

Respect is earned not commanded

The editorial¹ on gerontophobia, ageing and retirement is well written, thought provoking and revealing. Liking and disliking of the older scientific and academic communities mostly depend on the age of the reviewers. If one is below thirty, talented, inspired and motivated to pursue research work with zeal and devotion, then, one way or the other, the presence of stumbling blocks in the form of seniors becomes apparent. He finds in them not so hard working, committed personalities but the vehicles of exploitation and usurpation by virtue of their commanding positions in the hierarchy. The feeling which is normally suppressed for years ultimately finds expression in the form of indifferent, nonchalant and unchivalrous behaviour when those people retire.

The superannuated scientists on the other hand, bask in the glory of their achievements by eulogizing their performances and boasting of building most of the modern institutes in India. They also, in general, express their anguish by criticizing the present generation of scientists for their non-seriousness and casual approach to the subject, their lack of knowledge and

too much of a materialistic approach. The schism between the two generations is indeed quite deep.

In this scenario, a retired scientist finds an alien and inhospitable atmosphere to continue his scientific pursuits. He is regarded as an intruder who deprives fellow scientists from prime accommodation and other infrastructural facilities. His longing for scientific research is regarded as a pretext for overstaying and his dedication and devotion as a camouflage. All of a sudden his hitherto collaborators and associates avoid and dissociate themselves from him and make new alignments for greener pastures. The retired scientist must have Herculean strength to stomach all these unpleasanties.

The younger generation is, however, not always to blame. Some of the senior scientists shun active research long before their retirement and depend heavily on their students for this purpose. Some of them become managers of science, adorn various committees, attend national and international conferences very often and conduct examinations. They remain busy in extracurricular activities and hardly

find time to do active research. This breed of bureaucratic scientists is generally overlooked by the next generation.

Sincere, humble, retired scientists and academicians on the other hand, are always acclaimed by their fellow colleagues. Their advice is sought and appreciated. Their little demands are met without any grudge. They reap a good harvest of their deeds. Unfortunately, very few scientists in India plan for their retirement. So when the Damascus sword falls on their shoulders in the form of superannuation they are bewildered and want to stick to their old dens as there is no other occupation to fall upon.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 1163–1164.

R. K. KAR*
RATAN KAR

*Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany,
Lucknow 226 007, India*

**For correspondence.*

e-mail: rk_kar@yahoo.com

Corruption in science and science organization

Science as a profession is generally considered unattractive. However, scientists are usually well regarded by the public. Taking advantage of this opinion of the public, mediocre and below-average persons have made inroads into this profession during the last few years. Heavy funding from the government to scientific bodies and agencies like CSIR, DBT, DST, ICAR, ICMR and many more has been in effect for the last few years. Though there was a general cut in allocation of fresh posts in other government departments, the scientific departments and laboratories associated with them kept on filling positions to very high levels. There is nothing wrong in funding towards science for advancement of our nation and particularly the poor getting benefit out of it. Unfortunately, there is an old saying, 'where there is money – corruption is bound to come'.

A lot has been written about how to assess excellence in science. Some advocate research papers in international journals with high impact factors, others believe in foreign patents and some count on the quantity of papers. Then others believe in the number of citations as the criterion for evaluating a research paper. However, it is generally recognized that quality of research has suffered of late. The following could be some of the reasons for this downfall in quality research in many government research organizations.

- There are instances when heads of scientific institutions tend to insert their names in most of the research papers, patents or even papers for symposia and conferences communicated from their institute, irrespective of their field of specialization. This is totally unethical

and amounts to grabbing others' work for personal gains.

- Fresh appointments at several levels are not done on a transparent basis. Tailor-made advertisements to suit an individual are notified. Stronger candidates are screened out deliberately to make way for pre-determined candidates.
- A trend that has emerged in the last decade is to start an in-house journal from within the organization, on government cost of publishing research papers and thereby enhance lists of publication. There are instances where the head of the organization, who is also the Editor-in-chief of the journal, has published 20 to 30 research papers in a year in such a journal. This is how the bio-data are elevated for personal gains.
- The same can be unequivocally stated for fellowships and awards for at least

some of the academies and societies mushrooming in the country. The nominations are invited, the candidates are pre-decided, formalities are done and results announced. The pages of the CVs are not even turned.

- Hijacking of projects is a common phenomenon.

All the above are some examples, which I consider, should be treated as scientific corruption.

Now the most important aspect is financial corruption in science. Many scientific departments in our country are totally funded by the Government using public money. In the present era of electronic media and communication, the highest of the authorities and Indian Judiciary are advocating and are trying to implement

transparency in government departments. This would not only enable the masses to know how the public money is utilized, but also inhibit the bureaucracy from making extravagant expenditures and misutilising public money.

Recently there was a news item that several MPs were going to give the details of utilization of money on development of their constituencies from the MP's grants given by the Government. This is a very healthy sign in order to start transparency in our system.

Several organizations and their labs have their own websites. These websites provide very superficial information, such as an organizational chart and some activities. Some of the sites provide only information about the Director's bio-data whereas not even the list of all scientists is given, let

alone their specific areas of research. These sites are being used, in many cases, to only highlight the chief of the organization. If the Govt. of India and the Indian Judicial System are really serious about wiping out corruption from such organizations, it should be made mandatory that they put on their websites account of each and every paisa spent by them from public funding. Particularly phone, mobile, electricity, fuel, tour bills and all consumable and non-consumable expenses should be available on the website to bring transparency and check corruption.

KUMKUM RANI

Central Institute of Medicinal and
Aromatic Plants,
Lucknow 226 015, India
e-mail: rkumkum@hotmail.com

Cataloguing Indian biota

Chavan *et al.*¹ elaborated that database of more than 93% (84,000 species) of the known taxa (89,451) of Indian fauna have been compiled. I appreciate Vishwas Chavan and his team for undertaking such a stupendous task for the use of public domain and hope that the remaining 5,451 species of IndFauna³ will be completed in the next few months.

When the Indian fauna was accessed randomly to know the status of the genus *Oligotoma* (Order: Embioptera; Class: Insecta), 29 records with valid scientific names and 6 records of synonyms were displayed on 3 October 2004, the group on which experts from the world taxonomists were communicated. But after verifying the published data on the same by the Zoological Survey of India, the number of valid species of the genus *Oligotoma*² was found to be only 16, which shows that 13 more species of the genus are also present in India, but that is not the case, since these 13 species are entered in the database mostly with spelling mistakes and synonyms, without consulting any expert on the group or any taxonomist. If all these valid names are included in 84,000 species, there is an increase of 81.25% records in the database of single species belonging to order Embioptera, the order includes only 33 species from India. This itself raises the question of documentation of 84,000 valid species in ECAT. Cha-

van *et al.*¹ also mentioned that in some cases, single species may even have as many as 100 synonyms, but so far 47,405 synonyms of 84,000 species are included, therefore, this number is expected to be more than valid names.

Despite stating that 'the information provided in (<http://www.ncbi.org.in/biota/fauna>) is not guaranteed to be correct or complete and conclusion drawn from or actions undertaken on the basis of information are the sole responsibility of the user', it is general practice that information retrieved is used for the publications and drawing the inferences not only by the lay workers but even by the experts. These references even become the baseline for the future workers and are quoted at various places, and it then becomes very difficult to return to the same fold.

With experience of working on faunal diversity for the last 22 years, I have a suggestion for the readers of *Current Science*, that such information from websites should not be followed blindly and that the subject clarifications must be sought from the experts before being published and also a submission to Chavan to adopt some methodology for screening the data of individual species through experts before entering the website. This will then result in available information being utilized by the future workers and the site may further create in-

terest in this field of taxonomy, which has almost become a neglected subject while taxonomists are also dwindling in number.

1. Chavan, V., Watve, A. V., Londhe, M. S., Rane, N. S., Pandit, A. T. and Krishnan, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 749-763.
2. Mitra, T. R., *Embioptera, Faunal Diversity in India* (eds Alfred, J. R. B., Das, A. K. and Sanyal, A. K.), Zoological Survey of India, 1998, pp. 204-207.
3. Retrieved from NCBI-Indian Fauna <http://www.ncbi.org.in/biota/fauna>.

K. CHANDRA

Zoological Survey of India,
424, New Adarsh Colony,
Kamala Nehru Nagar,
Jabalpur 482 002, India
e-mail: crszsijb@sancharnet.in

Response

While commenting on our article¹ on the electronic catalogue of known Indian fauna (IndFauna), Chandra² has strongly made a case for increasing involvement of taxonomists in development of such catalogues. Electronic catalogues (ECAT) development is always a 'work in progress' and dynamic in nature.