Taxonomic Note

Proposal to change Recommendation 12c of the International Code of Nomenclature of Prokaryotes

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We propose changing Recommendation 12c of the International Code of Nomenclature of Prokaryotes to clarify the ways species and subspecies can be named to honour persons.

According to Appendix 9 – Orthography of the International Code of Nomenclature of Prokaryotes, persons may be honoured by using their name in forming a generic name or a specific epithet. There are numerous examples of names honouring famous microbiologists from the past and the present. It is good practice to refrain from naming taxa after persons not connected with bacteriology or at least with natural science. This is clearly stated in Recommendation 10a, but that Recommendation applies only to genera and to subgenera. The Code does not make a similar statement for specific epithets.

It is considered extremely bad practice if authors name organisms after themselves or after co-authors. This is clearly stated in Recommendation 6(10), which applies to the formation of genus names as well as specific epithets.

More specific recommendations are given in Recommendation 12c, which applies to the formation of names of new specific epithets. Recommendation 12c first refers to Recommendation 6, but then states: ... (3) ‘Ensure that, if taken from the name of a person, it recalls the name of one who discovered or described it, or was in some way connected with it, and possesses the appropriate gender ...’. To our opinion this recommendation is extremely confusing, and can even be interpreted as an encouragement for an author to name a novel organism after himself/herself, as he/she is the person ‘who discovered or described it’, or was more than anybody else ‘connected with it’.

We therefore propose reformulating Recommendation 12c(3) as follows: ‘Specific epithets should not honour the author or any of the co-authors of the proposed species or subspecies, or any persons not connected with bacteriology or at least with natural science’.