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Election of new ICZN Commissioners using an on-line platform

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New members of the International Commission for Zoological Nomenclature are elected via a secret ballot held under the auspices of the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS), as mandated by the ICZN Constitution (Article 4) and Bylaws. Traditionally, voting has occurred during an ICZN General Session at IUBS meetings or at meetings officially sanctioned by the IUBS that are widely attended by zoologists, or through by-elections within the Commission itself. The Constitution mandates such voting to occur in a session of the ‘Section of Zoological Nomenclature’, but at the latest General Session, which was held in conjunction with the 32nd General Assembly of the IUBS in Berlin, Germany, December 2015, the number of people voting was as low as 16.

The retirement of several Commissioners during the past two years resulted in five vacancies. The Commission originally planned for voting to be held concurrently during the 23rd International Congress of Zoology (ICZ), Cape Town and the XXVI International Congress of Entomology in Helsinki in 2020. Both of these conferences, however, were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ICZ was eventually held on-line, and the Commission approached the Organising Committee of the ICZ to establish a registration and voting portal under the name ‘Section of Zoological Nomenclature’ as specified in the ICZN Constitution and Bylaws. In November 2021, members of the international zoological community were invited through relevant mailing lists (e.g., Taxacom, ICZN-list) as well as the ICZN website to register to vote in the election and, once registered, were given access to a SurveyMonkey voting form that was administered by the ICZN Council. Voters could choose between 10 candidates, whose biographies were available on the ICZN website, and could vote for up to five Commissioners.

The Commission received 575 registrations from 50 different countries. Votes were subsequently received from 425 of these registrants, with a total of 1,396 votes. The identity of the voters was not revealed to Council, thus maintaining the anonymity required for a secret ballot.

The five nominees with the greatest number of votes were, in alphabetical order: Luis Ceriaco (Portugal; Reptilia, Amphibia, Mammalia), Nikita Kluge (Russia; Ephemeroptera, Insecta), Paulo Lucinda (Brazil; Ichthyology), Cristina Scioscia (Argentina; Arachnology) and Daniel Whitmore (Germany; Diptera). They have been duly appointed as Commissioners with their terms commencing on 1 January 2022. Biosketches of the Commissioners currently serving are available from the ICZN website (<https://www.iczn.org/about-the-iczn/commissioners/>).

The benefits of an on-line voting platform are obvious. It allowed voters from all over the world to participate in an event that was previously available only to those people who could afford to travel to and attend an international congress. Indeed, receiving votes from 425 zoologists from 50 countries most likely represents a level of diversity that has never been previously achieved by the Commission when electing new Commissioners, and certainly not within the living memory of the current Council.

While this ballot represents a major improvement in Commission activities, the Commission is keen to improve the mechanism of inclusive international voting in future ballots, and suggestions for improvement from the community would be welcome (send comments to iczn@nus.edu.sg).