

## The International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology Explores New Shores

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Guided by the International Code of Nomenclature of Bacteria and educated by experience, microbial taxonomists are considered conservative scientists; they need to be to develop a long-lasting, stable and reliable classification scheme and user-friendly identification systems. Any radical external input into their research field, no matter how stimulating and fruitful this input may turn out to be, will initially stir up the community of microbial systematists; this was witnessed when molecular sequencing was introduced in the classification of prokaryotes some 20 years ago, and, just recently, when after more than 25 years of successful service to science, the publisher of the *International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology* (IJSB) changed from the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) to the Society for General Microbiology. The concerns of taxonomists about these changes expressed to the Editors of the IJSB were honest and reflected their hope that the departure from the ASM would not be accompanied by the loss of its standard and high reputation.

As the Editor of this journal, speaking on behalf of the Associate Editors, Monique Gillis, David L. Labeda, Hans G. Trüper, Jan B. Ursing and William B. Whitman, and the members of the International Committee on Systematic Bacteriology (ICSB), I must stress that this change in publisher was not initiated because of any discord with the previous publisher. The ASM has developed the publication of the previous *International Bulletin of Bacteriological Nomenclature and Taxonomy* (Iowa State University Press) into a prestigious organ for new taxa and for innovative taxonomic and phylogenetic methods. The IJSB now has a very high impact factor (3.929) that should make all previous and recent authors, reviewers and the publisher proud of their work. The journal has broadened its international character, thus fulfilling the objective given to the journal by the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS).

The question is then 'why change publisher in times of extreme success?' Indeed, the IJSB was too successful in terms of numbers of accepted manuscripts and printed pages per annum, which reflects the increasing interest in prokaryotic systematics and phylogeny and the renewed focus on the isolation of novel strains. It has always been the mission of Editors of the IJSB to guide the less experienced authors along the Rules of the Code to maintain a high standard in the formal description of taxa. That is why the rejection rate of about 20% is rather low when compared to that of

other scientific journals. For the publisher, however, this poses a problem. In times of stagnating subscription numbers and moderate increases in subscription rates, the increase in page numbers from the anticipated 1200 to more than 1600 pages over the past 2 years let the journal run steadily deeper into deficit. As the journal was not owned by the ASM, but only published by the ASM for the IUMS, this deficit could neither be absorbed by page charges nor levelled by subsidy. Both ICSB and IUMS strongly opposed the implementation of page charges for the IJSB, wishing to maintain it as an international journal encouraging microbiologists in laboratories worldwide to increase their activities in studies of microbial diversity. As a consequence, much to the concern of the Editors and taxonomists, the ASM could not but terminate its publishing agreement with the IUMS.

Now, for the first time in the 48-year history of the IJSB, the journal has crossed the Atlantic. After a few months of negotiation between Tim Gray, representing the IUMS, and Ron Fraser, Executive Secretary of the SGM, the IUMS has signed a publishing agreement with the SGM, a society with a long-standing successful record of publishing one of the most internationally well-known journals in general microbiology, *Microbiology*. For many years, the majority of submitted and accepted IJSB manuscripts have originated from Europe/UK, so the move seems appropriate. The first experience of the Editors of the IJSB with the Managing Editor Aidan Parte has reinforced my impression that the transition period will be short and painless. The delay in the publication of the first issue of the 1998 volume by only 2 months is a distinct sign of the efficiency of the SGM and its ability to handle the new journal. The smooth transition is also due to Barbara Iglewski, Linda Illig and John Bell from the ASM who gave their full cooperation to the move and offered all their help in the transfer of files, documents and pending manuscripts.

The benefits of the move can already be noticed: authors will receive 25 offprints of their article free of charge and, as part of the redesign, each issue of the IJSB will have a different cover picture. Bacteriologists will be surprised to see a eukaryotic micro-organism on the cover of the first issue published by SGM in March 1998. The IJSB has a long tradition in publishing the taxonomy of yeasts and yeast-like organisms, although the number of novel yeast taxa has been small in the past. However, the recognition of the chimaeric structure of the eukaryotic cell at the genetic

and organelle level, harbouring elements from *Bacteria* and *Archaea*, as well as the strong relationships of eukaryotic hosts with prokaryotic symbionts and parasites at various levels of interactions, makes it necessary to place the microbial cell in a broader context than traditionally dealt with by the IJSB. To better address these evolutionary, phylogenetic, systematic and ecological interactions between all micro-organisms, the vast majority of Editors of the IJSB and the ICSB, in agreement with members of the IUMS, decided to change the title of the IJSB to the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology* (IJSEM) at the last IUMS congress in Jerusalem, August 1996. The change of title and scope of the journal will take place within the next couple of years, when SGM has settled into publishing the IJSB. Despite this expansion, the journal will keep on serving the community with its prime goal, the description of taxa according to the rules outlined in the Code of Nomenclature. Whether or not this journal will develop into a forum for the original description of taxa of eukaryotic micro-organisms remains to be seen, and will very much depend on the selection of appropriate Editors and signals given by taxonomists that specialize in eukaryotic micro-organisms. Besides the purely taxonomic facet of the journal, publication of data on nucleic acid sequences and their importance in the

elucidation of phylogenetic and evolutionary relationships will be strengthened. This is especially true for the comparative analysis of gene sequences that are going to be released from the genome sequencing efforts. The journal will remain a prime source for the description of phylogenetic relationships amongst archaeal and bacterial taxa, and serves the community of microbiologists by providing information on recent methodological approaches and their application for improving taxonomic conclusions. The regular publication of Validation and Notification Lists, which are presently compiled by Dr Norbert Weiss at the DSMZ, Braunschweig, Germany, provides recent updates of new taxa and changes in nomenclature according to the rules of the Code of Nomenclature. Authors who publish taxa governed by the Code in journals other than the IJSB are reminded to send copies of these descriptions to Dr Weiss for inclusion in a Validation List.

The last year has been stormy for the IJSB. Changing the crew in these conditions is usually judged risky and unwise but we have learnt better. The ASM and the SGM must be congratulated for their harmonic collaboration, never losing sight of the mission of the IJSB to serve the community of microbiologists. The Editors, authors and SGM are thanked for their trust in the future of the journal.