

PROPOSAL TO SUPPRESS A WORK

Edited by John McNeill

Reply to van Rijckevorsel's Proposal to Suppress *Selbyana* vol. 23 Supplement**William R. Anderson***University of Michigan Herbarium, 3600 Varsity Drive, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108-2287, U.S.A.
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Paul van Rijckevorsel (in *Taxon* 55: 1053. 2006) proposed the suppression of a four-page supplement to *Selbyana* vol. 23, in which was published a name for a new orchid from Peru. He proposed that this be done under Art. 32.9 of the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* (McNeill & al. in *Regnum Veg.* 146. 2006), which provides for the suppression of whole works and all the names in them. Before considering the longer-term implications of approving Rijckevorsel's proposal, let us examine the merits of the case he makes for his specific proposal.

(1) The species was named for the collector who bought the orchid in a market in Peru and supplied it to the authors. The phrase “blatant ‘name hunting’” is used in the proposal, apparently because the collector wanted the plant to be named for him. Well, at the risk of being called a cynic, I have to point out that botanists have been naming plants for patrons for hundreds of years. One thinks of *Cliffortia* (named by Linnaeus for the wealthy Dutch banker George Clifford) and *Carnegiea* (named by Britton & Rose for the American tycoon Andrew Carnegie), and we could continue adding to the list right up to the present day. Some may deplore this time-honoured practice, but it is not forbidden under the *Code* and has never before been proposed as a reason for rejecting a name.

(2) The description of the species was drawn up “overnight” and “rushed into print (eight days later it was received in botanical libraries),” which gave the name priority over a competing name that appeared in another journal the following month. The *Code* does not mandate the usually sedate pace of botanical publication. Should we, for the sake of decorum, go back through the last 250 years of plant taxonomy and suppress all the publications whose authors beat their competitors into print by days or weeks? That would cause the loss of many well-established names.

(3) The plant described in the supplement to *Selbyana* was carried from Peru to Florida illegally, in violation of the CITES convention, which produced unpleasant legal consequences for all involved. I certainly do not endorse the breaking of laws by botanists, but it is not the role of the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* to punish evil-doers. This is surely not the first case in which plant taxonomists have misbehaved, nor will it be the last, but their fate should be left to law-enforcement agencies and employers. The *Code* is designed to govern the publication and application of plant names, and its overseers should

restrict themselves to that function. If they go beyond that role, they invite a plague of unintended consequences.

As an example of where the misapplication of Art. 32.9 could take us, let us consider a genus of *Malpighiaceae*, *Cottisia* Dubard & Dop (in *Rev. Gén. Bot.* 20: 358. 1908). The authors described the genus as new to Madagascar, on the basis of a single specimen at P, supposedly collected by G.F. Scott Elliot; the name is based on an anagram of Scott. The authors recognized that their type was very close to species of *Aspicarpa* and *Janusia* in Mexico, but named it anyway, presumably because nothing like it occurred in Madagascar. Arènes (in *Notul. Syst.* 11: 81–85. 1943) reduced *Cottisia* to synonymy under *Janusia*, but took up the species epithet of Dubard & Dop and continued to treat the plant as a native of Madagascar. In 1948 Arènes (in *Notul. Syst.* 13: 165–166) published a correction, stating that the type of *Cottisia* was a mislabelled specimen collected in Sonora, Mexico (*Palmer 263* in 1887). He still maintained that it was a distinct species, but in fact that collection is a typical representative of *Janusia californica* Benth. (C! GH! NY! P! UC! US!). None of this would matter if it were not for the fact that North American species currently assigned to *Janusia* cannot be retained in the South American genus *Janusia* A. Juss. (C.C. Davis & W.R. Anderson, unpublished data), and my colleague C.C. Davis and I are going to have to move the North American species to a different genus. The only available generic name based on a North American type is *Cottisia*, so we will have to take up that name, even though it was the result of a curatorial mistake and parochial taxonomy by people who could not recognize an obvious absurdity even though they had the advantage of working in one of the great herbaria of the world. It is infuriating for us to have to apply that ridiculous name to a North American genus, but the *Code* makes no provision for rejecting a name just because it was the result of error. But if Rijckevorsel can get the *Selbyana* supplement suppressed for the weak reasons examined above, perhaps Davis and I can propose to have the Dubard & Dop publication of 1908 suppressed; we could surely make at least as strong a case for such an action as Rijckevorsel has made in his proposal. Once that is done, we can give *Janusia* in North America a name that is more to our liking.

This is not the first time someone wanted to stretch a rule of plant nomenclature to fit some specific need, but such actions can bear unforeseen and odious fruit. If the proposal

by Rijkevorsel is approved, it will establish a bad precedent and could be the first step onto a slippery slope leading into a morass of instability. The *Code* is far from perfect, but it could be a lot worse than it is, and one way to achieve that would be to make Art. 32.9 available to anyone who wants to get rid of some unpalatable but legitimate name for rea-

sons of morality, politics, nationalism, or convenience. Let us not start down that path. Rijkevorsel's proposal should be rejected, and consideration should be given to tightening the wording of Art. 32.9 so that others will not be tempted to abuse it.