



## Adventures in the fish trade\*

COLIN PATTERSON\*\*

Formerly of the The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK

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[edited and with an introduction by DAVID M. WILLIAMS<sup>1</sup> & ANTHONY C. GILL<sup>2</sup>]

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### Introduction

The Systematics Association (SA), a London based organisation dedicated to the promotion of systematic (comparative) biology in all its various aspects, was founded in May 1937. It is based on objectives set out for its earlier incarnation, the “Committee on Systematics in Relation to General Biology” (some relevant history can be found in Winsor 2000). That group’s remit was, and the SA’s still is, “to provide a forum for the discussion of the general theoretical and practical problems of taxonomy” (<http://www.systass.org> ; see also *Nature* 140:163, 1938).

Early in December of each year the SA hold its AGM. To attract an audience to an otherwise potentially stuffy business meeting a noted speaker is invited to talk on a subject dear to his or her heart (the outgoing president delivers a parting lecture on retirement, so every third year, by default, the president speaks).

On December 6<sup>th</sup> 1995 Colin Patterson FRS, celebrated palaeo-ichthyologist of the Natural History Museum, London, and instigator of the cladistic revolution in systematic biology (Forey 1999, Nelson 1998, 2007, Bonde 1999 and essays in Forey *et al.* 2000), gave the 29<sup>th</sup> lecture with a presentation entitled ‘Adventures in the Fish Trade’, a summary of his career, in fishes and cladistics. At one time the SA lectures were published, usually by the Linnean Society in one of its journals. Patterson’s lecture never was published, nor was it intended for publication, although it has since been widely circulated. As it has attracted some attention, we thought it wise to organise its publication in an appropriate venue. Here we offer his account in a slightly edited form.

Patterson meticulously prepared all his talks and lectures, writing out a full script, which he would learn by heart and then deliver the lecture almost verbatim. The text before you is derived from Patterson’s notes, which will be archived at the Natural History Museum, London. For the most part, we have stayed as close as possible to the written words in his notes. We have had to remove a few passages that only make sense in the context of a talk, where transparencies depicting old friends and old specimens convey more than words ever can. We have added (and, in some cases, corrected) references and include a selection of illustrations, those that are necessary to make sense of the text.

As a history of ichthyology in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a history of the development of cladistics, *Adventures in the Fish Trade* offers some useful, if not crucial, insights into the past—and, if the words are considered carefully—precautions for the future. We have endeavoured to remain true to the spirit in which the presentation was delivered, captured by Patterson’s closing words, which included a phrase from a book review we were unable to trace: “Fish systematists take their work seriously, but they seem to have an awful lot of fun. There was a phrase in a book review in *Nature* last month that caught my eye—‘Scientists, the good ones at least, do it only because they enjoy it’.”