

Implementation experience report

Introduction

One of the main objectives of the current effort is to make TCS useful again and the current release provides standard terms for concepts that are already widely used in applications that are out there. No new features have been added in this revision of TCS. Terms from TCS 1 for which we do not have clear idea yet of how they can be implemented have not yet been included in this release.

Relation with ColDP

A recent important application, the Catalogue of Life Data Package (ColDP), has a data model that is very similar to TCS and includes all TCS terms, the only conflict being that ColDP has a `Synonym` entity that requires an ID, which TCS does not. This might be a legacy from TCS 1 where `has synonym` is a relationship between Taxon Concepts. In TCS 2, we have split the `has synonym` relation into the `synonym` property for relationships between Taxon Concept and Taxon Name—like `taxonName`—and the `intersects` property for relationships between Taxon Concepts. When TCS is expressed in tabular form, a separate table is still needed for synonyms, because of the many-to-many relation between Taxon Concepts and Taxon Names, but there should be no identifiers for synonyms. This is the same way the Name Relation table in the ColDP schema has been implemented.

ColDP also offers a Name Usage entity "for simpler sharing", which is more similar to the Darwin Core Taxon.

Relation with Darwin Core

TCS can play the same role for the Darwin Core Taxon that the Darwin Core IRI (`dwciri`) namespace has for the other Darwin Core entities. Moreover the TCS Nomenclatural Type can be used as the object for the `dwciri:typeStatus` property.

In order to convert existing Darwin Core Taxon Core data sets to TCS data sets, a `taxonConceptID` can be created by coalescing the `acceptedNameUsageID`—or the `taxonID` of the `acceptedNameUsage`—and `taxonID`. If the data set, or record, lacks a `nameAccordingTo`, the `nameAccordingTo` is the data set itself.

While for sharing purely taxonomic data TCS is the preferred format, at the interface of taxonomic data and occurrence data, *e.g.*, identifications, Darwin Core will often be preferred. The `dwc:taxonConceptID` can be used to reference a `tcs:TaxonConcept` from a `dwc:Taxon`. For the purpose of distribution maps, etc., `dwc:Taxon` and `tcs:TaxonConcept` can be considered equivalent.

An example

The following example will (hopefully) serve to demonstrate some of the workings of TCS and how it can be used. This example deals with five different treatments (Tan & Koponen, 1983 [[tan_dicranoloma_1983](#)]; Eddy, 1988 [[eddy_sphagnales_1988](#)]; Tan, 1989 [[tan_dicranoloma_1983](#)]; Norris & Koponen, 1990 [[norris_bryophytes_1990](#)]; Klazenga, 1999 [[klazenga_revision_1999](#)]) of the moss genus *Dicranoloma* in Malesia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, The Philippines and Papua New Guinea). It contains a total of 71 Taxon Concepts (67 at the species level or below) and 133 Taxon Names. All the data used below comes from the [JSON-LD file](#) of one of the [examples](#).

Some examples of Taxon Concepts with their **accordingTo**, accepted name (**taxonName**) and synonyms (**synonym**), when entered into a graph database, are shown in figure 1.

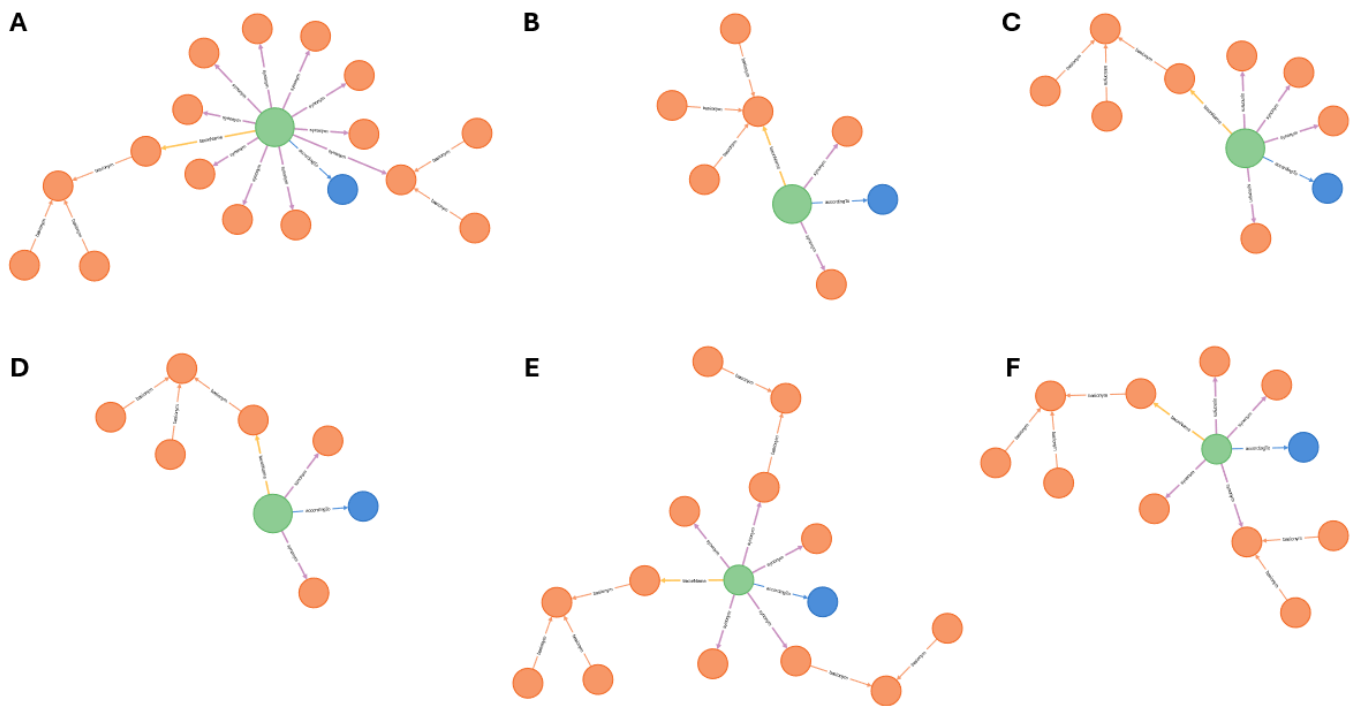


Figure 1. Taxon concepts (green dots) with their according-to (blue dots) and all associated names (orange dots). Taxon Concepts are connected to names via the **taxonName** and **synonym** properties and Taxon Names are connected to each other through the **basionym** and **replacedName** properties. **A.** *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Klazenga 1999 ([figure-1a.svg](#)), **B.** *Dicranum assimile* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 ([figure-1b.svg](#)), **C.** *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Tan 1989 ([figure-1c.svg](#)), **D.** *Dicranoloma assimile* s.s. sec. Eddy 1988 ([figure-1d.svg](#)), **E.** *Dicranoloma assimile* s.l. sec. Eddy 1988 ([figure-1e.svg](#)), **F.** *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Tan & Koponen 1983 ([figure-1f.svg](#)).

The Taxon Concepts in **figure 1** all have the same Taxon Name, *Dicranoloma assimile* (Hampe) Renauld, so will show at least some overlap. At the same time, they have different synonyms, so they are not exactly the same. If we put all Taxon Concepts and associated references and Taxon Names in the graph, we get a rather nebulous picture of the relationships between the items in the graph (**figure 2**).

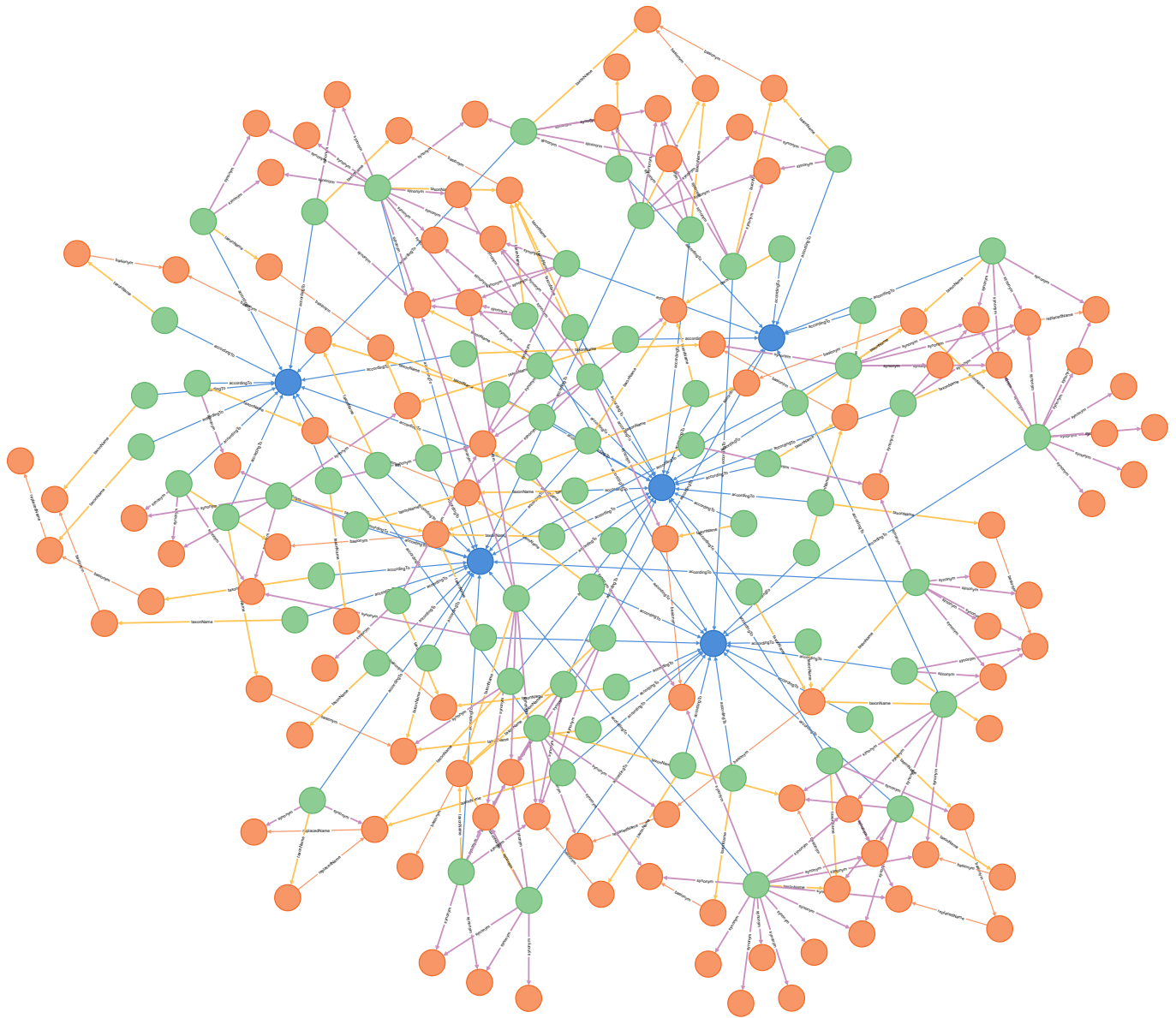


Figure 2. Graph with all Taxon Concepts (green dots), Taxon Names (orange dots) and references (blue dots).

Removing the references makes for a much clearer picture (**figure 3**) but there is still a big agglomerate of connected taxon concepts that contains almost half of the Taxon Concepts. While it is easy for humans to see where this cluster can be broken up, it will not be for machines and, more importantly, even humans cannot do anything about it without changing the Taxon Concepts while only working with Taxon Concept–Taxon Name relationships (*i.e.* accepted names and synonyms) alone.

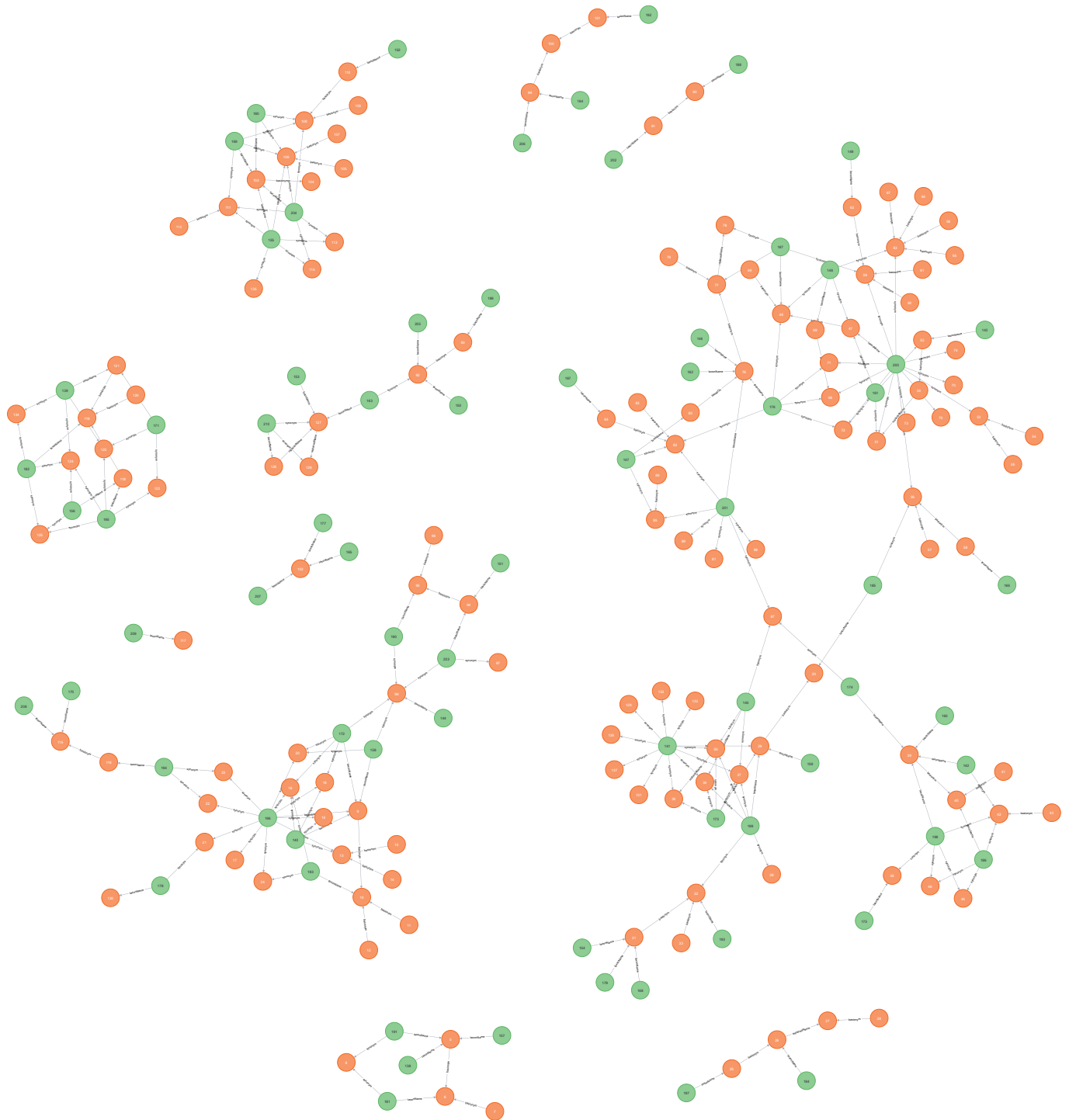


Figure 3. Graph with all Taxon Concepts (green dots) and Taxon Names (orange dots).

To address the problem, let's leave the administration for what it is and see what else there is to see in the data. For this, we make use of the fact that all scientific names have type specimens, so we can use the accepted names and synonyms as a 'specimen circumscription' (*cf.* TCS 1).

To do this properly, we first have to group names with the same type. In TCS, we've got the **basionym** and **replacedName** properties, representing terms that are used in the domain, to connect names with the same type. However, the **basionym** and **replacedName** properties will never connect the same names, and they are always different names from the subject (a name cannot be its own basionym or replaced name), so these properties cannot always be used to connect all homotypic names to the same name.

In the current example we've got names that have no other combinations (**figure 4A**) and combinations that group around a basionym (**figure 4B**), for which linking up the names through the **basionym** will work fine, but we also have some more complicated situations, like a replaced name and a replacement name, both of which are the basionym of another name (**figure 4C**), or a replaced name with a replacement name where the replacement name is the replaced name of another name (**figure 4D**). In order to link up these names, we have to do something different.

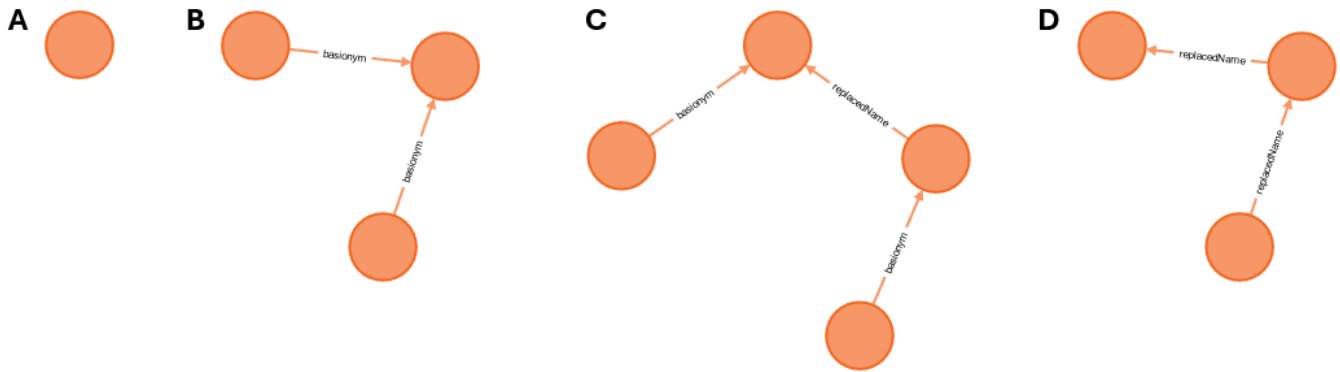


Figure 4. Taxon Names and their relationships. **A.** Name without other combinations ([figure-4a.svg](#)), **B.** basionym with two combinations ([figure-4b.svg](#)), **C.** replacement name and replaced name, both of which are the basionym of another combination ([figure-4c.svg](#)), **D.** replacement name of which the replaced name is the replacement name of another name ([figure-4d.svg](#)).

There was no appetite in the Task Group for an **originalName** property, analogous to the Darwin Core **originalNameUsage**, in TCS, probably because of the problematic semantics, so we have to infer it from the **basionym** and **replacedName** relations. This is probably for the best, as for our purposes it is immaterial which name in a group becomes the "original name", so we do not have to be concerned with the semantics and can do what works best in the situation. In this case, the "original name" is the earliest name (like in **dwc:originalNameUsage**) but (in contrast to **dwc:originalNameUsage**) this name does not have to be a legitimate name. So, it will be a different name depending on whether illegitimate and/or invalid names are included in the data set or not. **Figure 5** shows the examples from figure 4 with the **originalName** relations included.

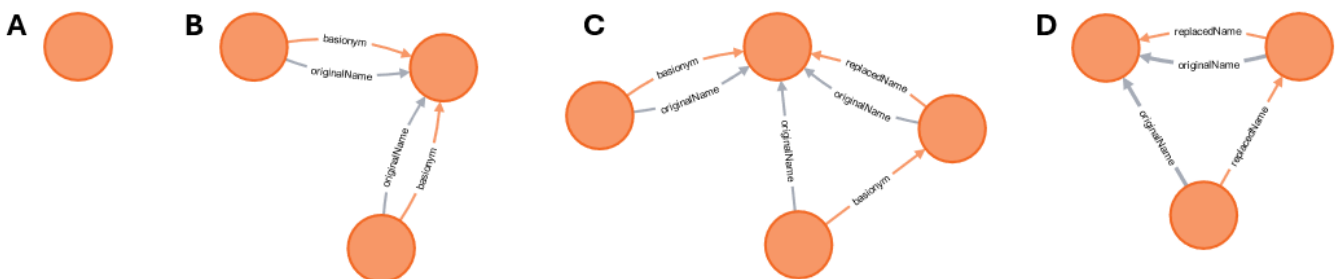


Figure 5. Same Taxon Name graphs as in the previous figure, but with **originalName** property connecting combinations to the same "original name" ([figure-5a.svg](#), [figure-5b.svg](#), [figure-5c.svg](#), [figure-5d.svg](#)).

One issue that was encountered is that there is nothing in TCS to link autonyms to a homotypic group of names, which is something the TCS Maintenance Group will have to look into. For the purpose of making the

example work, I have added a `autonymOf` property (in the example), but this will not withstand scrutiny, as a name is just an autonym, not an autonym of another name and, even if so, what would that other name be?

There is one other bit of data preparation that needs to be done, which is adding the accepted name and synonyms of infraspecific taxa to the specimen circumscription of their parents.

Now we've got everything in place to start mapping Taxon Concepts to each other. To do so, we first get all the pairs of Taxon Concepts that intersect, *i.e.* have names in common. Then, for each pair, we see which names are in the intersection (**A** \cap **B**) and which names are in one concept and not in the other (**A** – **B** or **B** – **A**). This helps us find the more precise relationships between concepts. For the names that are in the relative supplements, there is another check to do, as there is only a conflict if the name is used elsewhere in the other treatment. So, if there are only names in the intersection and there are no names that are in one concept and not in the other, the concepts are congruent (**A** `isCongruentWith` **B**); if the subject (**A**) has names that are not in the object (**B**) the subject includes the object (**A** `includes` **B**); if there are names in the object that are not in the subject, the subject is included in the object (**A** `isIncludedIn` **B**); and if there are names that are in the subject and not the object as well as names that are in the object but not the subject, the concepts partially overlap (**A** `partiallyOverlaps` **B**). Examples of each of the intersection types found in this example are given in **figure 6**.

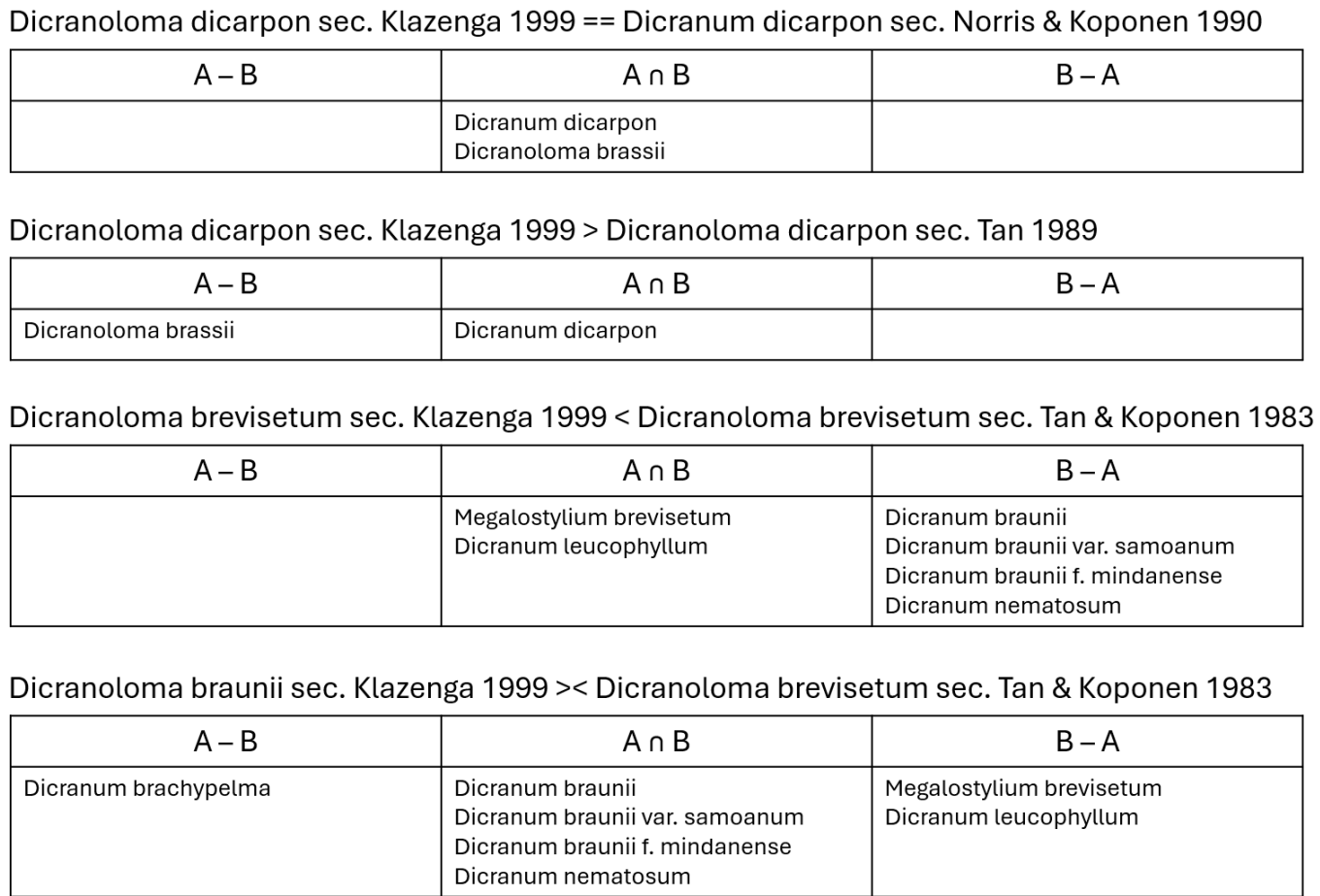


Figure 6. Examples of Taxon Concept Mappings using type specimens of names that the concepts apply to. `==`: `isCongruentWith`; `>`: `includes`; `<`: `isIncludedIn`; `><`: `partiallyOverlaps`. **A** \cap **B**: specimens included in both subject and object Taxon Concepts; **A** – **B**: specimens included in the subject Taxon Concept but not in the object Taxon Concept; **B** – **A**: specimens included in the object Taxon Concept but not in the subject Taxon Concept.

The Taxon Concepts and their mappings based on the inclusion of type specimens of names are shown in **figure 7**. The groups of connected concepts, or single concepts, are, of course, the same as in **figure 3** where we linked Taxon Concepts via the Taxon Names, because they are based on the same data. What we have gained, however, is that (1) we now have the more precise mapping relations and (2) a more expressive language to align taxon concepts (and reconcile taxonomies) than just 'accepted name' and 'synonym'. Most importantly (3), the taxon concept mappings are things we are allowed to muck around with, as they are not part of the taxon concepts.

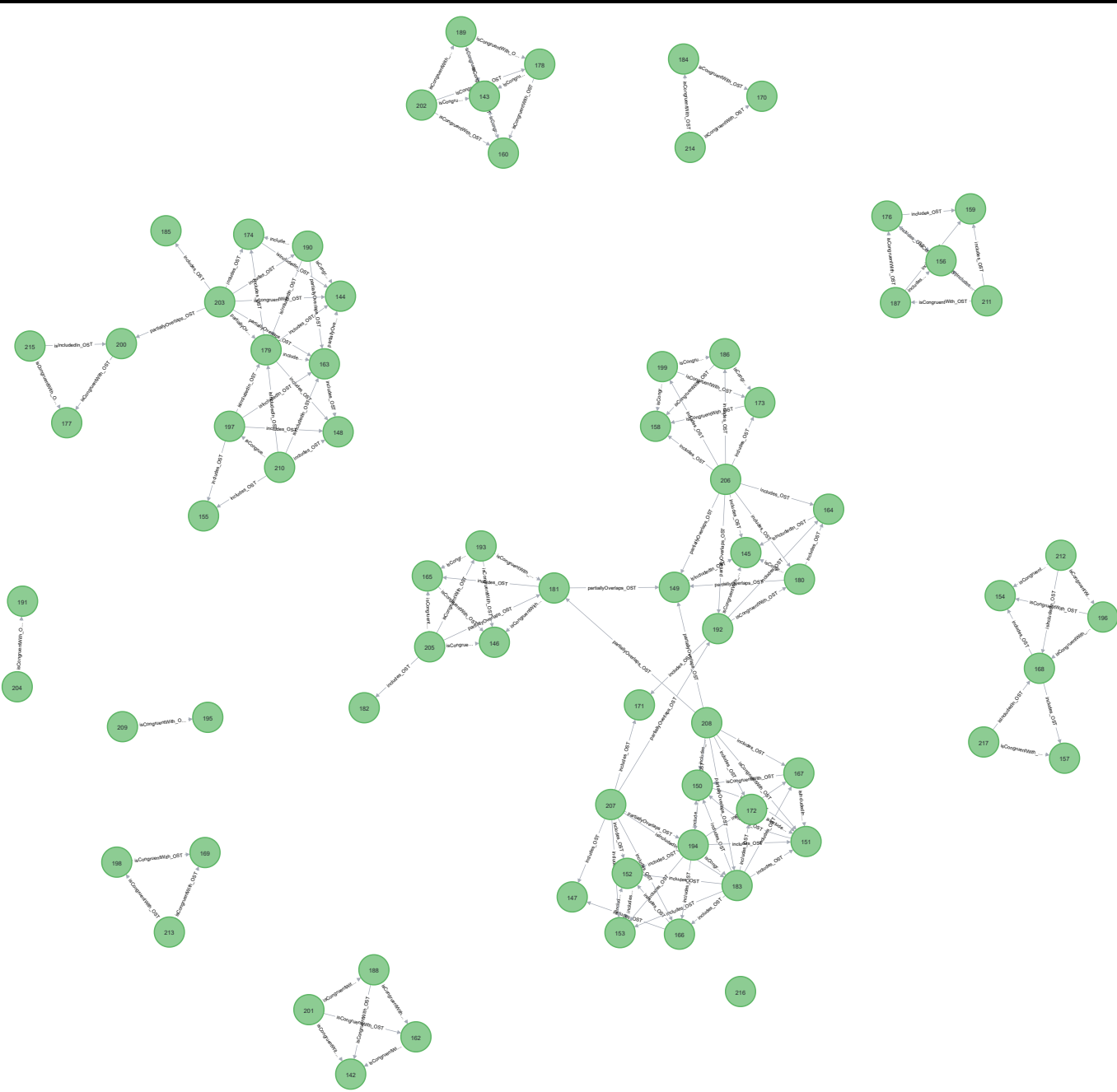


Figure 7. Taxon Concepts with mappings based on the type specimens of names that are included in the concepts (ostensive mappings).

Taxon concept information has two components (*cf.* Senderov et al., 2018 [[senderov_openbiodiv-o_2018](#)]), an *ostensive* component, which is a list of (some of the) organisms that belong to the taxon concept, and an *intensional* component, mostly expressed as characters, which is a definition of the allowable variation within (all) the organisms that make up the taxon. In TCS 1 these components are represented by the

'SpecimenCircumscription' and 'CharacterCircumscription' elements (for TCS 2, we are going to take a bit more time to think about circumscription, so these are not included in this release yet). For ease of use of terms, we call the taxon concept mappings based on the ostensive and intensional components of taxon concept information 'ostensive mappings' and 'intensional mappings' respectively. For many purposes, and certainly in this example, ostensive mappings can be inferred from the information that is already in the data set, so that is what we have just done, while intensional mappings need to be explicitly added to the data set, which is what we are going to do next.

In this example, in most cases the intensional mapping is the same as the ostensive mapping. Reasons why intensional mappings can be different from the ostensive mappings, and thus the data is misleading, include the following:

1. **Different interpretations of specimens.** There is no reason why type specimens cannot be misidentified by later workers. This is the case here for the type specimen of *Dicranoloma defoliatum* Froehl., which was included in *Dicranoloma deplanchei* sec. Eddy 1988 by Eddy (1988), in *Dicranoloma blumei* sec. Tan 1989 by Tan (1989) and in *Dicranoloma brevisetum* sec. Klazenga 1999 by Klazenga (1999). The **partiallyOverlaps** mappings between these three concepts that were caused by the type of *Dicranoloma defoliatum* were changed to **isDisjointFrom** mappings in the intensional mappings.
2. **Ambiguous types.** Eddy (1988) treated *Dicranoloma laevifolium* sec. Eddy 1988 as a species on its own. Tan (1989) and Norris & Koponen 1990 included the type of *Dicranum laevifolium* Broth. & Geh. in *Dicranoloma billardieri* sec. Tan 1989 and *Dicranum billardieri* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 respectively. None of these workers probably saw the type material in Brotherus's herbarium, which Klazenga (1999) considered to belong to *Dicranoloma braunii* sec. Klazenga 1999, but based their concepts on the description and on other specimens identified as *Dicranoloma laevifolium*. It cannot be discounted that we have to do with a mixed type gathering here and that the material in Brotherus's herbarium and the material in Geheeb's herbarium (which is inaccessible) belongs to different species, which is a situation that is not unheard of in bryophytes. In any case, intensionally *Dicranoloma braunii* sec. Klazenga 1999 does not overlap (is disjoint from) *Dicranoloma laevifolium* sec. Eddy 1988, *Dicranoloma billardieri* sec. Tan 1989 and *Dicranum billardieri* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990. The mappings between the latter three concepts remain unchanged from the ostensive mappings.
3. **Missing data.** This is the case when a name is used in some works and not in others. In this example Tan & Koponen (1983) recognise *Dicranoloma brachypelma* sec. Tan & Koponen 1983, while Eddy (1988) and Klazenga (1999) include the type of *Leucoloma brachypelma* Broth. in *Dicranoloma braunii* sec. Eddy 1988 and *Dicranoloma braunii* sec. Klazenga 1999 respectively. Tan (1989) and Norris & Koponen (1999) do not mention the type of *leucoloma brachypelma* at all. Because of this, we cannot say with certainty how *Dicranoloma braunii* sec. Tan 1989 and *Dicranum braunii* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 relate to the other three concepts of *Dicranoloma braunii* (Bosch & Sande Lac.) Paris.
4. **Different geographic scopes.** The five treatments have a different geographic focus. While the treatments by Eddy (1988) and Klazenga (1999) are for the entire Malay Archipelago, Tan & Koponen (1983) focus on the Philippines, Tan (1989) on Borneo (especially Gn. Kinabalu in Sabah) and Norris & Koponen (1990) on Papua New Guinea (the Huon Peninsula in Morobe Province). This might explain why Tan (1989) and Norris & Koponen (1990) did not list *Leucoloma brachypelma*, the type of which is from Java, but not why Tan & Koponen (1983) do have it.

The example also includes species whose main distribution is outside Malesia. Tan & Koponen (1983) recognise *Dicranoloma brassii* sec. Tan & Koponen 1983 as endemic in New Guinea, while Norris & Koponen (1990) and Klazenga (1999) include the type of *Dicranoloma brassii* E.B.Bartram in *Dicranum dicarpon* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 and *Dicranoloma dicarpon* sec. Klazenga 1999. *Dicranoloma dicarpon* is a mainly Australasian taxon that reaches into Papua New Guinea (and has two records, the syntypes of *Dicranoloma formosanum* Broth., in Taiwan), so, while ostensibly *Dicranoloma brassii* sec. Tan & Koponen (1983) is congruent with *Dicranum dicarpon* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 and *Dicranoloma dicarpon* sec. Klazenga 1999, intensionally it is included in those concepts. Eddy (1988) and Tan (1989) include the type of *Dicranoloma brassii* in *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Eddy 1988 and *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Tan 1989 respectively, so concepts of *Dicranoloma assimile* (Hampe) Paris, which are in all five treatments, are affected too.

In another example, *Dicranoloma platycaulon* sec. Tan 1989 includes the type of *Dicranoloma euryloma* var. *rugifolium* E.B.Bartram, which is also included in *Dicranum rugifolium* sec. Norris & Koponen 1999 and *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Klazenga 1999. *Dicranoloma platycaulon* is restricted to New Zealand and South-eastern Australia, so *Dicranoloma platycaulon* sec. Tan 1989 is not included in *Dicranum rugifolium* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 or *Dicranoloma assimile* sec. Klazenga 1990, as the data seems to suggest, but partially overlaps these concepts.

5. **New taxa.** Two new taxon names, *Dicranum cutlackii* Norris & T.J.Kop. and *Dicranoloma steenisii* Klazenga were published in the period from 1983 to 1999 in which the five treatments were produced. I have concluded that *Dicranum cutlackii* sec. Norris & Koponen 1990 and *Dicranoloma steenisii* sec. Klazenga 1999 are taxa that were overlooked before, rather than split off from other concepts, so they do not intersect with concepts from earlier treatments, but it is easy to think of situations where it is the other way. For new concepts that do not have any names in common with existing concepts, it is impossible to say based on the name data alone whether they are truly new concepts, which leave existing concepts unchanged, or whether they have been split off from already recognised taxa, so they affect the concept that keeps the existing name. Extra data needs to be included in the data set to tell these situations apart.

The intensional mappings have been added to the [JSON-LD](#) and are shown in **figure 8**.

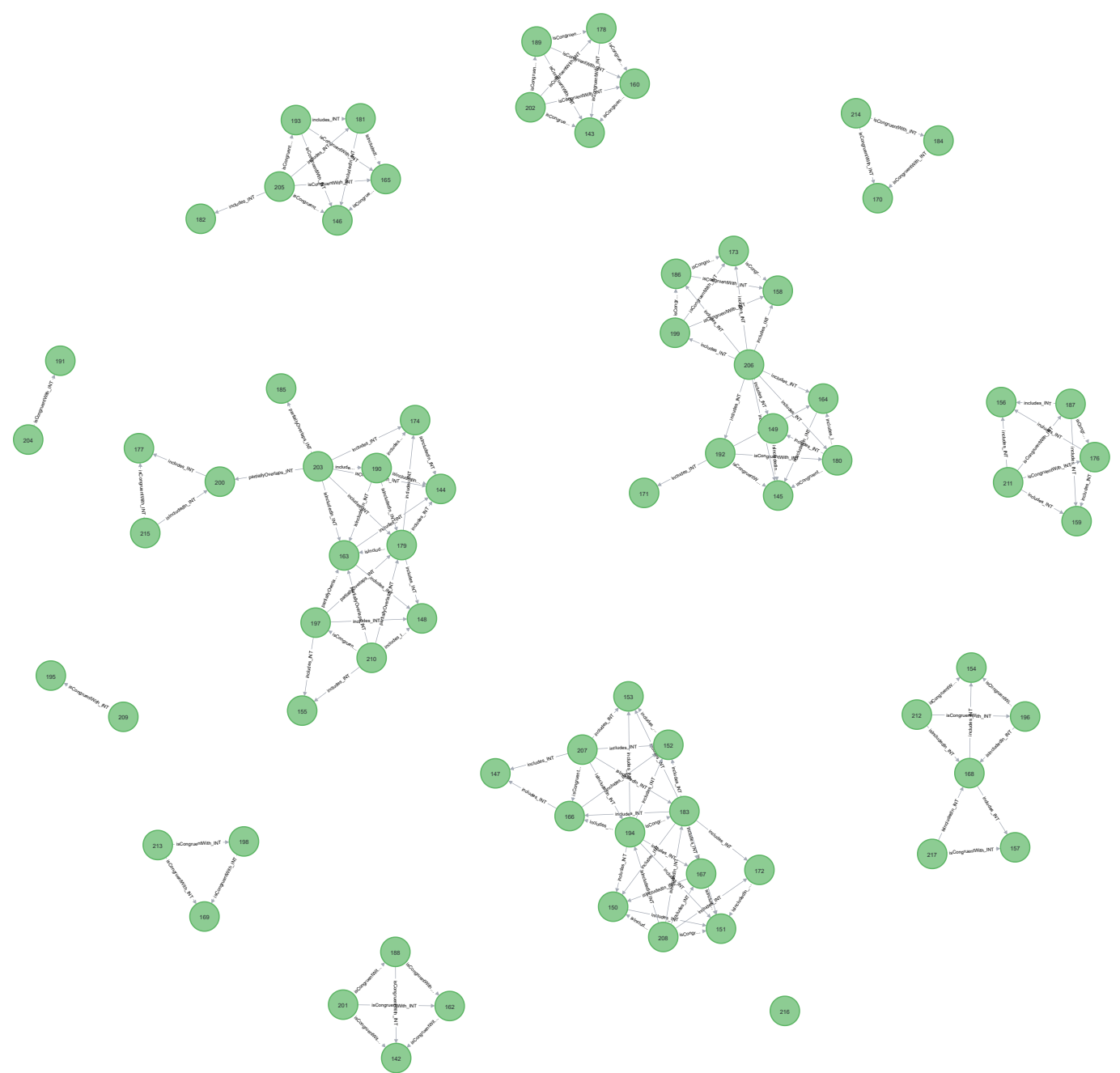
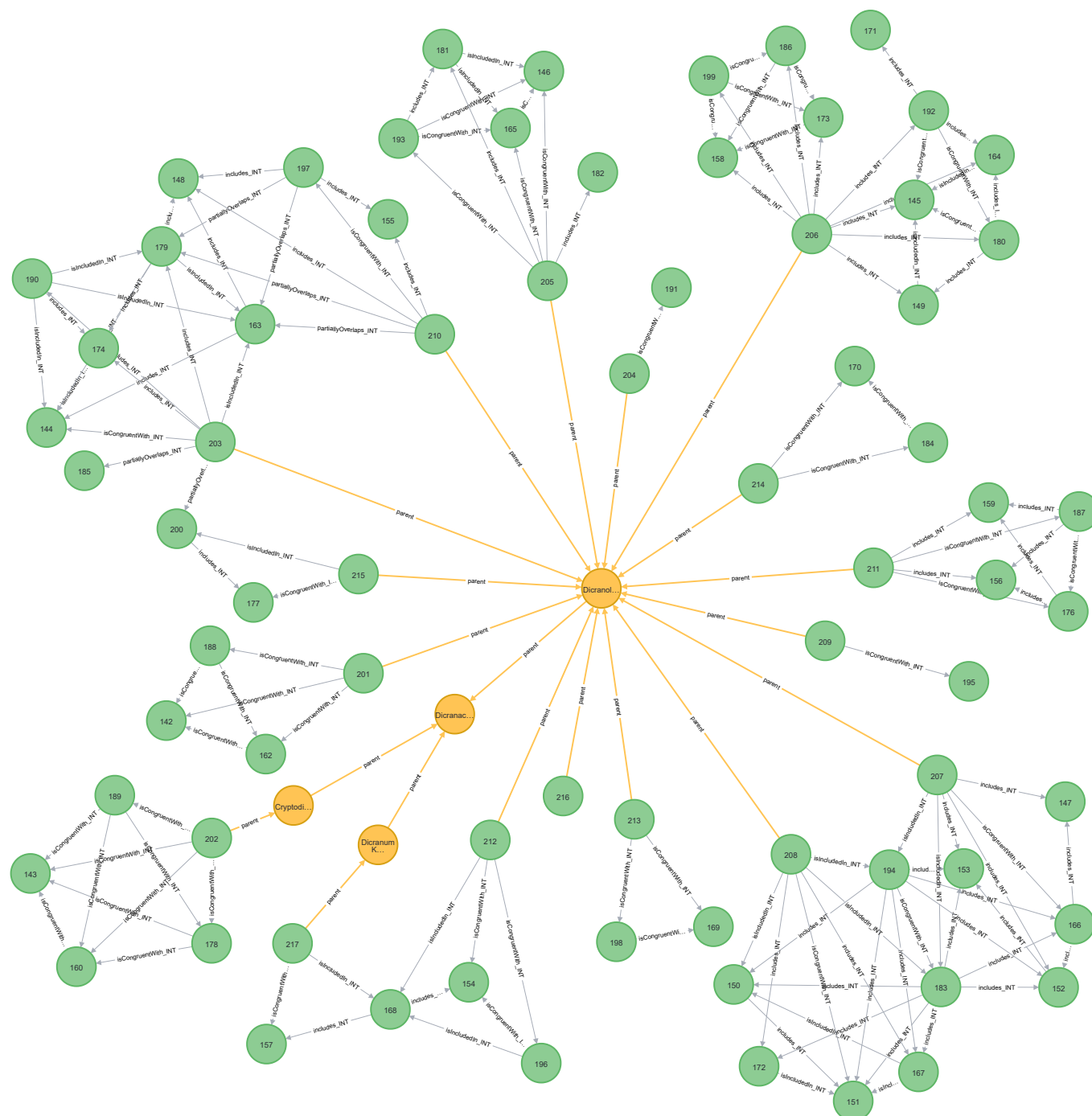


Figure 8. Taxon Concepts with mappings that were added to the data set by the author of the latest revision (intensional mappings).

We can see that the large agglomerate of connected concepts has been nicely broken up now that the intersections that are caused by misidentifications and ambiguous types. The mappings that do intersect now accurately reflect the horizontal relationships between the taxon concepts (I can see that).

To see what this looks like with a taxonomic backbone, let's throw in some higher taxa and hierarchical relationships (**figure 9**).



One more thing we can do is grouping the taxon concepts that are congruent to each other. This is what Avibase does with the Avibase IDs. The taxon concepts in these groups (or with the same Avibase ID if we

were talking about birds) have the same (or essentially the same) extension, which is the entire set of organisms the concept applies to. We could also say that they are the same taxon, as a taxon is the extension of a taxon concept.

The Avibase publication (Lepage et al., 2014 [[lepage_avibase_2014](#)]) speaks of "deep concepts". These "deep concepts" are already in the taxon concepts and are not a new type of objects that the AviBase ID applies to. What Avibase does, and what we are doing here, is deduplication, not creating a new type of object.

The "aggregate Taxon Concepts" thus created are shown in **figure 10**.

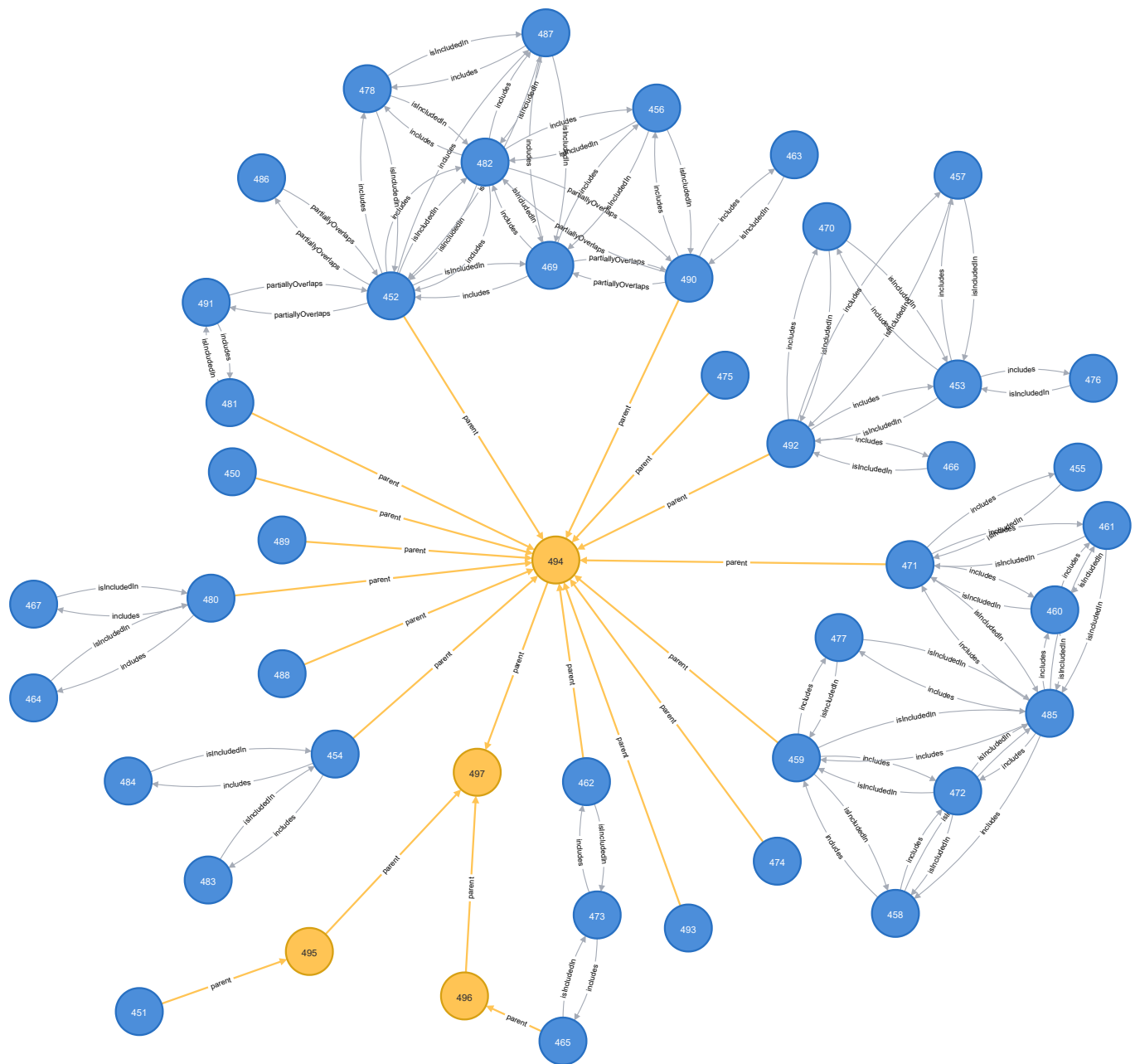


Figure 10. As previous figure, but with "aggregate Taxon Concepts", representing Taxon Concepts that are congruent with it and each other. Individual Taxon Concepts are related to the aggregate Taxon Concepts through **isCongruentWith** relationships (not shown). Aggregate Taxon Concepts can be related to each other via **includes**, **isIncludedIn** and **partiallyOverlaps** relationships.

While the deduplication may not have made a big difference in this example, as there are relatively many conflicting concepts, it is easy to see how much of a difference it can make at a larger scale or in less messy groups.

For this example, as will mostly be the case at the level of individual taxonomic revisions, it was easy to create the intensional mappings for all pairs of taxon concepts. At a much larger scale this will of course not work anymore. However, as indicated, in many cases the ostensive mappings we can get from the name matching are correct and they are mostly the best we've got. Therefore, it is important to persist these mappings as results of the taxonomy reconciliation, so that experts can go in and say 'this mapping is incorrect' or 'this mapping was missed', thereby correcting the worst mismatches and missed matches and incrementally improving the data. Letting in mappings from other sources, the further upstream the better, would be great too. For this all to work taxon concepts need to be identifiable in taxonomies (and identifications) and need to have strong identifiers.