board) had “failed to develop and implement adequate controls to balance the environmental concerns with astronomy development”. The audit also confirmed islanders’ charges of broken promises, violated leases and ignoring of environmental laws.

After the audit, the university’s president and the Institute for Astronomy blamed the public for problems on the mountain top, and proposed access restrictions that were later included in the university’s second, flawed master plan, discussed in your report. All this has made the islanders even more upset.

Given this history, the quote by NASA’s Keck programme manager, John Lee, that the organization does not want to “poison the well” for astronomy on Mauna Kea, seems ironic to many islanders. NASA and the international astronomy community need to understand that those ‘toxins’ were introduced by the Institute for Astronomy and the observatories, and will have to be removed by them before anything else is built on the mountain.

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A new approach to global book distribution

Sir — As pointed out by Keese in Correspondence (*Nature* **410**, 1021; 2001) and in your current web debate (<http://www.nature.com/nature/debates/e-access/index.html>), lack of access to scientific information is a widespread problem. I have experimented with a means for obtaining free books and distributing them to individuals and libraries, and believe this technique could be widely used.

The cost of extending print runs to produce extra copies of books is reasonably small — comparable to typical royalties. When I completed a conservation textbook for Blackwell Scientific, the publisher agreed to my suggestion that, in lieu of royalties, it would provide me with a free copy for each one sold. My aim was to send the book out to practising conservationists who would otherwise be unlikely to obtain it. The online bookshop nhbs.com (<http://www.nhbs.com>) offered to coordinate the distribution, and the Christensen Fund kindly paid for the postage.

As this scheme became known, we received many requests and suggestions for recipients (we welcome further suggestions — please contact me at w.sutherland@uea.ac.uk). Within a few months of publication we were able to send out

more than 1,250 copies of the book to people in 126 developing countries.

Such schemes could be widely applied to scientific and technical books, and everyone will benefit if the following three suggestions are followed. First, authors could ask publishers to provide all or some of their royalties in the form of extra copies. Authors write to be read, and this procedure greatly increases the distribution and hence the readership of a book. Second, academic societies and grant-awarding bodies could allocate funds for posting books, a very cost-effective means of promoting a subject. The distribution could be carried out at cost price, organized either through an academic body, through the author’s institution or through a commercial organization. The distributor can gain some excellent publicity by doing this. Third, publishers could advertise the fact that they are happy to proceed with such arrangements.

The charity Book Aid International (www.bookaid.org; info@bookaid.org) has also expressed an interest in distributing suitable books through its network.

The scheme offers clear advantages to publishers, as it improves their image and may attract authors. In the current case, the publisher believes the offer has increased sales.

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Improving taxonomy for us and the other fishes

Sir — Lewin in his engaging Concepts essay (*Nature* **410**, 637; 2001) asserts that unless “demanded by expediency”, recent changes in taxonomy “muddle our language, and could introduce confusion in our libraries”. Two of his examples involve traditional groups that are unambiguously paraphyletic (each of them includes an ancestor but not all of its descendants), and they nicely illustrate why monophyletic taxa (those comprised of a common ancestor and all of its descendants) are preferable for teaching, research and influencing public attitudes towards nature.

Lewin claims that molecular phylogenetics has led to “a host of new problems”: for example, “Because crocodiles are believed to be more closely related to birds than they are to turtles ... are sparrows just feathered reptiles, and does ornithology become merely a branch of herpetology?”. That birds and crocodiles are each other’s closest living relatives was a consensus view long before the advent of

DNA sequencing, as has the conclusion that reptiles (including birds) are more closely related to mammals than they are to amphibians. Herpetology, defined monophyletically as the biology of tetrapods, thus does incorporate mammalogy and ornithology, but this no more makes sparrows “just” feathered reptiles than it reduces bats to “just” winged mammals; ornithology is no more “merely” a branch of herpetology than the latter is “merely” a part of vertebrate biology.

More important, traditional failure to taxonomically formalize a close relationship between crocodilians and birds obscures their similarities in parental care, acoustic communication and various internal traits. Perhaps that failure also explains why some recent analyses of life-history evolution in each group fail to cite work on the other, and why they also ignore a substantial literature on reproduction in closely related, extinct archosaurs.

Lewin correctly notes that the coelacanth *Latimeria* “is closer to humans than it is to herrings”, but then complains, “so what price ichthyology?”. Actually, the incredible panoply of fishes is done an injustice by traditional recognition of two basal taxa, one of them spectacularly successful (there are more than 20,000 species of ray-fins) and the other usually viewed as an evolutionary dead-end (*Latimeria* and lung-fishes).

A monophyletic perspective enriches ichthyology by, instead, emphasizing that the adaptive radiation of fishes includes two more-or-less equally speciose subclades, one largely confined to water (the ray-fins) and the other represented by both aquatic and terrestrial forms (coelacanths, lung-fishes, tetrapods).

Of course, one could argue that tetrapods are special because they move about on land and have changed a lot, but then so have walking catfish, swamp eels and mudskippers, all of which we appropriately leave in with other ray-finned fishes.

Lewin disapproves of new names and altered meanings for old names, whereas my experience is that students are inspired by the underlying rationale for such changes. Lay people likewise are intrigued by behavioural similarities between crocodilians and birds, and amused by the realization that we are all fishes. Rather than hindering biology, increasingly accurate and phylogenetically based taxonomy promotes the study and appreciation of life’s diversity.

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