A NOTE ON NOMENCLATORIAL NOMENCLATURE

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While it is good to see that matters of plant nomenclature are again receiving some attention in the Auckland Botanical Society Newsletter, recent items remind me of widespread misconceptions about names. I'd like to comment on some terminological problems which arise from Prof. Rattenbury's recent article on what he calls "nomina nova" in an effort to head off further confusion.

All new names, whether introduced for taxonomic reasons or for strictly legalistic ("nomenclatural") reasons, are logically "nomina nova"; new names. Unfortunately, and here it is the established semantics of nomenclators which is at fault, "nomina nova" has come to have a quite restrictive legal meaning; nomina nova are substitute names introduced to replace existing names which have to be rejected for strictly legal reasons, not as a result of taxonomic judgement. (As in Art. 7.9 of the ICBN.) The abbreviation nom. nov. is often appended to the author citation for the name when it is introduced. Names for newly discovered species are not in this sense nomina nova and the abbreviation appended is typically n. sp. (nova species). This is an unfortunate practice since it is the name (not the taxon) which is the novelty, but I doubt that botanists can be persuaded to break this habit. It was unfortunate that the title Nomina nova plantarum Novae-zealandiae was used for Elizabeth Edgar's papers, since it suggests a narrower scope than was the case and gives a handle to confusion between nomina nova plantarum (new names of plants) and nomina plantarum novarum (names of new plants).

The second problem in terminology is more misleading; it is the use of the word "invalid". Validity of plant names has a very clear and unambiguous usage in plant nomenclature. Valid names are validly published names; a name has no status in botanical nomenclature until it is validly published. Thus the ICBN has a whole chapter on valid publication, giving the requirements for it; provision of a name in the correct form, accompanied by a Latin description or diagnosis, a clear indication of rank &c &c. Now the term as used in zoology is quite different; and Rattenbury has used the word "valid" in its zoological sense, not in its botanical sense. A species of plant can have several valid names simultaneously, but only one of them can be correct. Once a name is validly published it remains valid, and it does not become invalid as the result of the discovery of an earlier name which must supersede it under the principle of priority; such a name becomes incorrect, not invalid. Zoologists speak of a taxon having several available names of which only one can be valid. Zoological available equals botanical valid and zoological valid equals botanical correct. Another unfortunate use of terminology but one which is unlikely to change.

Rattenbury's remarks on nomenclatural conservation also call for some comment. Nomenclatural conservation was introduced expressly to avoid some of the unwanted consequences of strict adherence to the priority principle. Originally conservation was specifically aimed at the new coinages of Otto Kuntze, who in his Revisio generum plantarum (1891-1898) had dredged up a large number of old names which everyone had forgotten. Today the procedure involves a botanist making a proposal to conserve a name and the case being voted on by one of the standing committees. The votes of the Committees are automatically endorsed by the following International Botanical Congress and the Congress thereby effects the conservation. There isn't any restriction that the name has to have been in widespread use for any set length of time, but the wider the use of a name the better are its chances against the name with which it competes. Conserved names are listed in Appendix III to the ICBN.

Since the Sydney congress it has been possible to conserve specific names for plants of economic importance. Two names likely to be conserved in this way are those for the tomato and soft wheat, both of which have been changed in recent years. It is also possible using a similar process to reject a species name. Previously only generic and familial names could be conserved. The procedure for conserving family names was obscure and has been undermined by changes made to the Sydney Code; consequently Appendix II to the Code 'Nomina Familiarum conservanda' will have to be revised.

The matter of whether name changes must be taken up or are optional depending on one's taxonomic judgement is clearly addressed by Edgar and Connor (1983).

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Phil Parkinson is a member of the Committee on Algae, International Association of Plant Taxonomy and the names that are likely to be conserved are:

tomato; Lycopersicon esculentum will probably be protected against the priority of the name L. lycopersicum,

soft wheat; Triticum aestivum L. 1753 will probably be protected against Merat's choice (1821) of Triticum hybernum L. 1753 as the correct name when the two species are united.

Readers might like to note an earlier essay on the ICBN;

Parkinson, P.G. "The International Code of Botanical Nomenclature; An Historical Review and Bibliography". TANE 21: 153-173 (1975). Although now out of date it is still a useful introduction for people trying to understand why the rules of nomenclature are so complicated.

A GALLIMAUFRY OF NEW RECORDS

P. Jenner. Vining Scenic Reserve, Mangatangi. Cordyline pumilio.

E.K. Cameron. Great Barrier Island. Acianthus reniformis; Corybas orbiculatus, AKU 17187. 21/10/84.

R.O. Gardner. Kakamatua Inlet Track, Cornwallis. Astelia grandis.

G. Davidson. Kay Road balefill site, Swanson. Astelia grandis.

J. Mackinder. Upper Nihotupu Reservoir, Waitakere Range. Lycopodium scariosum. 11/11/84.