

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF TAXONOMY (EJT)

by Laurence Bénichou, Steven Dessein, Daphne Duin,

Isabelle Gerard, Graham Higley & Koen Martens

Introduction

The core mission of Natural History Institutions (NHI) is to contribute to the understanding of the natural world and our place in it and to disseminate this knowledge. Thus, NHI have been publishers of journals and monograph series since they were founded. Historically, these publications were most important to archive results produced by NHI researchers.

However, in today's digital era, the field of scholarly publishing is rapidly changing and the journals of natural history institutions are faced with complex strategic and technical questions concerning visibility, access, format, and financial structure of their titles. The journals that miss the digital boat will become obscure, user unfriendly and will probably go 'extinct' in the near future. In parallel, more and more institutional journals are outsourced to a private publisher. Under influence of the 'ISI Impact Factor effect' several journals have shifted their editorial scope from descriptive taxonomy to phylogenetic and molecular research. The result is that today there are fewer communication channels for descriptive taxonomy, and these do not usually have wide circulation. Descriptive taxonomy remains nevertheless crucial for all biological disciplines, as all use species and genus names to refer to organisms. In particular biodiversity studies, including those on ecosystem services, ultimately rely on taxonomic frameworks.

During the last 10 years or so, commercial publishers have discovered this gap and new taxonomic e-journals have been launched. These quickly attracted many papers, demonstrating clearly that there is a need for taxonomic e-journals. However, next to these commercial journals, there is also a need for NHIs to act as public producers of taxonomic information. The field needs a journal that offers the latest online standards and services, but also an economic management model that is favourable to our unique scientific environment. The European Journal of taxonomy (EJT) aims at meeting these needs at the EU level and beyond.

Vision of the EJT

A Consortium of (European) Natural History Museums is gathering means in order to publish and fund the EJT. EJT will be a truly 'Open Access' where neither authors nor readers have to pay. According to this vision, the whole EJT has to be funded by the Consortium itself and by possible external funding.

Coordinating institutional resources into a single publishing platform contributes to excellence, prevents repetition, and increases efficiency in the dissemination of taxonomic data, while providing a secure long-term platform at minimal cost.

EJT aims to be a peer-reviewed, high standard, fully free, taxonomic journal that offers all the modern interactive web-based facilities of high-level, high impact journals. It will provide links to all leading biodiversity related databases in which new names of species and genera will automatically be included. EJT sets a new standard in taxonomic publishing.

Scope of EJT

The EJT is an international, fully electronic, fast-track, Open Access journal in descriptive taxonomy, covering subjects in zoology, entomology, botany, and palaeontology.

EJT-papers must be original and of high scientific (content) and technical (language, art work) standard. Manuscripts that are clearly substandard in either of these categories will not be sent out for review.

EJT's scope is global, even if it is launched by a Consortium of European NHIs. Both authorship and geographical region of study need not be European. Authors are, however, invited to involve European natural history collections by consulting extant material, or by depositing (type-) material related to the published paper in the collection of a European Natural History Institute. This way, EJT will be truly global, yet firmly anchored in the European Research Area.

The EJT consortium

The Consortium supporting EJT are all members of the EDIT Network of Excellence, and indeed EJT originated from within EDIT and is one of the most sustainable EDIT deliverables.

Founding members are:

- Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (Paris, France)
- Natural History Museum (London, UK)
- Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (Brussels, Belgium)
- Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren, Belgium)
- National Botanic Garden of Belgium (Meise, Belgium)

Other potential members are presently being considered. The plan is to enlarge the consortium to at least 10-15 European members, more if possible. The EJT is still being branded among CETAF members, an association representing around 30 most important Taxonomic Facilities in Europe.