S Usefulness of morphological data for the study of nematode biodiversity

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Abstract:

Public interest in biodiversity has never been so high, but the necessary inventory of existing species is hindered by the scarcity of taxonomists able to characterise and describe new species (*a*-taxonomy). This situation is particularly worrisome in nematology where only a small fraction of the estimated 10^5 to 10^8 existing species has been described and where experienced taxonomists are fast disappearing while the few that are still active find it increasingly difficult to publish morphological descriptions and to get financial support for biodiversity studies. The present disregard for *a*-taxonomy is said to originate from the excessive reliance by funding agencies and academic authorities on the Impact Factors attributed to scientific journals by ISI (Institute for Scientific Information). Molecular studies gave back some support and prestige to taxonomy, but that approach suffers from some limitations and it cannot be used alone for reaching taxonomic conclusions. In addition, any described DNA sequence should always be linked to a named species whose morphology has been correctly described by a trained taxonomist. The authors call for a renewed interest in *a*-taxonomy. Electronic publication according to the Code of Zoological Nomenclature would be one solution, but journals and authors seem reluctant to accept it. A variant would be to publish on paper only the diagnosis of the new species. The complete descriptions could be deposited in an Internet database but the setting-up of such a database would be a costly enterprise that would require several years of work by a team composed of morphological and molecular taxonomists and

computer scientists.

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