorship of David Cannatella and managed by him still. The Society owes a real debt of gratitude to Dave for his continued service. In addition to improving our own website, we are investigating the possibility of depositing all trees and aligned data sets with TreeBASE and will continue to require GenBank submissions for molecular sequences.

I am looking forward to my term as Editor of *Systematic Biology*. To quote the famous systematics comedian David Hillis on the eve of his debut as Editor, "On the one hand, I knew there would be long hours of hard work, deadlines, and lowered personal productivity, but on the other, there would be angry authors, a demanding Council, and procrastinating reviewers." Seriously, all recent Editors have said to me that working with *Systematic Biology* has been one of the most rewarding experiences of their career and I expect the same. *Systematic Biology/Zoology* has always been one of my favorite journals. Oddly, unlike all other journals I read, I have a distinct recollection of the first time I found that intriguing black-and-green volume on the top floor of the University of Florida library; I was a senior in college. Later, as a graduate student at Stony Brook, I survived the interesting years of the phenetics versus cladistics debate and the excitement of the introduction of molecular techniques to systematics. As a beginning faculty member at the University of Hawaii, I led a graduate seminar that traced the history of the journal and was fascinated by the development of ideas. In 1991, I moved to the University of Connecticut. That was the year, in Hilo, Hawaii, that SSB began meeting regularly with Society for the Study of Evolution and the year after David Hillis became Editor and spearheaded the conscious widening of the journal constituency to include non-zoologists. With its strong emphasis on theory and methodology, clearly *Systematic Zoology* had become a journal for all systematists. In his editorial comment (*Syst. Zool.* 39:187–191), Hillis compared the impact of *Systematic Zoology* with that of 96 other zoology journals, noting that *Systematic Zoology* ranked first or second in all but one of the years between 1980 and 1988 and that its average score outranked even conceptual journals such as *Evolution*, *Genetics*, and *American Naturalist*. As Dick mentioned

above, *Systematic Biology* has continued to have extremely high impact.

During my term as Editor, *Systematic Biology* will retain many of the excellent features introduced by my recent predecessors. It will continue to publish theoretical, methodological, empirical, and terminological papers and reach out to an ever-broader constituency. As in the past, empirical papers will be selected that are outstanding in the field because of their thorough data analysis, application of a useful new methodology, discussion of a particularly controversial systematic question, or incorporation of some unusual character evolution or biogeographic pattern. Points of view will as always be a lively forum for debate. I will continue the tradition instituted by David Hillis of inviting counter-points and by Mike Miyamoto of occasionally inviting a review of a new method, program, or analytical approach. Sets of relevant, peer-reviewed symposium papers will continue to be published on a limited basis.

The move to six issues per year will enable *Systematic Biology* to increase the number of papers it can publish, while keeping the number of papers per issue approximately the same, thereby showcasing important works in systematic biology. I will continue the practice of combining Associate Editors with an Editorial Board. No manuscript will be mailed to reviewers without first obtaining their promise to review in a timely manner. I will choose an Associate Editor for each paper submitted. Each Associate Editor will send each manuscript to one board member and one ad hoc reviewer. On receipt of the reviews, the Associate Editor will then review the paper him or herself and make recommendations to me. I will then review the paper myself in light of the three reviews in hand.

With the ongoing increase in numbers of submissions and the move to six issues per year, I have increased the number of Associate Editor's from 16 to 21. For 2001–2003 they will be Keith Crandall, Cliff Cunningham, Dan Faith, Nick Goldman, Junhyong Kim (joining in 2002), Karl Kjer, Peter Linder, Pete Lockhart, Francois Lutzoni, Roberta Mason-Gamer, Gavin Naylor, Rod Page, Bruce Rannala, Mike Sanderson (on sabbatical Spring 2001), Pam Soltis, Ted Schultz, Jack Sites, Mike Steel, Jack Sullivan, Jeff Thorne,

and Ziheng Yang. I thank these excellent colleagues for volunteering their time and expertise and eagerly look forward to working with them. As a group, the Associate Editors combine theoretical expertise with significant organismal experience. I feel strongly that knowledge of the organisms, their biology, and the morphological and molecular characters used as data are as important as knowledge of analytical techniques. I have chosen people who have demonstrated a broad knowledge of systematics methods and, in my opinion, are extremely conscientious and approach criticism in a constructive manner. Using the same criteria, Associate Editors have helped to select an equally excellent line-up of Editorial Board members. Their names and addresses will be announced on the SSB website once the last few have been finalized. My Associate Editors and I share Dick Olmstead's sentiment that we are partners in the publication process. We will continue the tradition, instituted by President Vicki Funk and Editor Olmstead, of inviting sister systematics societies with no journal of their own to nominate an Editorial Board member. Currently this includes systematics societies from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Despite the best efforts of our all-volunteer staff, however, turn-around time will always remain a difficult issue. Although there are many Associate Editors, there is still only one of me. I ask your patience and your cooperation. Lack of response from you doubles our communication workload, so please be prompt with reviews. In an attempt to improve time-to-publication, my new Associate Editors, Board members, and I will prepare a set of "Suggestions for Authors" to accompany the "Instructions for Authors." This is an idea borrowed from the journal *Evolution*. In these suggestions we will attempt to spell-out the most common mistakes made by past authors so that future authors can avoid them. Another feature borrowed from the journal *Evolution* is web-posting of the status of each manuscript. My editorial assistant will be in charge of this and will also remind reviewers and authors of impending deadlines. Everyone will work hard to maintain the tradition of excellence that has characterized *Systematic Biology*.

—Chris Simon