

OBITUARY

SANTIAGO CASTROVIEJO BOLIBAR (1946–2009)

With the untimely passing of the doyen of plant systematics on the Iberian Peninsula, Dr Santiago Castroviejo Bolibar (Figure 1), shortly after his 63rd birthday, on 30 September 2009, the global plant taxonomic fraternity lost one of its staunchest supporters and contributors. He was a mild-mannered and humble person who easily and readily shared his considerable expertise in matters of a taxonomic nature with his colleagues. He worked well beyond the borders of his native Spain and participated widely in a wide range of international botanical initiatives.

Santiago was born on 7 August 1946 and spent his childhood in Tirán, Moaña (Pontevedra). After completing his secondary schooling, he entered the Universidad Complutense, Madrid, where he eventually graduated with a doctoral thesis entitled 'Flora y Cartografía de la Península del Morraza en Pontevedra' under the tutelage of Prof. Francisco Bellot Rodríguez. He always had a strong interest in systematics and was one of a rare breed of biodiversity specialists who understood the value of, and strongly supported, descriptive taxonomy in a bio-systematics framework. During his professional botanical career, Santiago held various scientific and administrative positions, among others as director of the Real Jardín Botánico, Madrid, from 1984 to 1994.

His taxonomic interests and background led naturally to a significant involvement in the *Flora iberica* project of which he was a major architect. This project brought the by then outdated *Prodromus florum hispanicae* into the 20th century, and is indeed what Santiago will be best remembered for. This model hard copy and web-based project benefitted greatly from his international experience and is today regarded as one of the leading sources of primary taxonomic information on a significant component of the Iberian flora. Significantly, Santiago did not simply rely on others to produce treatments for the *Flora iberica* project, he also conducted taxonomic research himself, including a treatment of, for example, the Crassulaceae of the region.

He was very much aware of the importance of international collaboration with a global reach and actively pursued the establishment of professional links with a range of colleagues and institutions from abroad. This awareness and his commitment to the *Flora iberica* project gave rise to a strong involvement in the Species Plantarum Programme—Flora of the World (SPPFW), where he served on the Steering Committee since the revival of the programme in the early 1990s. The SPPFW benefitted greatly from his considerable expertise in developing electronic and web-based taxonomic products, such as identification and mapping tools. In 2005, Santiago was also elected to the Council of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT), where he served until shortly before his death.

In spite of his considerable administrative duties in the various appointments he held in Spain, he retained a lifelong passion for field work and collecting herbarium specimens. Field trips were as far as possible linked to attending international botanical meetings. These gave him an opportunity to further satisfy his curiosity on a range of botanical interests that covered not only taxonomy and systematics, but extended into biogeography, ecology and conservation science. Santiago undertook two collecting trips to South Africa, the first coinciding with the hosting of the 3rd SPPFW Steering Committee meeting from 10 to 12 February 1999 (Smith 1999) at the Kirstenbosch Research Centre of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in Cape Town. The second trip followed after he attended the first-ever Africa-hosted Council Meeting of the IAPT, which was held at the National Herbarium of SANBI in Pretoria on 12 January 2008. On these two trips, Santiago collected 726 accessions of mainly Asteraceae, Ericaceae, Fabaceae, and Restionaceae. The specimens are deposited in the Herbarium of the Real Jardín Botánico, Madrid (MA), which is the main preserved plant collection in Spain.

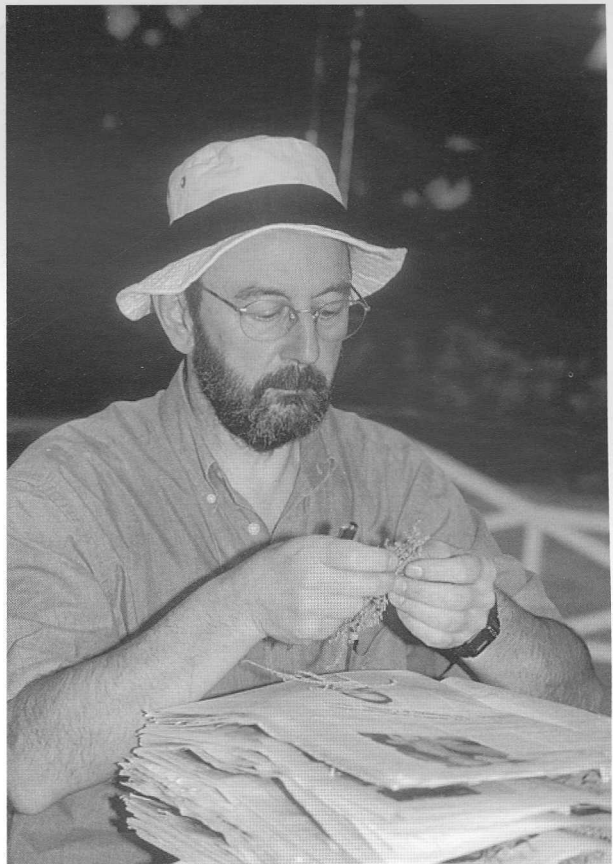


FIGURE 1.—Santiago Castroviejo processing collected material gathered around Ladysmith during a field trip to South Africa in 1999. Photographer: A. Prunell.

Santiago finally succumbed to cancer of the mouth following a two-year battle with the disease. We join his numerous colleagues and collaborators in mourning his passing. His untimely death leaves a void that will be felt well beyond his native Spain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCE

- SMITH, G.F. 1999. Documenting plant diversity on a global scale: recent progress with the Species Plantarum: Flora of the World Project. *South African Journal of Science* 95: 55, 56.

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