



A few remarks on the proposed amendment of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature to expand and refine methods of publication

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Why a New Code?

The purpose of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (hereafter 'the Code') is to promote nomenclatural stability. If the Rules are changed every tenth year or so, Zoological Nomenclature will have to adapt each time to the new rules, which will be a source of instability. Another thing will be that the taxonomists will have to consider each time under which edition of the Code nomenclatural acts will have been done, which will unnecessarily complicate his work, and will even be a cause of mistakes. We do not think that a new Code is necessary, for the moment at least.

Criteria of publication

The two last editions of the Code (1985 and 1999) insisted upon the fact that, in order to be considered a published reference, a taxonomic work should be produced 'by a method that assures numerous identical and durable copies' (article 8.1.3 of the Fourth Edition), which should be obtainable 'free of charge or by purchase' (article 8.1.2 of the Fourth Edition). Until the Third Edition comes out in February 1985, the most adequate methods for obtaining such copies was considered as using 'ink on paper by conventional printing, such as letterpress, offset printing, and hectographing or mimeographing' (article 8(c) of the Third Edition). The idea behind these dispositions is evidently to have at disposal texts which will last a very long time.

The Fourth Edition is much less precise about methods of producing texts for nomenclatural purposes. For works issued after the year 1999, it just uses the words 'printing on paper' in article 8.6, and recommends 'works on paper' (Recommendation 8B). Works produced after 1999 by a method that does not employ printing on paper are authorized providing that they have been deposited, in the form in which they are published, in at least 5 major publicly accessible libraries which are identified by name in the work itself (article 8.6). This is somewhat receding when compared to the exigency of wide dissemination expressed in Article 8.1.3 and Recommendation 8A.

At the occasion of a special session held in Paris from 23 to 27 August 2008, the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature voted, although not unanimously, in favour of three principles relating to publication (ICZN 2008):

- (1) Electronic-only publications should be allowed, if mechanisms can be found that give reasonable assurance of the long-term accessibility of the information they contain;
- (2) Some method of registration should be part of the mechanism of allowing electronic publication of names and nomenclatural acts;
- (3) Physical works that are not paper-based (e.g. CD-ROMs, DVDs) should be disallowed.

The main issue regarding this proposal relates to the mechanisms which can be found and that give reasonable assurance of the long-term preservation of information contained in electronic-only publications. Preservation is understood as ensuring the permanent protection of valuable information for the access of future generations. The way in which principle number 1 is turned shows clearly that the ICZN is not completely convinced that such mechanisms do exist today.

Both paper and digital documents undergo threats to their preservation. Just as paper disintegrates over time, information recorded on the magnetic surface of the most widely used storage devices can also become impossible to retrieve. The advantages of paper over electronic media regarding the long-term preservation of information are clear and well-recognised by the ICZN (2008).

The preservation of digital information also involves the technological obsolescence that is inherent to software and hardware. For instance, the large floppy-disks of the early 1980s can no longer be read due to the degradation and