

## Preface

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For reasons which are described in this Preface, this will be the last issue of the *Bulletin of the Geobotanical Institute ETH*. The *Bulletin* has a long and distinguished history. The first issue was published in 1928 as the *Bericht über das Geobotanische Forschungsinstitut Rübel in Zürich 1918-1928*. It describes the origins and first 11 years of the private research foundation established by Eduard Rübel, which was dedicated to the study of geobotany in general and the mapping of vegetation in particular. Considerable space in this first issue is given to describing the fine new Institute building, which was funded by Eduard Rübel's sisters Helene and Cécile and was completed in 1929. After 1931, the *Bericht* was published annually, and from 1932 onwards, it included original scientific publications as well as a report of the Institute's activities. The first articles included a paper by Rübel (*Versuch einer Übersicht über die Pflanzengesellschaften der Schweiz*) and an important study by Eduard Frey from Bern on the lichen communities of the Alps.

Over the years the *Berichte* developed into one of the most important publications of the flourishing new discipline of geobotany; it contained papers by staff of the Institute such as Werner Lüdi and Heinrich Zoller, and also many external contributions (e.g. in 1954, *A synopsis of the Dactylorhizids of the British Isles*, by J. Heslop-Harrison). In the early 1960ies the journal was edited by Heinz Ellenberg, who succeeded Rübel as Director in 1958. The volumes appearing during this time included several important methodological

articles (ordination, use of punched cards for vegetation data, indicator values of plants) and also described the activities of the International Biological Programme. Under Elias Landolt, who succeeded Ellenberg in 1966, the *Berichte* continued to be an important scientific journal. For example, the issue for the year 1981 has 218 pages and includes major articles by Landolt (*Distribution pattern and ecophysiological characteristics of European Lemnaceae*), Urbanska (*Polymorphism of cyanogenesis in Lotus alpinus in Switzerland*), and Dietsch (*Schafweiden im Alpsteingebiet - Ostschweizer Kalkalpen*).

In 1996, the *Berichte* was given a 'face-lift' and started to be published in its present form with most of the articles in English. Before this change, considerable thought had been given to whether the house journal of a research institute still had a useful role to play. At that time we concluded that it did: in our view the journal offered the opportunity to publish papers of high quality but of regional interest, which might be considered too parochial for mainstream scientific journals; another important role of the journal was to serve as a platform for describing work in progress and as a forum for new ideas.

Why have we now decided to discontinue this journal, which is widely known and respected, especially in continental Europe? There are two main reasons, both related to changes in the way that scientific discovery is communicated. Firstly, there has been a strong trend for important scientific work to be published in a few mainstream journals with a high

impact factor. Over the years journals such as *Ecology*, *Oecologia* and *Oikos* have become the standard outlets for ecological work, and the small house journals have been more and more marginalised. Although we have been fortunate to publish many good articles in our pages, we see little point in trying to compete with major journals for the best articles. Secondly, the invention of the internet is transforming the way in which we obtain information. Most important journals now provide their articles in electronic form, and in a surprisingly short space of time researchers have come to expect that the literature they need can be downloaded onto their own computer. The internet is particularly convenient for publishing material of relatively short-lived importance, such as annual reports, research notes and summaries of PhD theses.

It is for these reasons that the Institute has decided that it is appropriate to discontinue the *Bulletin*. We have concluded that the time and resources it requires would be better devoted to maintaining a lively, informative and up-to-date presence on the internet. In fact, in this issue of the *Bulletin* we publish one article which in a way marks the transition from the journal to the web. This article, by Fleischmann *et al.*, is a virtual gallery of the vegetation and flora of the Seychelles. The printed article provides a brief description of the main types of vegetation and the threats posed to the flora by invasive plants. However, the most important part of this work is to be found on our web page, where we present a collection of photographs of the plant species and vegetation types of the Seychelles.

We hope that through the new medium of the internet you will continue to follow the work and publications of the Geobotanical Institute ETH with interest. You will find us on: <http://www.geobot.umnw.ethz.ch>.