

R. FOSTUNER (Ed.), *Advances in computer methods for systematic biology. Artificial intelligence, databases, computer vision*. Baltimore & London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, xiv + 562 p. (1993). Price: 65 \$ (USA), 78 \$ (outside USA).

During September 1990 an interdisciplinary conference called ARTISYST (Artificial Intelligence and Modern Computer Methods for Systematic Studies in Biology) gathered researchers in computer sciences and systematics at Napa, California. During the meeting four domains capable of contributing to systematics were emphasized: algorithmic approach of phylogenetic inferences, expert systems and methods of identification, databases, computer vision and shaped recognition.

This book assembles thirty contributions and is offered as a practical guide to the Proceedings of the ARTISYST workshop. Two appendices are added: the first presents the workshop notes, the second is a report to the National Science Foundation and exposes forty-four recommendations concerning research in computer science as applied to biology. A glossary, an annotated bibliography and a subject index are also included.

The volume is divided into six: (1) artificial intelligence, (2) systematic biology and phylogenetic interference, (3) expert systems, expert workstations and other identification tools, (4) database systems, (5) computer vision and feature extraction, (6) conclusions.

Chapter I consists of a single contribution which appears rather peripheral to the main theme and develops an historical review of the evolution of automated reasoning for diagnostics in medicine and biology. Chapter II begins with two general articles and exposes the goal and methods of systematics along with the basic principles of algorithms dedicated to phylogenetic reconstruction. Three more specific articles expose some recent work on the same topic and approach the problem of uncertainty in phylogenies. Chapter III, more heterogeneous, gives an accurate outlook on what systematics and systematics users can gain from computers as tools for taxonomic description and especially identification. Some general articles provide a widespread overview on expert systems and workstations in use in biology, others consider what level computer tools have to acquire in order to develop a specific application. Others present completed systems such as an "object centred representation for fish identification" or the NEMISYS system (Nematode Identification System). The latter, which concerns a few parasitic nematode genera, will interest all nematologists because of its numerous potentialities actually programmed or proposed by the authors. The last two articles describe original methods devoted to discrimination rather than identification. Chapter IV concerns the practical management and use of taxonomic database systems. Apart

from an article dealing with the DELTA coding system and the INTKEY (interactive identification) program which would have been better placed in the previous chapter, the other eight contributions demonstrate how diversified are the databases serviceable to systematists and how extraordinarily complex is the management of knowledge in systematics. Different representations are given. Some are general, others are specific to distinctive fields of study such as: "A microbiological database", an "Application of artificial intelligence to extracting and refining locality information", "The use of geographic information systems in systematic biology". Chapter V comprises seven articles and provides an outstanding approach to computer vision, image analysis, feature extraction and shape recognition as applied to various domains in systematics. How to acquire, to improve, to compress or to segment images, how to extract and to measure landmarks and coordinates of outlines are exposed in clearly understandable language. Chapter VI consists of only one article and, as a conclusion, brings out the progress and developments achieved in computer hardware and the consequences for users. But in contradiction with its title indications, it does not give the directions necessary to improve computer assistance as applied to systematics. As a consequence the content of this chapter appears quite removed from systematists real requirements and possibilities at the present time.

The report of the NSF reassembles relevant recommendations, even if they look difficult to realise in the short term, and defines the prospective axes in computer science as applied to systematics. This chapter demonstrates how crucial computer assistance will be for the development and the diffusion of our knowledge in organism biology in the near future.

The book is carefully conceived and most of the authors are considered authorities in either biology or computer sciences and sometimes in both. Most of the articles are written in a really clear style suitable every kind of reader.

In conclusion this volume is essential reading for professional systematists, whether already qualified or students keen to learn what are current applications of computers to systematics.

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# Advances In Computer Methods For Systematic Biology Artificial Intelligence Databases Computer Vision

**M Mark**



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