

EXTERNAL CUTICULAR CHARACTERS -- A REAPPRAISAL OF THEIR IMPORTANCE
FOR DEFINING NEMATODE TAXA OF VARIOUS LEVELS

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The concepts and policies currently dominating nematode taxonomy have lead to inordinate proliferation of genera, families and higher categories contributing to instability and disorder in this science. Among several causes of such a proliferation (pre-conceived size limits for taxa; limitation of light microscopy in resolving minute morphology essential to understanding relationships; geographical distances between populations as prima facie evidence for speciation; etc..) it is common that new taxa, mainly genera, have been proposed using one or few characters related to external, cuticular structure, thus relying on "key" characters and confusing determination and taxonomy. A reappraisal of the value of such characters is now needed to give a more consistent basis to systematics. Examples are given of such reappraisals applied in different groups (Chronogaster, Aphanolaimus, Plectus, Atylenchidae, Tylenchorhynchidae s. lato, Criconematidae s. lato).