or North America. If permanent availability becomes ZR-dependent, low-level awareness of or access to this database in the presently less developed world will contribute to instability. Workers in such areas are likely to persist with the nomenclature known to them locally regardless of anything the Code might require.

5. Conclusion. In the light of the comments here made I am against the course of action proposed in draft Article 11b concerning the availability of new names and hope that other zoologists will join with me in urging the Editorial Committee to think again on this very important issue.

Comment on gender of genus-group names and on species-group epithets (Articles 30 and 31)

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I would like to register my strong objections to the introduction of linguistic laxity into the draft Code. We all know that modern education does not produce classical scholars. I myself have only smatterings of Latin and no Greek at all, yet I have never had any difficulties with forming new binomina — and I have published more than a hundred of them. Those who have no knowledge of classical languages can easily consult one of the many source books that provide instructions on name formation (as I write I have in front of me an excellent compendium that would enable anybody to form a correct binomen: R.W. Brown (1991), Composition of Scientific Words, Smithsonian Publications). The proposals do not abolish Latin and Greek, they only bastardise them and lower the standards. People will have to continue to use classical languages, but they will simply be free to use them incorrectly. Systematics is a discipline on the defensive these days as a supposedly obsolete branch of science ("surely all this was done in the 19th century?"). Lower standards will have further unfavourable impact on its standing in the scientific community and in the eyes of those who decide on apportioning support.

‘Castrating’ genera (Article 30) is a retrograde step. The proposal (Article 31) that specific names should be returned to their original gender form, even if grammatically incorrect, is absurd. Talk about instability! The suggestion that corrected endings should be retained in cases of ‘existing usage’ is vague and leaves the door open to all kinds of difficulties.

Comment on need for stability in names (Article 79c)

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It seems to me that the strong case for stability made in the covering explanatory notes by Kraus & Ride is not adequately conveyed by the present form of
Article 79c in the Discussion Draft. I suggest that a Subsection (vii) be added paraphrasing the third paragraph of those explanatory notes, perhaps more or less as follows:

"Stability in name application and form, consistent with taxonomy, is of paramount importance irrespective of any priority or linguistic consideration. Stability must take precedence over priority and linguistics, neither of which is an end in itself. No scientific purpose is served by changing names for purely formal reasons, if doing so causes significant confusion in any biological context (whether specialist or non-specialist). The present Article is intended to ensure that names in present use remain valid, or can easily be validated."

The Preamble has not been included in the Discussion Draft, but I do think a clarification of the Code’s role in biology should be in the eventual text, noting the importance of nomenclatural stability in the context of non-taxonomic as well as taxonomic literature. Taxonomists are the guardians of biological nomenclature for the benefit not only of themselves, but far more importantly for the common man and the numerous biologists of other disciplines whatever those may be: ecology, conservation, genetics, evolution, education, medicine, organismic, cell or molecular biology, etc. Educated non-taxonomists depend on taxonomists to ensure stability of nomenclature, insofar as it is consistent with advancing knowledge, and to keep that stability immune from changes for purely nomenclatural reasons which will not be understood by non-specialists. Failure of taxonomists to serve that function in good faith undermines their value to, and endangers the trust and respect of, their fellow non-specialists on whom the effectiveness of the Code depends.

Comment on languages of the Code (Article 85)

F.C. Thompson


The only proper way to address the issue of ‘official’ languages of the Code (see Article 85 of the Discussion Draft) is to have none! Why should English and French be the only languages? Spanish and German are now more widely used than French, and English is far from being the most widely used language. So, for expediency and neutrality, Article 85 should be modified as follows to reflect reality.

Article 85. Languages of the Code.— The Commission may authorize the publication of the Code in any language and under such conditions as it may decide. All such authorized texts are official and are equivalent in force, meaning and authority. If it appears that there is a difference in meaning between official texts, the problem is to be referred to the Commission, whose interpretation shall be final.