

A tribute to Philippe Clerc: an eminent and multitalented lichenologist in Switzerland

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Philippe Clerc was born on April 26, 1955, in Lausanne, Switzerland. He was an undergraduate at the University of Geneva when he stumbled upon an article in the newspaper *Tribune of Geneva* about lichens and air pollution that first sparked his interest in lichens. To learn more, he went to Professor G. Turian, who was cited in the article and who loaned him a few books and a microscope, saying ‘First you have to know the species’. So a lichen taxonomist was born! His first academic work dealt with the application of lichens as bioindicators of air pollution in the Wallis region of Switzerland (Clerc & Roh 1979a, b). He obtained his master’s degree in Biology under Prof. Turian’s supervision in 1979.

Philippe found his career path through the opportunity to work as a research assistant in the Department of Cryptogamy at the University of Bern under Prof. Klaus Ammann. The Eduard Frey (1888–1974) lichen collection had been acquired recently by the University and, in this collection, Philippe started to study the genus *Usnea* (the popular ‘old man’s beard’ lichen), which would become his main scientific interest for the next four decades. His first step was to visit Lublin (Poland) to study the collection of the Polish botanist and lichenologist, Józef Motyka (1900–1984), who had published a world monograph of the genus (Motyka 1936–38). The taxonomy and classification of *Usnea* appeared chaotic at that time and the genus was renowned as one of the most difficult to identify to species level due to its wide phenotypic plasticity and seeming over-abundance of names (as many as 1243). As Philippe later reflected: ‘the first two years of my thesis were completely in the shadows’, but he persisted and

gradually dismantled and refined the taxonomy of *Usnea*. His first publications about the genus were soon published (Clerc 1984a, b) and, at the same time, he also obtained his secondary education certificate (Biology section, under Prof. M. Villard). He was awarded his PhD – ‘Taxonomy and systematics of the genus *Usnea* in Europe – Preliminary studies towards a monograph’ – in 1986 under the supervision of Professor K. Ammann.

After acquiring his doctorate, he moved with his family to the USA to take up a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Duke University (North Carolina, USA) under Professors William L. Culberson and Rytas Vilgaly. This was an opportunity to study molecular biology and he became a pioneer in the molecular systematics of *Parmeliaceae* (1990–1993). He spent 15 months there (1988–1989).

Returning to Bern, he started his career, funded by a National Foundation Research Fellowship, which enabled him to continue his project on the molecular systematics of the *Parmeliaceae* s.l. (lichenized *Ascomycetes*) that he began during his tenure as a post-doctoral researcher. The molecular era in the classification of lichens was just beginning, and this enabled the elucidation of the biological nature of lichen chimeras (or photosymbiodemes). It was established that the mycobiont in a chimera is only one species (not two as previously believed) and that the different vegetative morphology is determined by the associated photobiont (Armaleo & Clerc 1991, 1995) (Fig. 2B).

He moved with his grant to Geneva in 1991 and, with Jean-François Manen (Geneva University), helped to establish the first molecular laboratory at the *Conservatoire et Jardin botaniques de Genève*.

In 1993, Philippe was appointed to curator position at *Conservatoire et Jardin botaniques* in the City of Geneva (CJBG), at that time directed by Rodolphe Spichiger, where he has remained for the remainder of his working life. Geneva had a strong lichen tradition and one of the world’s most important lichen herbaria, thanks to the efforts of Johannes Müller (known as Müller Argoviensis), one of the most influential lichenologists of the 19th century. Müller had been a greatly respected Professor of Botany at the University of Geneva for 18 years and the

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Director of the Botanical Garden of Geneva for four years. After him, there was a gap of 98 years before Philippe was appointed as lichenologist. Lichenology had returned to the heart of Europe!

Philippe devoted his entire professional career to the study of the genus *Usnea*. He published on the species concept in the genus (Clerc 1998), where the most important phenotypical characters were identified and discussed, and so laid the foundation for his subsequent studies, as well as those of others. He revised Motyka's monograph that had been the key publication on *Usnea* for decades. His enormous contribution to *Usnea* taxonomy is underlined by his great number of publications, including book chapters (Table 1), new records and species (Table 2), and notes about the genus, plus illustrations, keys to identifications and a checklist with information on all of the *Usnea* types worldwide (Clerc et al., unpubl.) (Fig. 1). He is rightly regarded as the worldwide expert on the genus.

Philippe is a true field lichenologist and believes that systematics should begin by studying as many specimens

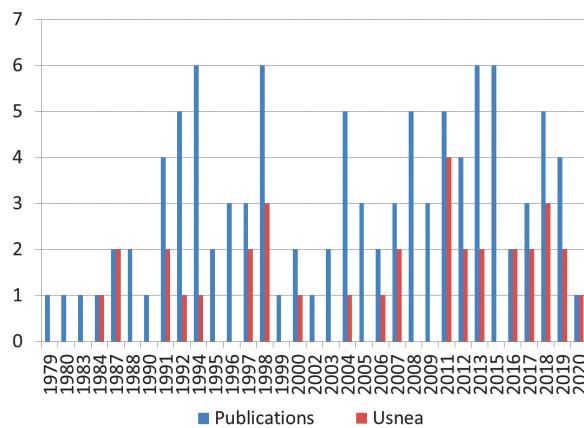


Figure 1. Philippe Clerc's publication timeline. Highlighted in red are the publications focusing on the Systematics of the genus *Usnea*. From Recent Literature on Lichens.

as possible, both in the field and in the herbarium. He would take copious ecological notes in the field. His many expeditions to collect and study lichens were mainly in Europe (the British Isles, France, Norway, Russia), but also included the Macaronesian region, Zimbabwe, North America (New Jersey, etc.), the Galapagos, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Brazil, Chile and Australia (Fig. 2). With respect to the diversity of *Usnea*, Philippe believed that Brazil or, more specifically, the southern São Joaquim National Park, was the most species-rich territory in the world.

Today there are only some three other lichenologists in Switzerland, all working mainly on lichen conservation,

the Red List and inventories: Mathias Vust, Silvia Stofer and Christoph Scheidegger, all in Zurich (Vust 2019, pers. comm.). Philippe is thus the rare lichen taxonomist in this small country in the heart of Europe. However, he has also contributed to other topics in his active life as a researcher (Fig. 3), including: lichen conservation in Switzerland and the red-list (e.g., Vust et al. 2015), lichen inventory (e.g., Habashi & Clerc 2012, 2013a, b), chemistry (e.g., Gadea et al. 2019), molecular biology (Armaeo & Clerc 1991, 1995; Clerc et al. 1991; Döring et al. 2000; Truong et al. 2013; Divakar et al. 2015; Gerlach et al. 2018; Temu et al. 2019; Jung et al. 2019), the taxonomy in genera other than *Usnea* (e.g., *Botryolepraria* Canals et al., *Candelariella* Müll. Arg., *Melanohalea* O. Blanco et al., *Melaspilea* Nyl., *Menegazzia* A. Massal., *Parmelia* Ach., *Parmelina* Elix & Hale, *Rinodina* (Ach.) Gray, *Tetramelias* Norman, *Verrucaria* Schrad., *Waynea* Moberg, and many regional lichen inventories (e.g., for Alaska, Canary Islands, France, Italy, Scandinavia, Switzerland). In recognition of his work identifying African lichens, *Pertusaria clerckii* Messuti & A.W. Archer was described (Messuti et al. 2007). More recently, *Aspicilia clerckii* Cl. Roux & M. Bertrand, another saxicolous crustose species, was described in recognition of his invaluable taxonomical studies on lichens from the Alps (Nimis et al. 2018; Roux 2020). Philippe has also published many outreach articles (see below) and even collaborated on a publication reporting the first myxomycetes (slime molds) of El Salvador (Rojas et al. 2013). A complete list of his scientific publications can be seen at the *Recent Literature on Lichens* webpage (<http://nhm2.uio.no/botanisk/lav/RLL/RLL.HTM>).

Philippe has always been deeply involved in the herbarium and was appointed head curator of the botanical collections at the CJBG in 2008. He is passionate about classification and dedicated much time to identifying and classifying the lichen herbarium, locating and cataloguing the type specimens (with the help of his collaborator, Matthieu MacGillycuddy), and bringing the classification of the collection into line with modern concepts with the help of molecular tools. He also actively participated in the acquisition and incorporation of many satellite fungal herbaria, among them Paul Ozenda's lichen collection (2002 and 2010, 5,500 specimens), Pierre Neuville's Basidiomycete collection (2012, 6,000 specimens), François Ayer's fungal collection (2012, 6,800 specimens), Jean Bozonnet's myxomycete collection (2013, 4,000 specimens), Mathias Vust's lichen collection of the Red List of the Geneva Canton, (2014, 1,700 specimens), Marianne Meyer's collection of Myxomycetes (2016–2017, 40,000

Table 1. *Usnea* chapters published by Philippe Clerc in general books about lichens.

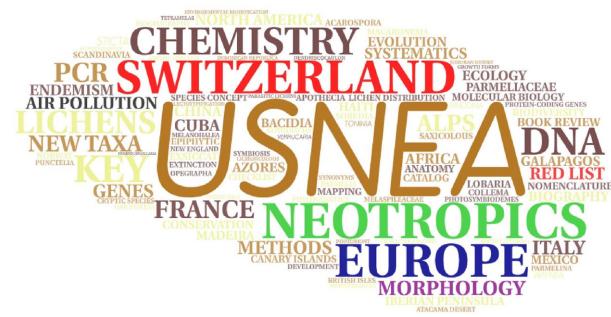
Books Lichen Biota	Editors and year
Nordic Lichen Flora	A. Thell & R. Moberg (eds). 2011
Lichen Flora of the Greater Sonoran Desert Region	Nash III, T.; C. Gries & F. Bungartz (eds). 2007.
The lichens of Great Britain and Ireland	Purvis, O.W.; B.J.Coppins, D.L. Hawksworth, P.W. James & D.M. Moore (eds). 1992
Die Flechten	Wirth, V.; M. Hauck & M. Schult (eds). 2013
Cryptogamica Helvetica	Clerc, P. 2014.



Figure 2. A – Philippe in the field at Santa Catarina State, São Joaquim National Park (Brazil, 2017) observing and collecting a photosymbiodeme lichen [photo by Alice Gerlach]; B – the lichen photosymbiodeme collected by Philippe at the same locality [photo by Alice Gerlach]; C – Philippe examining saxicolous *Usnea* in Minas Gerais State, Pedra Bonita (Brazil 2017) [photo by Alice Gerlach]; D – Philippe during an expedition in September 2014 to the Grecia Forest Reserve, Costa Rica. From left to right: Carlos Rojas (from University of Costa Rica), Gabriela Loza, a park ranger, Randall Valverde (from University of Costa Rica), Ricardo Morales (from University of El Salvador), Philippe and another park ranger; E – Philippe with Iris Pereira (Talca University, Chile) and his student Daniel Nunes during an expedition to Ille de Chiloé, Chile, in March 2019 to recollect *Usnea flavocardia*; F – Philippe with Fernand Jacquemoud and Marc-André Thiébaud for the 100 birthday of the Console [photo by Bernard Renaud]; G – Philippe during an outreach atelier (Atelier vert) showing lichens to children at Geneva Botanical Garden.

Table 2. List of taxa published by Philippe Clerc.

New combinations
<i>Diplotomma hedinii</i> (H. Magn.) P. Clerc & Cl. Roux
<i>Lichinella heppii</i> (Müll. Arg.) P. Clerc & Cl. Roux
<i>Parmelina atricha</i> (Nyl.) P. Clerc
<i>Porpidia turgida</i> (Ach.) Cl. Roux & P. Clerc
<i>Tetramelus thiopolizus</i> (Nyl.) Giralt & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea cirrosa</i> subsp. <i>ramillosa</i> (Motyka) P. Clerc
<i>Usnea cornuta</i> subsp. <i>brasiliensis</i> (Zahlbr.) P. Clerc
<i>Usnea fragilascens</i> var. <i>mollis</i> (Vain.) P. Clerc
<i>Usnea hirta</i> subsp. <i>trachista</i> (Motyka) P. Clerc
<i>Usnea praetervisa</i> (Asahina) P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subfloridana</i> subsp. <i>praetervisa</i> (Asahina) P. Clerc
<i>Waynea stoechadiana</i> (Abassi Maaf & Cl. Roux) Cl. Roux & P. Clerc
New species
<i>Rinodina canariensis</i> Matzer, H. Mayrhofer & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea ammannii</i> P. Clerc & Herrera-Camp.
<i>Usnea aranea</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea arianae</i> P. Clerc, E. Caviró & A. Gerlach ad int.
<i>Usnea aurantiaciparvula</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea boomiana</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea brattiae</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea cedrosiana</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea crenulata</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea crocata</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea cylindrica</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea esperantiana</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea exigua</i> J.M. Rodriguez & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea flabelliformis</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc ad int.
<i>Usnea flavorubescens</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea fleigiae</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea galapagona</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea geissleriana</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea grandisora</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea grandispora</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea halei</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea kalmiana</i> P. Clerc & A. Gerlach
<i>Usnea krogiana</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea luttii</i> J.M. Rodr. & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea macaronesica</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea mayrhoferi</i> Herrera-Camp., Bungartz, Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea myrmaciacaena</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea nashii</i> P. Clerc & Herrera-Camp.
<i>Usnea oreophila</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea patriciana</i> Bungartz, Herrera-Camp. & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea rubricornuta</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea rubriglabrata</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea rubropallens</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc ad int.
<i>Usnea sanctaeritae</i> P. Clerc & Herrera-Camp.
<i>Usnea saxidilatata</i> J.M. Rodr. & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea stipitata</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc ad int.
<i>Usnea subaranea</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subcomplexa</i> Truong, P. Clerc & Herrera-Camp.
<i>Usnea subdasaea</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subflammea</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subflaveola</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subglabrata</i> Truong & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subparvula</i> A. Gerlach & P. Clerc
<i>Usnea subrubicunda</i> P. Clerc
<i>Usnea tenuicorticata</i> P. Clerc & A. Gerlach ad int.
<i>Usnea viktoriae</i> P. Clerc & Otte
<i>Usnea vitrea</i> P. Clerc & Herrera-Camp.
<i>Usnea wirthii</i> P. Clerc

**Figure 3.** Word cloud based on the keywords from Philippe's publications.

specimens), and the Coire herbarium collection (2006 and 2017, 4,700 specimens). These acquisitions greatly increased the scope and significance of the Geneva Cryptogamic herbarium (G), making it an invaluable resource for mycologists worldwide. Philippe leaves a herbarium that is almost up to date with current taxonomy.

During his work, Philippe organized several guided visits for the general public to the CJBG to show the diverse biological aspects of the lichen symbiosis. He contributed his scientific expertise to the organization of the *Murs sanctuaires – A la découverte des murs de la Ville de Genève* (which can be downloaded here: <https://patrimoine-vert-geneve.ch/murs-sanctuaires-de-la-ville-de-geneve>) and organized a lichen exhibition at Mycorama (Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 2008), which featured many informative banners, a wonderful glass cabinet full of colored lichens, big rocks covered in crustose lichens, and a model of an apothecium to illustrate sexual reproduction in lichens. He was always enthusiastic to show off to the public his place of work, the *Conservatoire botanique* ('maybe a place where musicians are playing while looking at the plants', he joked), including *La Console*, where the cryptogam herbarium, library, molecular laboratory and many offices are housed. Philippe also organized or collaborated in events such as *La nuit de la science* (The night of science), les *Ateliers verts* (outreach ateliers for children), and exhibitions.

Philippe was appointed Lecturer at the University of Geneva, Faculty of Sciences in 2000, where he and Michelle Price were responsible for teaching 'Systematics and ecology of lichens and bryophytes'. He organized a workshop on the *Physciaceae* in the Geneva Botanical Garden (Clerc 2009) and was invited to give an *Usnea* workshop in Sweden in 2011. His passion for nature, and his ability to explain science with precision, but in an easily understandable way, was frequently showcased by the Swiss media.

Philippe has been a valued and influential mentor to his Masters and Doctoral students, always very generous and supportive, while giving them the freedom to develop their scientific independence. He successfully mentored many students in taxonomy and ecology from South America, Europe and Africa, a number of whom have become well established and forged their own careers in lichenology or mycology, including Marusa Herrera-Campos (PhD, 1997), Pekka Halonen (PhD, 2000), Mathias Vust (PhD, 2001), Juan Manuel Rodriguez (PhD, 2011),



Figure 4. A – Philippe with Roland Moberg during the *Physciaceae* workshop at CJBG in 2008 [photo by Juan Manuel Rodriguez]; B – Philippe with his student Juan Manuel Rodriguez at Geneva in November 2008; C – Philippe with Adriano Spielmann and his student Camille Truong during the IAL-7 symposium, Thailand 2012 [photo by Luciana Cañez]; D – Philippe with his student Alice Gerlach and collaborators, Yoshihito Ohmura and Marusa Herrera Campos, during the IAL-8 symposium, Finland 2016; E – Philippe with the French lichenologist team during the IAL-8 symposium, Finland 2016: Joel Esnault (AFL), Michel Bertrand's wife, Michel Bertrand (AFL) and Françoise Lohezic-Le Devehat (Rennes University) [photo by Alice Gerlach]; F – Philippe with his student Anne Kissling at CJBG in 2017 [photo by Alice Gerlach]; G – Philippe introducing his PhD student, Stella Temu, to *Usnea* taxonomy during his visit to the Evolutionary Biology Centre, Uppsala University, Sweden on October 10, 2017. [photo by Sanja Tibell]; H – Philippe with his student Maud Oihénart and collaborator Othmar Breuss (Verrucariaceae experts) at CJBG in 2017 [photo by Alice Gerlach].

Camille Truong (PhD, 2012), who also described *Usnea clerciana* Truong in his honor, Alice Gerlach (PhD, 2017), Maud Oihénart (Master, 2018), Anne Kissling (Master, 2019), Daniel Nunes (Master, 2020), and Stella Temu (PhD in progress). All have been deeply instilled with Philippe's passion for his subject and his adherence to accuracy and good science. They and all of his colleagues in Switzerland, Europe and far beyond, wish him well for the future (Fig. 4).

Some outreach publications by Philippe Clerc

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- Clerc, P.** 1998. Les années 80–90, une période faste pour la lichenologie suisse. *Meylania* 14: 14–19.
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- Clerc, P.** & Truong, C. 2008c. Les CJB présentent une exposition permanente sur les lichens au Mycorama. *La feuille verte* 39: 13.
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