

## Editorial 2014 – the scope and publication trends of *Australian Systematic Botany*

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Welcome to another year of *Australian Systematic Botany* and my first editorial as Editor-in-Chief. I plan on taking the occasional opportunity to write these editorials to update readers of the journal on relevant happenings, and put forward some points-of-view, and hopefully gain in return some useful feedback.

Firstly, thank you to my predecessor, Mike Bayly, for his tireless efforts and dedication, he has steered the journal to a healthy Impact Factor of 1.469, which compares very favourably with other international botanical systematics journals. Mike has agreed to stay on as an Associate Editor, for which I am grateful, both for the continuity of his experience as well as his patience as a sounding-board. Mike now works as part of the excellent team of 16 Associate Editors, who are a great asset to the journal and

deserve much praise and thanks for all their work. I also welcome our three new Associate Editors: Dr Harald Schneider (Natural History Museum, London), Prof. Michelle Waycott (State Herbarium of South Australia & University of Adelaide) and Dr Russell Barrett (Kings Park & Botanic Garden), and wish them the best of success. I also acknowledge and thank the team at CSIRO Publishing, particularly Chris Anderson, Leanne Hamilton and Andrew Bullen; they are all highly dedicated professionals, who have helped enormously in my first year as Editor-in-Chief.

An important point I would like to raise is that these are challenging times for *Australian Systematic Botany*, as a journal focussed on international taxonomic and systematics research.



*Dr Dan Murphy's primary research interests are the use of molecular data (DNA sequencing) and morphology to investigate the systematics, taxonomy and biogeography of flowering plants. After postdoctoral research positions at Aarhus University and the University of Melbourne, Dan has been at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne for 11 years as a systematic botanist (Molecular Systematist), with interests in legumes (especially Acacia and related mimosoids), grasses, Adansonia, Proteaceae and food plants. He is also investigating co-evolutionary relationships (plant interactions) and movements of plants in contemporary (naturalised and invasive species), historical and pre-historical (historical biogeographic) time-frames. As an active participant in the systematics and evolutionary biology research community, he has been a long-term member of the Editorial Board of the journal Muellera; co-supervises students enrolled at several different universities and holds an honorary associate position at the University of Melbourne; and for the past 11 years he has co-organised the Melbourne Systematics Forum, a monthly meeting at Melbourne Museum for discussion between systematists working in different institutions.*



*Harald Schneider is a research leader at the Natural History Museum London, UK. He obtained the Ph.D. at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and the Venia Legendi at the Georg-August University Goettingen, Germany. During his professional career, he was postdoctoral researcher at Duke University, Durham, NC, USA, Field Museum Chicago, IL, USA, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, the Netherlands, University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA. He was appointed as a senior visiting professor of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2011. His current research interests are concentrated on macro- and microevolutionary history of land plants with focus on the integration of biogeography, ecology and phylogeny. Besides, he is in particular interested in the biology and taxonomy of ferns and lycophytes as well as the plant morphology. The results of his studies were presented in more than 130 publications in scientific journals and books. He collaborates extensively with research groups in Brazil, China, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK and USA.*



*Michelle Waycott is the HBS Womersley Professor of Plant Systematics, School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Chief Botanist, State Herbarium of South Australia (Department of Environment Water and Natural Resources). As head of the State Herbarium of South Australia (Chief Botanist) she has a responsibility to support and enhance the understanding of the flora of South Australia with a particular emphasis on systematics and taxonomy. Michelle is a strategic advisor within the Department of Environment Water and Natural Resources on a wide range of natural resource management issues. She is currently involved in research activities that aim to inform management of threatened species, restoration and to identify knowledge gaps for seagrasses and seagrass ecosystems in South Australia. Prof. Waycott also contributes to teaching in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences in the Evolutionary Biology and Marine Biology programs (The University of Adelaide) and is responsible for honours, masters and PhD students as a supervisor. Michelle has research partnerships with funding with James Cook University, The University of Virginia, Edith Cowan University and The University of Western Australia; and an extensive network of collaborators across the world. Prior to taking up her role at The University of Adelaide she was the Associate Professor of Botany at James Cook University and Head of Discipline of Plant and Agricultural Sciences in the School of Marine and Tropical Biology.*



*Russell Barrett is a research scientist at Kings Park and Botanic Garden in Perth, Western Australia where he has been based since 1998. He graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of Western Australia in 2012. He is an adjunct lecturer in the Faculty of Science at the University of Western Australia and an honorary research associate at the Western Australian Herbarium, Department of Parks and Wildlife. With a broad range of research interests, his career has focussed on the discovery, documentation and conservation of the flora of the Kimberley region in northern Western Australia where he grew up. His current research also includes Cyperaceae tribe Schoeneae, the focus of his Ph.D. and the subject of several international collaborative projects. He has published over 50 refereed papers, books and book chapters, including the description of 45 new species of plants and fungi. He is an associated editor for the Western Australian Herbarium's journal Nuytsia.*

The reasons for this most likely relate to changing drivers in academic publishing and the way scientific impact is measured, which does not necessarily favour taxonomy. Notably, in recent years we have seen a reduction in the number of comprehensive taxonomic monographs being submitted, something that the journal will probably have to contend with for the foreseeable future, as the pressure on most authors is to fragment research into smaller publishable units. Another possibility is that this decrease reflects a decline in taxonomic research (I will turn more attention to this in another editorial later in the year). However, on a positive note, there does not seem to be a decreasing need for taxonomy or systematics, or the use of the results of our research in other subject areas, nor the interest taken by the general public. Herbarium and university workers can attest to the many requests for information; for online database resources and queries; electronic floras and keys; and requests to give talks and workshops to special interest groups. For *Australian Systematic Botany*, we have decided that, despite a decline in the number of pages of taxonomy being published, above all we strive to maintain a high-quality journal and will not compromise on this.

To perhaps encourage taxonomists and systematists to submit their research papers to *ASB*, I would like to dispel some myths, which are based on some anecdotal feedback I have gleaned. It is possible that some authors think that *Australian Systematic Botany* no longer publishes traditional taxonomic papers, or that taxonomic studies based on morphological data alone are no longer acceptable. To address this, I think it timely to publish the current official journal scope of *Australian Systematic Botany*.

### Scope

*Australian Systematic Botany* considers papers and critical reviews that aim to advance systematic botany and related aspects of biogeography and evolution of all plant groups, including fossils. Descriptive taxonomic papers should normally constitute a comprehensive treatment of group. Short papers on individual species and nomenclatural papers must contain significant new information of broader interest to be considered. Papers dealing with groups of unrelated species or miscellaneous collections of species are not considered. Numbered series of papers are discouraged. The prestigious L.A.S. Johnson Review Series is published. Other review articles will also be considered. (See <http://www.publish.csiro.au/nid/150/aid/393.htm>.)

I note in particular that the scope of the journal is broad and we do routinely publish traditional taxonomic papers. Importantly

we will consider single taxon descriptive papers too, if the significance and quality of the research is high. There is also no mention of any requirement to have molecular data for systematics or phylogenetics (even if that is something I would encourage, given my own research interests and inclinations). Lastly, the journal will consider papers without imposing a length restriction, something that is unlikely to occur in most other international journals.

As for the journal performance during 2013, I have already highlighted the healthy impact factor, and *ASB* also boasts a rapid turnaround for papers, maintaining a very creditable time of only 42 days from submission to first decision on manuscripts, and a favourable publication speed of 108 days from acceptance until publication. This turnaround time particularly impresses me, given the relative complexity of most taxonomic papers, requiring checking and formatting, which from a production point of view creates certain challenges. At this point I wish to extend a very big thank-you to our redoubtable Nomenclature Editor, Brendan Lepschi (Australian National Herbarium), and also Peter Wilson (Royal Botanic Garden Sydney) for his assistance and as a source of second opinions. They both undertake critical work, checking names and descriptions for compliance with the International Code of Nomenclature for Algae, Fungi and Plants.

For an international journal we still have a majority of papers submitted from Australia, and as part of my role, I would like to publicise the journal and encourage submissions from other parts of the world, while maintaining our strong Australasian connections. Over the past year we have received a number of well-written papers that are only let down by the sampling methodology, which may be based on artificial groupings of species often due to a geo-political basis in the sampling boundaries, rather than a complete sampling of the taxonomic groups being studied. Unfortunately these papers are not within the journal scope, but this could easily be rectified by authors with some initial planning.

Finally, thank you to all our authors and reviewers, without your on-going support, the journal simply would not exist. In order to assist authors and speed up journal production, a new set of guidelines for formatting manuscripts is currently being prepared, and recently the online Endnote template for referencing has been updated (for this we are indebted to John Conran for his help).

As for where we are heading? Well, I do not expect to stray too far from the current journal direction, although I am particularly interested in publishing some relevant book reviews, topical review papers and points-of-view ('perspective') papers to stimulate debate. So watch this space and please feel free to contact me with ideas for papers and suggestions for the journal.