Conserve the endangered science, taxonomy

The recently organized refresher course on ‘traditional and modern approaches in plant taxonomy’ and the forthcoming refresher course on ‘traditional and modern approaches in animal taxonomy’ by the science academies of India are worthy initiatives, as taxonomy is the oldest science in biology. India is one of the megabiodiversity countries and it is high time we inculcate awareness about this important discipline. Indeed taxonomy as one of the oldest sciences continues to exist along with human existence; plants and animals can live without man, but man cannot live without them. Although some species are disappearing fast, there are many faunal and floral species that need to be documented. Such an important study is ignored by students, researchers, reviewers, funding institutes, etc., except as a piece-meal syllabus at school/college curriculum. The least-funded scientific discipline in biology is taxonomy. Such an attitude leads to misidentification of popularly known species too.

We quote two examples from Current Science. These mistakes came to light as the photographs of wrongly identified species appeared on the cover page. Normally the cover-page photograph is not peer-reviewed and hence the sole responsibility of the identification rests with the authors.

Bandyopadhyay et al.\(^1\) reported the pharmacologically active fatty acids of tiger prawn *Penaeus monodon*, a marine crustacean. However, the photograph that appeared on the cover page of the journal was a freshwater prawn belonging to the genus *Macrobrachium*.

Mahato et al.\(^2\) also made a similar mistake in the identification of bats. The photograph that appeared on the cover page of the journal was identified as *Pteropus giganteus*, the Indian flying fox; the error of misidentification was rightly pointed out by a rejoinder\(^3\). Mistakes of this kind result from poor knowledge in taxonomy. Carl Linnaeus alone estimated 26,500 species throughout the world. Though we have sophisticated equipment and techniques, we are unable to estimate how many species of animals and plants live today. Hence it is time the national institutes and funding agencies encourage taxonomic work and grant ample finance assistance to strengthen the knowledge base in taxonomy.


**CORRESPONDENCE**

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