

Preface

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No active scientist can be unaware of the revolution that is transforming the way scientific information is published. The trend for authors to submit their papers to journal editors is now well established. As a result, the number of journals and the number of articles published every year have increased exponentially during the last three decades. This enormous quantity of publications forces scientists to be highly selective in their reading. Accordingly, 'being sufficiently read' has become a major concern for authors and an essential criterion in the selection of journals to which manuscripts are submitted. Once published, articles must be brought to the attention of potential readers. The familiar reprints are increasingly being replaced by pdf files which authors can send by e-mail to interested colleagues. The rows of indexing journals which resembled huge telephone directories have already gone and have been replaced by electronic bibliographic databases of astonishing speed and efficiency. Even journal volumes are disappearing from the library shelves, to be replaced by 'e-journals' on the computer screen. Just how quickly this revolution has proceeded has taken even publishers by surprise. However, no-one can yet say what the final result will be; will libraries filled with books become a thing of the past? If so, how long will it take before we work in a completely electronic environment?

This year we announce two new developments which show how the *Bulletin* is adapting to this revolution:

As from this year the *Bulletin of the Geobotanical Institute ETH* will be available as pdf files on the *Bulletin* homepage (<http://www.geobot.umnw.ethz.ch/publications/periodicals/bulletin.html>). It will be possible to download all contributions free of charge. If you prefer this way of accessing the *Bulletin* and no longer wish to receive a hard copy, please let us know. A smaller print run will help us to reduce our costs. The *Bulletin* will also be available on the web site of Opulus Press and included in their search system, so that scientists who did not know about our journal will be given the opportunity to discover it. We thank Opulus Press, and in particular Joost van der Maarel, for offering us this facility.

Another feature of modern scientific literature is that it is mostly in English. In 1996, when we first published the *Bulletin* in its new format, we decided that, in keeping with the international nature of science, papers should whenever possible be in English. This decision has led to occasional criticism from readers who pointed to the long and distinguished tradition of the Stiftung Rübél in Switzerland, and regretted that publications were no longer in one of the Swiss national languages. In fact, we always have accepted German or French contributions – indeed, there is one in German in this volume. If you wish to submit an article in either of these languages (unfortunately we are not able to process Italian manuscripts) we shall be pleased to receive it. We believe

that the co-existence of several languages within the *Bulletin* is appropriate as it reflects the diversity of the readership our journal aims to address. Therefore, as from next year, all contributions will have two summaries: one in English and one in German or French. Authors will find details of the procedure in the instructions for authors on the *Bulletin* homepage.

We hope that these new developments will not only broaden the readership of the *Bulletin* by making it more easily accessible, but that they will also make it more attractive for authors from within and outside the Geobotanical Institute to submit manuscripts to us. Last but not least, we hope that both our old and our new readers will find useful material in the nine contributions appearing in this year's issue.