

# Taxonomists aboard electronic 21st century

---

By Kevin Thiele

**Recent changes to the rules governing the naming of plants have resulted in an easier, faster and more modern process for naming the many new species that are discovered every year in WA.**

The naming of plants (nomenclature) is governed by the International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants (ICN) which is discussed and voted on at a week-long meeting of the International Botanical Congress (IBC)—the world's largest scientific botanical meeting, held every six years. The most recent IBC, held in Melbourne in July 2011, saw some of the most important and far-reaching changes to the ICN for many years.

One change allows species to be described in fully electronic journals whereas previously only printed journals were

recognised. Another change overturns a centuries-old tradition that required a description in Latin, the once-universal language of science, to accompany the description of new species.

These changes come at an opportune time for the WA Herbarium, which recently moved towards electronic publication of its taxonomic journal *Nuytsia*. The changes are helping staff at the herbarium describe some new species more rapidly. Recently, *Tetratheca spenceri* was named in *Nuytsia* just six months after its discovery near Kalgoorlie. Of course such rapid publication can only happen when the considerable skills needed to recognise the new species are available, and when the taxonomy is relatively straightforward. The ICN changes will help us deliver a more rapid taxonomy which will help our attempts to save and conserve WA's remarkable plant biodiversity.