
FOREWORD

The *Apiales*, and in particular the umbellifers, have long been a source of fascination for botanists and lay people alike. Although not of major economic importance, they provide us with widely used herbs and flavourings, and commonly cultivated garden plants. Their place in history is ensured by hemlock (*Conium maculatum* L.), which is believed to have been used to poison Socrates. The very features that make them so characteristic and readily recognizable, such as the umbel and the mericarps, mask a complexity of taxonomic and evolutionary relationships between the various groups that have proved to be a continuing challenge to systematists. This volume is a major contribution to the elucidation of these problems and I am delighted to commend its publication.

As pointed out in the Introduction, this issue of the journal can be considered the third in a series of international symposia on the family *Apiaceae* (*Umbelliferae*). I had the pleasure of organizing and hosting the first one in 1970 at the University of Reading, and have been privileged in being able to attend all three.

It is particularly pleasing to note in this volume that due emphasis has been given to the application of molecular and cladistic techniques at various taxonomic levels, and to the use of informatics as a means of handling the large amounts of data that are being generated, while at the same time not neglecting the contributions made by morphology and anatomy. The future of systematics will continue to depend on such multidisciplinary approaches.

While this collection of papers represents an important advance in our understanding of the *Apiales*, much remains to be done and I am sure that umbellifers and their allies will continue to fascinate and intrigue botanists. The *Apiales Resource Centre* will play a major role, and facilitate the co-ordination of the results obtained through advances in research.

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