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With reference to the article *Écrire français* by Michel BAUMER (*Bois et Forêts des Tropiques* n° 274), a contribution from Paul VAN RIJCKEVORSEL

Botanical names are governed by a Code, the *ICBN*¹, (International Code of Botanical Nomenclature), or *CINB* in French (*Code Internationale de Nomenclature Botanique*), which is adjusted every six years by the world's plant taxonomists (latest edition: 2000). Ideally, each and every plant species should have a single botanical name, which is recognised all over the world. Botanical names are treated on the Latin, but may be derived from any language. A species name consists of two parts, eg. *Milicia excelsa*: the name of the genus and a specific epithet. The epithet is customarily written with the first letter in lower case.

In *Bois et Forêts des Tropiques* 274 (4): 85-87, it would appear that Michel Baumer has made an impassioned plea for French-speaking people to abandon the *Code* and take a new direction. It would be highly unfortunate if he were to be followed in this, especially in view of the grand tradition of the French language in the history of the *Code*, of which the first authoritative version was written by de Candolle in French in 1867.

In the matter of the lower-case initial letter, the *CINB* states: "60f.1 All specific and infraspecific epithets should be written with an initial lower-case letter, although authors desiring to use initial capital letters may do so when the epithets are directly derived from the names of persons (whether actual or mythical), or are vernacular (or non-Latin) names, or are former generic names."

Although Michel Baumer states that this is in the *Code* for reasons of harmonisation with the Animal Code, the *ICZN*, this is not actually the case: it was included in the *Code* before 1936. Initially, it was explicitly stated that no difference exists between noun and adjectival epithets, but this was later abandoned as superfluous.

It has been noted many times that even top experts using major libraries have great difficulty in deciding what an epithet is derived from. An epithet included in one name may be derived from an old genus name, while an identical epithet in another name may have quite a different source. In all such cases it is necessary to make a thorough search of the literature, but even this often proves inconclusive. It is far easier to always use a small initial (lower-case) letter.

There is in fact a strong feeling among taxonomists to disallow any exception. In 1999 a motion to forbid initial capital letters of (infra)specific epithets entirely gained a vote of 59.25% while 60% was required for acceptance.

The use of an upper case initial letter is occasionally allowed because in some cases there are strong emotional reasons to do so. For example, when composing a work dedicated to Didier Normand, the *eminence grise* of forestry and wood anatomy, it is appropriate to write the species named after him with an upper case initial letter, as in *Dalbergia Normandii*. But otherwise it is easier to write the name of this rare *lie-de-vin*-coloured rosewood as *Dalbergia normandii*.

There is nothing to be gained by advising the use of upper case initial letters for (sub)species epithets, as they merely confuse the issue. Upper case initial letters for epithets should only be used when there are exceptionally strong emotional reasons to do so.

A relatively minor matter is the *-i-* in epithets derived from personal names. Since 1988 it has been mandatory to correct *Acacia sieberana* to *Acacia sieberiana* (Art. 60.11 and Rec 60C.1(d)). Latin always adds an *-i-* to personal names that end in a consonant, with the correct termination coming afterwards. The botanical *Code* had been the exception, and was adjusted in 1988.

Another matter is that "*Acacia tortilis* ssp. *tortilis* Brenan" is not allowed. This concerns the typical subspecies of *Acacia tortilis*, which comes into being automatically when a second subspecies is named. It therefore cannot have an author and should be written *Acacia tortilis* ssp. *tortilis* or *Acacia tortilis* (Forssk.) Hayne ssp. *tortilis*.

Although including authors as part of a botanical name is mandatory when it comes to monographs on taxonomy, it is quite different matter in works of a general nature. It is doubtful whether it is always wise to include an author as part of a botanical name in a field guide or forestry book, as this is not helpful for the non-taxonomist. There is only one *Senna siamea* so it is unnecessary to write "*Senna siamea* (Lam.) H.S. Irwin & Barneby". It would be far more useful to write *Senna siamea* (syn. *Cassia siamea*) since *Cassia siamea* can still be found in many books.

As to Michel Baumer advocating writing *Albizzia* and *Anona*: the rest of the world has been writing *Albizia* and *Annona* for some time now.

¹ The *ICBN* is available online at:
<http://www.bgbm.fu-berlin.de/iapt/nomenclature/code/>