



Biotropica: The next 50 years

In 1967, the leadership of the recently founded Association for Tropical Biology¹ (ATB) decided its *Bulletin*—the organization's outlet for scholarly research—was not “attaining the status originally contemplated for it” (Soderstrom, 1968, p. 10). Because it was deemed “essential” that the organization produce a journal with “original and stimulating articles,” the ATB Council asked James A. Peters to chair an *ad hoc* committee tasked with evaluating the *Bulletin* and proposing either revisions to its format or a new publication to replace it (Soderstrom, 1968, p. 10). One year later, the committee made its recommendations. First, that the *Bulletin* be revamped in such a way to make it “the first place a tropical biologist thinks of” when they have a major contribution to publish and where they turn to read the best papers in their field.² Second, that while changes in format were necessary, there was no need to change the title of the *Bulletin* or replace it with a new journal (Peters, 1968). After considering the committee's recommendations, the Council decided to cease publication of the *Bulletin*, and ATB President Abraham Willink announced to the membership that renowned botanist William L. Stern had been appointed the inaugural Editor of the society's new scholarly publication: *Biotropica* (Willink, 1969).

This issue marks *Biotropica's* 50th anniversary. Volume 1(1) was a slim issue with only three articles: a paper on mangrove morphology (Gill & Tomlinson, 1969), one on bat taxonomy (Taboada & Pine, 1969), and—in what may come as a surprise to many of the journal's contemporary readers—a provocative speculation on the routes by which techniques for decorating ceramics spread between Central and South America over 3,000 years ago (Meggers & Evans, 1969). This collection of papers may seem eclectic, but it reflected Stern's view that “the overriding factor in considering the publication of any manuscript is its direct relevance to life in the tropics” (ATB Newsletter 1969). Five decades and more than 3,600 articles later, Stern's other goal—that *Biotropica* be a first-class scholarly journal where tropical biologists are proud to publish the results of their research—has been

the guiding principle for those of us privileged to serve as Editor: Michael Emsley (1973–1982), E. Raymond Heithaus (1983–1996), Robert J. Marquis (1997–2003), Robin L. Chazdon (2004–2005), and Jaboury Ghazoul (2006–2013). With the selection of Jennifer Powers as the new Editor-in-Chief, our next 50 years are already off to a fantastic start.

To celebrate the 50th Anniversary, the Editorial Board is soliciting submissions—to be published through June 2020—that address the theme “*Biotropica: The Next 50 Years*.” Of particular interest are Commentaries reflecting on the impact or importance of an article or selection of related articles published in *Biotropica*. These could be about an article that is considered one of *Biotropica's* “greatest hits,” but we are also interested in highlighting articles members of our community consider important but under-appreciated. We are also interested in publishing Review articles on a fundamental topic in tropical biology and conservation. In keeping with the anniversary theme, these reviews should use a synthesis of research to date on to propose a framework for future research. Finally, we will consider Special Sections of 6–8 articles motivated by the anniversary theme. The thread unifying the articles can be conceptual, taxonomic, or geographic. Contributions can be sole author or collaboratively written, and we welcome the perspectives of scientists at all career stages, especially students and other early-career scholars. All submissions will undergo an expedited peer review and be highlighted with a special anniversary logo designed by Editorial Coordinator Wendy Martin. If you are interested in submitting an article or commentary for consideration as an Anniversary article, please contact me or one of our Associate Editors. The first of these articles—which include thought-provoking Commentaries on subsistence hunting (Suarez & Zapata-Ríos, 2019) and the legacies of colonialism for contemporary research (Baker, Eichhorn & Griffiths, 2019)—is already available.

To kick-off our anniversary celebrations, I would like to end this essay by addressing two of the questions I have been asked most frequently since taking over as Editor: Why was the journal named *Biotropica*, and who came up with this unique name? After years of searching in vain for the answers, I finally found some insights buried in the minutes of early council meetings. It seems that “Why *Biotropica*?” can be summed up with two words: “marketing” and “creativity”. The minutes of the 1968 Council Meeting note the need for the new journal to have a “distinctive title” (Duckworth, 1968), perhaps to set it apart from the established journals *Revista de Biología Tropical* and *Tropical Ecology*. A year later Stern reports

¹The original name was changed to the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) in 2003.

²The exact text of the report is “The *Bulletin* should be re-designed in such a matter that it is the first place a tropical biologist thinks of when he has a major contribution to publish on the tropics and the first place he looks in order to read the best papers in his subject.” I decided that the value added to the essay from using the complete quotation was outweighed by the use of masculine pronouns to refer to scientists. I include it here, however, to draw attention to both how much our field has changed and how much work remains to be done.

that he chose the name *Biotropica* because it is “succinct, descriptive, and appealing” (Stern, 1969), and neither his report nor the Council minutes indicate any other names were put forward or deliberated. My sense is that part of its appeal is that it transcends language—not only can it be pronounced in, for example, Spanish, French, Portuguese, or English, but its meaning can be inferred in all of these. This nod to an international scientific community is something that would not have gone unnoticed by the ATBCs leadership at the time, which included scientists based on countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Ghana.

Does that mean Stern is also who came up with the name? He appears to have worked with both Thomas Soderstrom and Donald Duckworth to launch the new journal (Willink, 1969), so conceivably the name could have been proposed by one of them. It could also have been suggested by someone with whom they discussed it in passing—perhaps one of their students, a colleague, or a family member. However, Stern goes out of his way to name and thank others for their contributions, including those that provided “... advice and counsel and who, more than anything have served as bolsters of morale during the sometimes frustrating, and always delicate, and decidedly risky venture of starting a new publishing enterprise on a tenuous spider web.” He is also repeatedly credited by others as the driving force behind the realization of the journal and person responsible for selecting its name. Although definite proof is missing, I believe we have him to thank for our distinctive name, perspective, and mission.

The next 50 years will be filled with both daunting challenges and exciting opportunities for researchers studying tropical biology and conservation. On behalf of the Editorial Board and Staff of *Biotropica*, I thank you for your tireless efforts in the face of these challenges, and we look forward helping you share your findings with those who need them for years to come.

Epilogue: Shortly after penning this essay I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Stern; he confirmed that the name *Biotropica* was indeed his creation. Mystery solved!

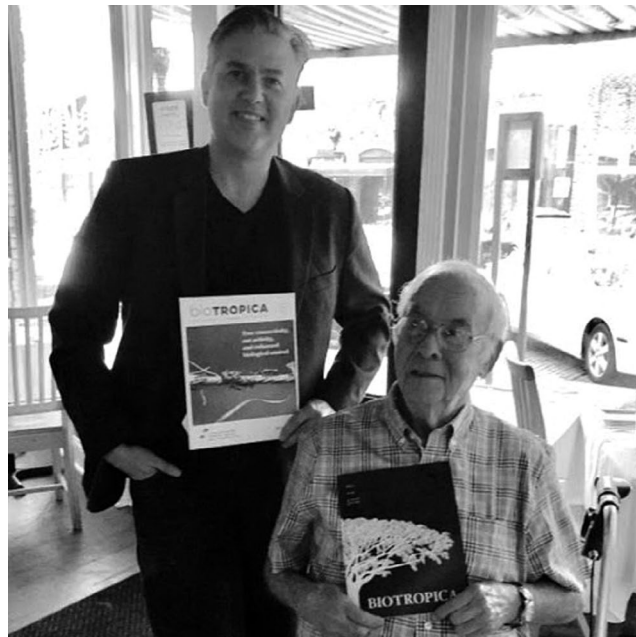
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Our current Editor, Emilio Bruna, with *Biotropica*'s inaugural Editor, William L. Stern.

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