

## Preface

This volume is based on papers presented at an International Conference on Current Concepts in Plant Taxonomy, organized under the auspices of the Systematics Association and held in the University of Reading on 7–9 July 1982. The Conference was attended by some 117 delegates from 11 countries.

Fifteen years ago a comparable conference assessed the then state of plant taxonomy. The ensuing proceedings ("Modern Methods in Plant Taxonomy", V. H. Heywood (ed.), Academic Press, 1968), proved remarkably successful and were reprinted three times, almost unprecedented for a symposium volume. After one and a half decades it became apparent that a contemporary overview would again be profitable and a number of leading and active systematists were invited to present a critical but balanced assessment of their special fields, identifying challenges, problems and misconceptions as well as highlighting achievements and advances. The contributors accepted the challenge admirably, and some of them cast a very critical eye on the current procedures of taxonomy and even questioned basic assumptions. The results therefore constitute a valuable updating of taxonomists' views of taxonomy and of themselves.

A comparison of this volume with that published 15 years ago reveals the rise to prominence of chemosystematics and micromorphological studies, then still in their infancy, the continuing importance of biosystematics, though no longer holding the centre of the stage as it did in the 1960s, and major advances in the establishment and use of taxonomically orientated data-bases. A chapter on cladistics acknowledges a currently contentious subject that has affected plant taxonomy only marginally hitherto. Whether it will come to occupy the role that its proponents assert or whether it will be viewed as a divine afflatus is for the next generation to decide. The increased preoccupation with conservation in the past decade or so has led to serious reappraisals of the contributions made so far by taxonomists to inventories of the world's resources and these, in turn, have led taxonomists to look again at some of their more traditional practices.

The organization of the conference on which this book is based was sponsored by the Systematics Association, which also provided some funds. We are grateful to the Association, and to The Royal Society of London, which provided travel funds for some overseas speakers. We acknowledge the support of the University of Reading in arranging accommodation and lecture facilities, as

well as for providing a much-enjoyed sherry reception in St Patrick's Hall. We are indebted to Miss Alice Hezlett and Miss Valerie Norris, our secretaries, for looking after so many of the arrangements before and during the conference. Finally, we must accord our appreciation of the assistance given by the editorial staff of Academic Press in seeing this volume through to publication.

Reading, November 1983

*V. H. Heywood*

*D. M. Moore*