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Systematics in Zoology

SYSTEMATIC zoology has been in eclipse for so many years and has been so little considered in scientific circles that it has almost lost its standing as one of the fundamental aspects of biology. Indeed, a proper perspective of the science has so largely been lost that some of its branches have been mistakenly accepted as separate sciences and accorded more respect and encouragement than the larger field of which each of them is but one part.

Thus, a few decades ago the branches of morphology and comparative anatomy flourished at the expense of other branches of systematics. And in the last few years the study of evolution has been so popular that the subject has assumed a dominant position in biological thought. That evolution is but one branch of systematics has seldom occurred to zoologists, many of whom have relegated "systematics" to the limbo of outmoded fads. Their own frequent dependence upon the varied work of systematists has seldom been recognized by them.

But systematic zoology has not been in decay. It has been pushing steadily toward the solution of some of the most fundamental of biological problems, content to let other aspects of biology and even some of its own diverticula hold the limelight. It has been assembling data that have been used by many other disciplines with little thought to its source.

Systematists have not felt a need to justify their science, but they have recognized the lack of appreciation and understanding resulting from the belief of other zoologists that it was no longer a basic, important, and indispensable part of biological science. This recognition of the undeserved position to which it has been relegated has led to a resurgence of interest

in principles and in the problems of systematics as part of biology.

A major step in implementing the awakening interest and self-assertion is the organization of a Society of Systematic Zoology to bring together all systematists and to help restore the science to its rightful place. The widespread interest in this society is shown by its growth in membership in three years to over 800, and by the confident expectation that it will pass 1,000 in another year. The determination of the society to exert the utmost influence on zoological thought and practice is shown by its current program, which includes publication of a new journal on principles and procedures, sponsorship of a book on the foundations of systematics, and encouragement of the interchange of ideas among systematists.

Improving the education of systematists and the instruction of other zoologists in the contributions and potentialities of systematics are major aims, as well as assuring that the importance of their work and the fundamental nature of the subject are acknowledged. The place of books in systematics is recognized in the program in the exhibit of recent books at national meetings.

One example of current work in systematics is the forthcoming 1,000-page volume by W. K. Gregory, entitled "Evolution Emerging." In dealing not so much with evolutionary principles as with the results of evolution (classification), this work would qualify as a major systematic paper even in a restricted sense of the word. Although dealing primarily with vertebrates, the origins of animal groups and the principles of evolution revealed in these origins are treated. The bibliography of 5,000 titles will make this a major source book in evolution of the vertebrates.

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