



Correspondence

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Reply to ““Taxonomic certification versus the scientific method”: a rebuttal of Rogers (2012)” by Stribling *et al.*, 2012

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I am grateful to Stribling *et al.*, (2012) for pointing out two errors I made in my original opinion piece (Rogers, 2012), namely citing Stribling *et al.*, 2003 as Stribling *et al.*, 2002, and stating that that same reference used the term “bench taxonomist” when in reality it was “production taxonomist”.

I am glad that the Taxonomic Certification Program (TCP) of the Society for Freshwater Science (SFS) has put far more thought into the idea of taxonomic certification than others I have discussed this topic with over the years. I was not specifically attacking the SFS program, but rather addressing issues that I have heard from a variety of proponents of taxonomic certification programs, not just that of the SFS, not just in the USA and Canada, but also from Australia, Chile, China, Colombia, Iran, and Thailand. Stribling *et al.* (2012a) wrote: “The SFS-TCP was established not as a program to guarantee better data quality, but rather, as a process intended to help distinguish individuals who have appropriate training and experience, and subsequent to successful completion of the certification exercise, to be considered as having the *capability* of providing taxonomic data of acceptable quality.” I think that it would be helpful if this language as well as the “two unwritten goals” (Stribling *et al.*, 2012a, pg 66, paragraph 2) were added into the text on the SFS-TCP website (<http://www.sfstcp.com/>). This may eliminate some confusion, particularly since the website currently states: “High quality taxonomy is crucial to credible ecological studies and reliable bioassessment programs. However, there is concern that (A) there are many errors and inaccuracies associated with the taxonomy of some on-going programs; (B) there is no recognized protocol in North America for evaluating the taxonomic ability of people identifying invertebrates; and (C) academic support for faculty positions and student training related to non-molecular, organismal taxonomy is declining.” This text may seem to relate taxonomic data quality and certification to some. It certainly does to me.

Stribling *et al.* (2012a) wrote: “In Rogers’ correspondence (2012), there seems to be some confusion regarding the difference between certification and accreditation. Rogers mentions the issue of certifying individuals rather than laboratories (p. 67, paragraph 2), falsely implying that the TCP is a proponent of laboratory certification.” No such implication was made. The argument that certifying a taxonomist is no different than certifying an analytical chemistry laboratory was made to me by taxonomic certification proponents in the past, and I did not attribute it to a source and never mentioned SFS. That argument was not mine, and I was, like Stribling *et al.* (2012) pointing out its fallacy. I think that we agree that it is a bad argument.

I agree with Stribling *et al.* that the terminological discussion is probably trivial. However, I do take exception to the implication that I think diagnosticians are “simple, unskilled labor”. In point of fact, the diagnostician (Rogers 2012) is probably far better at general identifications than the taxonomist. The taxonomist typically specializes in one or two groups, whereas the diagnostician is able to identify a tremendous range of organisms from a myriad of groups. I likened diagnosticians to automotive mechanics: hardly simple unskilled labor!

I also reject Stribling *et al.*’s argument that by using identification keys one is testing species concepts, and by implication is a taxonomist. They state:

“We should also point out here that many authors have properly suggested that taxa are hypotheses . . .
Wheeler & Platnick (2000) emphatically stated that phylogenetic species are the endpoints of evolution,