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Preface

Systematics is increasingly in demand today. Ambitious programs like the “Systematics Agenda 2000” and the foundation of new societies (e. g. the “Gesellschaft für Biologische Systematik” in Germany) reflect the newly growing interest. One of the main reasons for this trend lies in the development of attractive new methodologies. The past decades have seen the advent of cladistics as the method of choice for reconstructing phylogenies. Molecular techniques have amplified the possibilities for studying the relationships among organisms at all levels, from individuals to populations, species, and higher taxa. Advanced computer technology gives new possibilities for creating and transmitting results from systematic studies, for instance by establishing interactive identification keys on the internet. Systematics thus provides the key tools for describing and classifying the diversity of life which is fundamental to all aspects of biology. It now has also a great impact on many other research fields like pest management, medicine, pharmacy, genetics, or conservation.

The increasing diversity in systematic methods and techniques makes it more and more difficult for individual researchers, to keep pace with recent changes. In November 2000 we therefore organized a one day symposium to give a review of the most important methods in systematics. The symposium included contributions on biogeography, cladistics, molecular systematics, classification of fossils and applications of the internet for identification. The present volume comprises some of the papers given at the symposium. Unfortunately, it was not possible to publish these works prior to the establishment of our new journal “Contributions to Natural History” in 2003. However, the submitted manuscripts were not only reviewed, but also extensively revised, since their first submission.

Hannes Baur and Christian Kropf