

FRESHWATER MUSSELS' CONSERVATION WORKSHOP

CONFERENCE REPORT

A Freshwater Mussels' Conservation Workshop was held on 30–31 August in the Natural Park of the Guadiana Valley, southern Portugal. The workshop was meant to be essentially practical, aiming to discuss freshwater mussels' conservation problems while exploring some pristine and endangered populations. The organizers certainly achieved this aim, with the added bonus of the workshop being a very enjoyable, friendly event. There were 16 participants from many countries (Brasil, Canada, France, Great Britain, Po-

land, Portugal, and USA); freshwater mussels were the favourite (but not the only) topic of our ongoing discussions. The seminar session programme included the introduction to the Natural Park of the Guadiana Valley, problems of conservation of freshwater mussels there, and biomonitoring of the River Oeiras, influenced by mining activities. There were also presentations on the impact of dams on the pearl mussel in France, on the possibilities of the active protection of the swan mussel in Poland, and a very in-



Fig. 1. Participants of the workshop. The Organiser JOAQUIM REIS third from the right in the first row. Photo A. SULIKOWSKA-DROZD

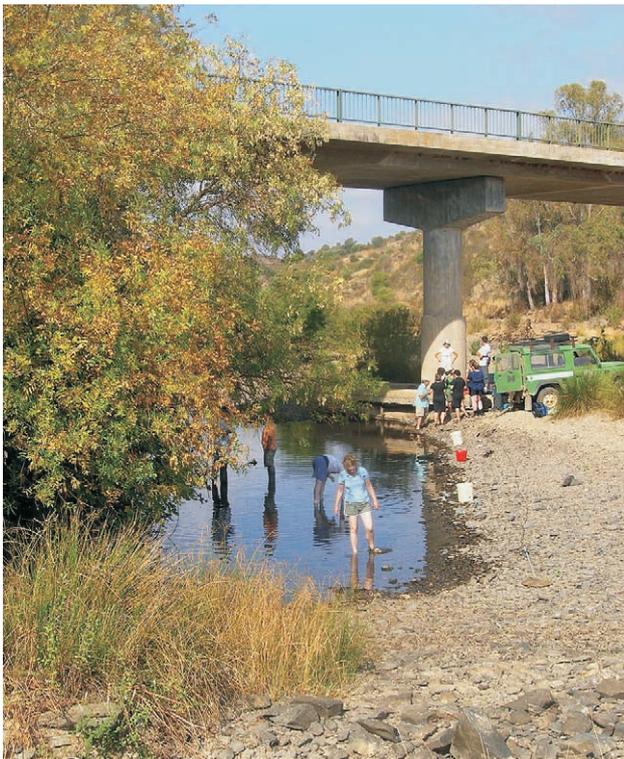


Fig. 2. Bivalve collecting on the drying Vasco River. Photo A. ABRASZEWSKA

spiring presentation on the restoration methods for endangered freshwater mussels in the United States (RICHARD NEVES the Great). The field session in-

cluded visits to a site at the River Oeiras affected by mining activities, with low-density population of unionids, but thriving *Corbicula fluminea*, a site at the River Carreiras, heavily impacted by the lack of water in dry years, and two sites at the River Vasco in which only pools of water remain in summer. Populations of unionids are abundant there, quite impressive for places nearly completely drying out every summer! Electrofishing allowed us to see the fish species that are indispensable in the life cycle of the mussels, but also the introduced carnivorous species which strongly affect the local fish fauna (by eating it out), and so pose a serious threat to the mussel populations. One of the pools was large enough to snorkel for mussels. We did find quite a lot, including the very rare *Unio tumidiformis*. Getting into the water was in itself a fantastic thing to do, with the air temperature close to 40°C!

Beautiful historic places, museum-towns of Mértola and Monsaraz, and small family-held restaurants with delicious traditional food of southern Portugal made a fantastic setting for the integration of the international freshwater mussel community. Many thanks to JOAQUIM REIS and his colleagues for organizing it!

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