

## Our contribution to documenting biodiversity in a changing world

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Editor in chief

No one could have predicted that more than one year later, the COVID-19 pandemic would continue to hold the world in its grip. One unanswered question about the disease is its origin, although a WHO team has been set up to investigate the matter (Mallapaty 2020). In October last year, IPBES published a report that establishes a link between increased pandemic risk and biodiversity loss (IPBES 2020). It urges us “to re-assess the relationship between people and nature, and to reduce global environmental changes that are caused by unsustainable consumption, and which drive biodiversity loss, climate change and pandemic emergence”.

Last year, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew published the State of the World’s Plants and Fungi, a comprehensive publication about the status of the plant and fungi diversity on earth (Antonelli et al. 2020). It might seem surprising, but not all plants are known to science yet. There are currently around 350,000 accepted species of plants in the World Checklist of Vascular Plants and this number changes every year. In 2019, around 2,000 species of vascular plants were newly named and Brazil was the number one country where new species were found. As *Plant Ecology and Evolution* also publishes taxonomic work, we have noticed an increase in the number of submissions concerning the Brazilian flora over the years (e.g. Andriano & Gonella, this issue pp. 137–149; Antar et al., this issue pp. 121–136; Lírío et al., this issue pp. 150–158). By continuing to publish this kind of research, we contribute to documenting the biodiversity on our planet.

As journal and as publisher, we are however particularly interested in tropical Africa. Last year, almost half of the papers in *Plant Ecology and Evolution* dealt with the African flora and in 2019, a large revision of West and Central African *Psychotria* (Rubiaceae) was published in *Opera Botanica Belgica* (Lachenaud 2019). Unfortunately, in the grand scheme of things, Africa ranks very low in the total number of newly described species (i.e. 12% in 2019; Cheek et al. 2020). For example, only seven species of plants were described from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2019, although it is tropical Africa’s largest country and home to most of Africa’s evergreen forest (Cheek et al.

2020). This lack of taxonomic investment is illustrated by the case of *Drypetes morocarpa* from D.R. Congo, which took more than 80 years between collection and description (Quintanar et al. 2020). This is why we are highly motivated to continue to provide a platform for African plant diversity.

Ever since its inception, *Plant Ecology and Evolution* has favoured a holistic approach as we recognise that ecology, phylogenetics, systematics, and conservation biology are intertwined (Robbrecht 2010). This is also emphasised in the new author guidelines: taxonomic papers should present a broader context and additional analyses are encouraged. Such comprehensive work provides a deeper understanding about the ecology and conservation of the plants (e.g. De Block et al. 2020). We are committed to the continued improvement of the journal and therefore created new editor and reviewer guidelines, in addition to the new author guidelines.



Dr Ana Rita Simões, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK.

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We also welcome a new editor to the team: Dr Ana Rita Simões is a taxonomist at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and studies the diversity of the tropical plant family Convolvulaceae (the family of sweet potato, bindweeds, and morning glories). Her broad research interests and extensive network in the Global South will be of great value to the journal.

Dr Tariq Stévant has been with the journal from the beginning but unfortunately, he recently had to scale down his editorial activities due to increased academic workload. He will however remain available to the journal as editor for IUCN conservation assessments. We thank him for his generous commitment over the years.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to all editors, whose supportive and professional attitude made my start as editor in chief much easier. Finally, I also wish to thank all reviewers for their selfless contribution to the peer review of the papers published in volume 153.

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