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50 years of the International Association of Bryologists

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The International Association of Bryologists (IAB) has been close to my heart during half of a century. Following the establishment of the IAB at the International Botanical Congress in Seattle in 1969, I served as its first secretary-treasurer for eighteen years and helped setting it up. Now, a half-century later, it is a joy and great satisfaction to see a vigorous and healthy IAB continuing on the path of promoting communication and collaboration among the world's bryologists. It is a pleasure therefore to write a few lines on the history of the organization for this special Golden Jubilee issue of *Bryophyte Diversity and Evolution*. In doing so, I lean heavily on my account of the early history of the Association (<https://bryology.org/history-of-iab/>) and my talk on the history of international collaboration at the IAB congress in Madrid (Gradstein 2000).

International collaboration among bryologists has a long history, spanning almost two hundred years, and the idea of establishing an international bryological society has been on the minds of bryologists for a long time. One of the early protagonists was the hepaticologist Frans Verdoorn, founder of *Annales Bryologici* (1927–1939) and editor of the first multi-authored *Manual of Bryology* (1932), who proposed the idea for an international bryological organization in 1935 at the International Botanical Congress in Amsterdam. Wartime slowed down the realization of these plans and it took until 1966 when William (Bill) C. Steere, a preeminent moss specialist and director of the New York Botanical Garden, discussed the idea for such an organization at the Pacific Science Congress in Honolulu; this time with more success. Bill was joined by two other leading bryologists present at the congress, Stanley W. Greene from U.K. and Zenoske Iwatsuki from Japan; together they compiled an address list of bryologists and drafted a constitution, thus paving the way for the formal establishment of the Association at the botanical congress in Seattle.

As mentioned in my account of the early history of the Association, the IAB was originally a daughter organization of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) and the IAB office was located in the IAPT headquarters at the University of Utrecht. With the growth and expansion of the IAB it was considered that the society could stand on its own feet and in 1987 the IAB became an independent society. Much credit for transforming the IAB into an independent organization goes to my successor, Dale H. Vitt, who served as a secretary-general from 1987 until 2005.

The membership in the organization has fluctuated but currently stands at a healthy 400+. The activities of the Association have also evolved over the years, but they always focused on four main goals: 1) the organization of meetings (usually combined with a field trip); 2) the dissemination of bryological news; 3) the publication of data of general interest to bryology; and 4) the awarding of prizes and grants. During the 50-year period, twenty-three international meetings have been organized, in locations all over the world (see the list on the IAB website, bryology.org; the most recent one took place in Madrid in 2019, Figure 1). Some of these were held in conjunction with the international botanical congress (as required by the IAB constitution), others were organized independently, but almost always in association with a local bryological society and, most recently, with the newly established International Molecular Moss Science Society (iMOSS) (von Konrat *et al.* 2020). All these meetings have been extremely fruitful and stimulating as is evidenced by the lively accounts published in the newsletter of the Association. The proceedings of the meetings usually appeared in book form or in bryological journals, and a long list of titles can be found on the IAB website. Much credit goes to the Hattori Botanical Laboratory and its director, Sinske Hattori, for having published many of the Association's congress proceedings. Interestingly, in the early years broad-focused conferences alternated with symposia focusing on particular themes, such as taxonomy (Geissler & Greene 1982), ecology (Pócs *et al.* 1985), methods (Glime 1988) and tropical bryology (Allen & Magill 1990, Delgado 1996). This principle has now been abandoned and all recent IAB congresses are spanning a broad spectrum of topics.



FIGURE 1. Group photo at the joint conference of International Association of Bryologists (IAB), International Molecular Moss Science Society (iMOSS) and Spanish Bryological Association (Sociedad Española de Briología, SEB), 9–12 July 2019, at the Royal Botanical Garden (RBG), Madrid, Spain. Photo: César García.

Considerable evolution is observed in the dissemination of bryological news by the IAB. Initially, news items were published twice a year in a column in the journal *Taxon*, the *Bulletin of Bryology*. Twenty-eight issues of the *Bulletin* have appeared, over a period of 17 years. Because of the delay between submission of the manuscript and its appearance in print, a wish for faster dissemination of news items was expressed and this led to the establishment of *The Bryological Times* in 1980. The response to this new venture was extremely positive and four to six issues were published annually over many years. The development of fast electronic means of communication and the rise of the social media in recent years seem to have somewhat impacted the frequency of publication of the newsletter, which is now appearing about two to three times per year. One hundred and fifty issues of *The Bryological Times*, containing thousands of news items, have been published since 1980 and this wealth of information is now freely accessible on the website of the IAB thanks to the efforts of the secretary-general of the Association, Matt von Konrat, and his associates.

The rise of rapid electronic communication mentioned above led to the establishment of the BRYONET in 1991, developed by the Swedish bryologist Gillis Een. Managed by Janice Glime at Michigan Technological University for over a quarter of a century, BRYONET has served as an extremely popular and effective means of communication. Requests for pdfs, however obscure, are almost invariably fulfilled, often within minutes! Initially the network operated independently but since 2001 it is an official activity of the IAB. The Association is currently also present in Facebook and Twitter, as evidenced on the IAB website, and these networks are gaining increasing popularity as an ultrarapid, informal means of communication and dissemination of news items and publications.

Notable evolution has also taken place in the publication of bryological data by the IAB. For a long time, the main focus had been on publishing works of general interest such as review articles, bibliographies, nomenclature indexes, manuals, glossaries, etc. Examples are the *Advances in Bryology* (e.g., Longton 1997), *Compendium of Bryology* (Vitt *et al.* 1985), *Glossarium Polyglottum Bryologiae* (Magill 1990), *Conspectus of Bryological Taxonomic Literature* (Greene & Harrington 1988, 1989) and part of *Index Hepaticarum* (Geissler & Bischler 1985–1990); details and

backgrounds of these projects are given in my account on the early history of the Association. Over many years the IAB avoided the publication of the results of original research, in order to avoid conflicts with the established bryological journals which traditionally focus on publishing new research. This policy was recently abandoned with the establishment of the journal *Bryophyte Diversity and Evolution* in 2013; since then the IAB has become actively engaged in the publication of original data.

Over the years IAB developed a strong awards and grants programme, following the establishment in 1979 of the *Hedwig medal*, in recognition of outstanding, life-time contribution to bryology. On the first occasion the medal was awarded to two bryologists, but later on it has become the tradition to award a single medal every six years (by the latter principle, the Hedwig medal that I received in 2013 was illegal...!). The Hedwig medal was soon followed by the *Spruce award* for outstanding contribution to bryology in the first 25 years of a career and the *Hattori prize* for the best publication or set of publication within the two preceding its adjudication. More recently, the *Riclef Grolle award* for excellence in bryodiversity research was added. In addition, two grant competitions to support bryological research (i.e., *Stanley Greene award*; *Conservation and endangered species grant*) were established and are held biennially. The programme of prizes and fellowships awarded by the Association has certainly added much to its prestige as a promoter of bryological research.

Fruitful international collaboration is a challenge that requires active communication, creativity, friendship, flexibility and enthusiasm. The IAB can be proud on what it has achieved during a half-century in meeting this challenge. All this has been possible only through the efforts and the unfailing enthusiasm of the numerous persons which make up the IAB. We must not forget that the IAB is an organization of persons, of *bryologists*, not a society for bryology. I therefore congratulate all the members of the IAB for an outstanding half century of progress and wish the association all the best for significant additional activities in the next 50 years. Let me end here by citing the words of our founder William C. Steere, spoken during his inaugural address delivered at the IAB congress in St. Petersburg in 1975: “*Cooperation and broad vision are becoming more and more urgently important as the field of bryology advances, especially if we are to prevent avoidable and unnecessary duplication of research efforts. If the International Association of Bryologists can serve as a bridge for friendship and cooperation between bryologists of different nations, different cultures and different kinds of governments, our most earnest aspirations for the organization will have been fulfilled*”.

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