



Proposed amendment of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* to expand and refine methods of publication

International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature

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For 250 years, taxonomists have relied on having access to physical copies of published works in order to verify information about taxa. The difficulty of tracking down publications can be a substantial impediment to taxonomic work, which has led some researchers to advocate modifying the codes of nomenclature, for plants and bacteria as well as for animals, to allow electronic publication of scientific names (Knapp et al. 2007, Wheeler & Krell 2007).

Electronic publishing and access to online information can clearly accelerate progress in taxonomy (Wheeler 2008). Even when the fourth edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (ICZN 1999) was published, it was clear that electronic publication could not be ignored (Ride 1999, 2003). In all fields of science, however, long-term access to digital information has been and remains a significant concern (Anonymous 2001, Howe et al. 2008, Szalay 2008). Botanists have rejected proposals for electronic publication because of concerns for archiving and security from tampering (Zander 2004, McNeill 2006). Although some works printed on paper are rare, the number of instances in which no copies are known to survive is vanishingly small, so it certainly has been possible to reliably archive paper copies. Will we be able to say the same for electronic works 100 years from now? Can we have both rapid and effectively permanent access to publications and the information they contain?

The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) considered these issues at a special session in Paris, August 23–25, 2008, preceding the XXth International Congress of Zoology (ICZ). The Commissioners voted to start the process required to amend the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* to allow electronic publication of new scientific names and other nomenclatural acts. A summary of the draft amendment was presented at the ICZ on August 27, during the *Systema Naturae 250* symposium. The draft amendment was then refined via email discussion among Commissioners during the following month.

In Paris, Commissioners voted separately in favour of three principles relating to publication. None of these passed unanimously, but all had at least a two-thirds majority among the twelve voting.

- 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.
- Some method of registration should be part of the mechanism of allowing electronic publication of names and nomenclatural acts.
- Physical works that are not paper-based (e.g. CD-ROMs, DVDs) should be disallowed.

One development favourable to the acceptance of electronic publication is the emergence of mature platforms for archiving electronic documents, such as Portico, which offers a permanent archive for electronic journals,

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